

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

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, April 28, 2009

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONS

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 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 Anne Pritchard, B.E. Maxwell, A.K. Richards 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.

Winnipeg Regional Health Authority

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

Manitoba's Premier and his NDP government have not recognized the issues of public concern related to the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority.

The WRHA is building an administrative empire at the expense of bedside care.

Winnipeg Regional Health Authority needs to be held accountable for the decisions it is making.

Health-care workers are being pressured into not being able to speak out no matter what the WRHA is doing or has done.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Premier (Mr. Doer) and the NDP government to call a meeting of a standing committee of the Legislature and invite representatives of the WRHA to appear before it.

Mr. Speaker, this is signed N. Hanuschak, Ben Hanuschak, L. Diane and many, many other fine Manitobans.

PTH 15

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

These are the reasons for this petition.

In 2004, the Province of Manitoba made a public commitment to the people of Springfield to twin PTH 15 and the floodway bridge on PTH 15, but then in 2006, the twinning was cancelled.

Injuries resulting from collisions on PTH 15 continue to rise and have doubled from 2007 to 2008.

In August 2008, the Minister of Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) stated that preliminary analysis of current and future traffic demands indicate that local twinning will be required.

The current plan to replace the floodway bridge on PTH 15 does not include twinning and, therefore, does not fulfil the current nor future traffic demands cited by the Minister of Transportation.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Transportation consider the immediate twinning of the PTH 15 floodway bridge for the safety of the citizens of Manitoba.

Signed by Eleanor Zieske, Valerie Anderson, Les Welling and many, many other Manitobans.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines): Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table the Supplementary Information for Legislative Review, 2009-2010 Departmental Expenditure Estimates for Manitoba Science, Technology, Energy and Mines. Thank you.

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Water Stewardship): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table the Manitoba Water Stewardship Supplementary Information for Legislative Review, 2009-2010 Departmental Expenditure Estimates.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Day of Mourning

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I have a ministerial statement for the House.

Today, April 28, is a day of mourning for workers killed or injured on the job. On this day, we remember the men and women who did not return home safely from work last year. Twenty-two workers lost their lives on the job in Manitoba, and more than 17,000 were injured severely enough they were off the job for a number of days.

The gravity of these workplace incidents is enormous, and their toll on families and communities in Manitoba is all the more tragic because they are preventable. This day has special significance for Manitoba. In 1991, Manitoba Member of Parliament, Rod Murphy, introduced private member's legislation that prompted the Parliament of Canada to officially recognize April 28 as the Day of Mourning. Seven years earlier, Manitoba union leader, Dick Martin was instrumental in the Canadian Labour Congress initiative to designate April 28 as the national Day of Mourning. The Day of Mourning is now observed in more than 100 countries around the world.

While we have reduced the time-loss injury rate by 27 percent since 2000, we must not be satisfied until every worker returns home safely every day. Today, as we remember and honour those workers who were killed or injured on the job, we must accept our responsibility to follow in the footsteps of the health and safety pioneers who came before us. As leaders in the community, along with our business and union colleagues, we must set the example that safety and health on the job is a daily priority at every workplace in the province.

Mr. Speaker, following statements by my colleagues, I would ask that all members stand for a moment of silence in the Chamber to honour the memory of men and women of Manitoba who were injured or killed in the workplace this past year.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for her statement.

On behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus, I would like to recognize the significance of the national Day of Mourning for people killed or injured at work. Today, I had the honour to join many other Manitobans walking in the Leaders Walk, which highlights collectively the tragic reality of workplace accidents. I want to especially recognize the many young people that were there today.

The national Day of Mourning calls us to remember in a special way those who lost their lives while working and their families and friends who mourn their loss. One important way which we can remember and honour the departed is by working toward a safer and accident-free workplace. I want to convey my deepest sympathy to those who have lost a loved one, whether it's a spouse, a child, a brother or sister or friend. The departed must not be forgotten, and today we come together to remember, reflect and give thanks for the lives tragically shortened.

Mr. Speaker, we especially remember those occupations today that continually face deadly hazards, particularly firefighters and police officers who consistently put the security of others ahead of their own. We also remember high-risk occupations, many of which are crucial to the vital infrastructure we use daily, and we recognize the particular dangers these workers face. We must ensure that every safety precaution is taken, as life is too precious not to.

* (13:40)

So, too, must we recognize that, for many workers, injuries sustained in the workplace permanently change their lives and the lives of their families. Together we must work to ensure that these workers have ready access to support and needed resources, and that programs are responsive to their distinct needs. Workplace accidents do not discriminate based on age, sex, race and, sadly, too many of these accidents rob us of our family.

Regardless of party affiliation or political persuasion we all have a duty to ensure that workers in Manitoba work under safe conditions so that no

family has to deal with the tragedy of a workplace death. We must also laud and support those whose jobs it is to ensure that Manitobans return home safely every day. Employers, unions and the Workers Compensation Board, together with many other safety officials, all work to ensure the safety of Manitobans at work.

Indeed, in a sobering way, the national Day of Mourning reminds us that a safe work environment is all of our responsibility. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I ask leave to speak to the minister's statement.

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

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I join other members of this Chamber in speaking out about the importance of safety in workplaces in Manitoba. Although there has been some reduction in the time-loss injury rate, we still have rates which are higher than other provinces, and there is still considerable room for us to improve and pay more attention and do more in this area.

Certainly, in the area of farm injuries, it's an area where we have more work to do. I think all of us would extend our sympathy and condolences to workers who have been injured, or the family and friends of those who have died in the workplace, and want to dedicate ourselves to making sure that we have safer workplaces, which are safer in terms of physical injuries, but, also, in terms of mental anguish and mental harassment on the job. Thank you.

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

Please rise.

A moment of silence was observed.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today Paul Dombkins from Winnipeg and Bonnie Dombkins from Ottawa, who are the guests of the honourable Member for Fort Rouge (Ms. Howard).

Also in the public gallery we have with us from Pointe-des-Chênes School 42 grades 9 to 12 students under the direction of Monique Syreij. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable

Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hog Industry Government Strategy for Potential Economic Challenges

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the flu outbreak that originated in Mexico is, for very understandable reasons, causing a high level of concern for all Manitobans.

I want to thank the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) for the invitation to attend a briefing later this afternoon with some public health officials on the health issues arising from this outbreak.

But, in addition to the health issues, there are certain very significant economic issues that arise in the course of such an outbreak. With our pork industry here in Manitoba, the livelihoods of some 15,000 Manitobans are at stake, and we know that this is an industry that contributes some-thousand dollars per Manitoban in exports which is greater than the amount of exports of Manitoba Hydro.

So I want to ask the Premier: In light of the threats that are now arising on top of all of the other significant challenges faced by the pork industry in Manitoba, if he could indicate what steps he is taking to protect this industry which is so vital to the livelihoods of so many Manitoba families.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): I thank the member for the question.

I, first of all, want to pass on our condolences to the people of Mexico who have suffered over 150 lives that are lost and the many people very sick and great fear in that country. Certainly the member will be briefed by Dr. Kettner later today with the Leader of the Liberal Party.

We obviously believe that the issue of animal surveillance and safety and public credibility of safety of products is extremely important. That's why yesterday the Chief Medical Officer, the public health officer and the Chief Vet spoke to the people of Manitoba, both to indicate what we are doing in Manitoba and also what we're doing across the industry, the hog industry, in Manitoba.

We have some of the most sophisticated surveillance systems, according to the Canadian government. We had a number of pigs tested for influenza last year, in 2008. We have pioneered information management tools to analyze disease trends. We're also concerned, as members of the industry are, on the terminology used to describe the flu and what impact it will have on producers here in Manitoba.

We obviously believe that the best people to talk about the safety of food, including pork, are the vets, the public health officers. They can speak with credibility. So can the industry. So can the producers who are reinforcing the measures they're taking.

We will continue to work with our pork industry here in Manitoba about any unintended consequences that could be quite serious for their livelihood and for their investments here in this province.

Mr. McFadyen: I thank the Premier for the response. I know that we all want to do what we can, as Manitobans, to protect jobs and incomes here in our province where we can.

We know that food produced in Manitoba is very safe. That's very well established. There's no relationship between the flu outbreak in Mexico, what we now see happening, and what we now have in terms of product coming from Manitoba.

I want to just ask the Premier whether he has or will contact the Secretary of Homeland Security in the United States and any other contacts he has south of the border to ensure that what is now a health issue does not become an issue that results in lost jobs and incomes here in Manitoba, as we look at the potential for those south of the border, for some interests south of the border, to attempt to try to use this as an opportunity for protectionism as a way of keeping product out of the United States and killing jobs here in Manitoba.

Mr. Doer: We have communicated with Stockwell Day, Minister Day, and we have also communicated with Minister Cannon during their visits to Washington. We talked about the issue, generally, of the hog industry with Ambassador Wilson. I talked to him directly, along with other U.S. legislators. Certainly Minister Day is in Washington. I know he was in Washington yesterday meeting with his various counterparts, including trade secretary, Mr. Kirk, who has just been appointed by the Obama administration.

I know that the Canadian government has raised the issue of the border being able to have trade between our two countries. I know we have raised, and so have our federal ministers, including up to the Prime Minister, the whole issue of country-of-origin legislation, which we worked hard on to get the right rules, and, then, subsequent to the rules being presented, there was a suggestion from the Secretary of Agriculture to allow for voluntary interpretation of the laws which would, again, put weanlings and other parts of our industry at risk from the integrated markets that we enjoy with the United States and they enjoy with Canada.

So those dialogues are going on as we speak. As I say, Trade Minister Day was in Washington yesterday. I'm not sure whether he's still there today, but we have written to him, and we have discussed this directly with the ambassador.

*(13:50)

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Premier for that response. We would certainly urge him and others to do whatever they can to contact their connections south of the border to make sure that we are strongly promoting Manitoba food, which is known to be safe.

I would just want to ask the Premier: In light of the current flu outbreak, which is unfortunately labelled, but it comes on the heels of both lower prices for commodities, the country-of-origin labelling which the Premier has referred to, the challenges for transportation resulting from the closure of Highway 75, all of these factors combining to create yet another very difficult year for an industry that puts food on the table for thousands of Manitobans, I want to ask the Premier whether there is any work being done to provide support for that industry in the event that factors beyond its control result in threats to the livelihood of these thousands of Manitoba families.

Mr. Doer: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is not the first time that certain food products have been labelled with safety issues through public perception. The best way we know how to deal with that is the fact that we know that the consumer in the United States and Canada has a great deal of confidence in the food products. Any kind of surveys that have been done south of the border have indicated that a Canadian label is considered with great credibility by the consumers in the United States. It's considered with a great deal of credibility in Japan. It's considered with a great deal of credibility in Mexico.

It's considered with a great deal of credibility in Korea.

So it is important for us, as the member opposite has identified, to deal with the perception issue with the labelling of the disease, that this is clearly not a food safety issue. It is certainly an issue that we have to manage. We will work with the Canadian government because all the producers across Canada will be affected. All the producers in the United States will be affected. All the producers, dare I say, in Mexico will be impacted, and we will obviously have to work with knowledgeable third party experts like the public health officer, like the Chief Vet, to reinforce with all members of the public that the issues of food safety are ones of perception, not ones of reality.

Agriculture Environmental Programs Funding

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Last week in Estimates, the Minister of Agriculture said there would be \$18.8 million in joint federal-provincial funding over five years for environmental programs related to agriculture.

Moreover, the Province says: We'll now be looking after the formerly done, well-respected Farm Stewardship Association in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, given that the Province is now looking after this very important program, could the Minister of Agriculture tell this House what our farmers can expect as a result of this funding announcement and environmental projects compared to past years?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by giving a lot of credit to the farmers of Manitoba who did environmental plans at an unprecedented rate in comparison to other provinces. There has been a tremendous amount of work.

As I indicated to the member in Estimates, we have just signed the framework agreement, and there are terms and conditions in it, and we are working out the details of how each of those programs will be developed.

We have worked in very close consultation with the producers. As we were developing the Growing Forward program, producers had the opportunity for input, and, as we go forward and develop final plans, producers will also have input.

Mr. Eichler: The federal government, according to the Estimates process, is putting in \$10.8 million. The Province is putting \$8 million into the program over a five-year comparison.

The Saskatchewan agricultural producers will have access to \$32-million worth of joint funding from [*inaudible*] programs, which is considerably more environmental dollars being made available than for our Manitoba producers.

Mr. Speaker, why is this minister blaming the federal government, when Saskatchewan came up with a better deal for their farmers while our own minister has failed our producers by dropping the ball on this important issue?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure what the member is talking about when he said I'm blaming the federal government. I haven't blamed the federal government.

The member talks about how much money is going into Saskatchewan. He will remember that Saskatchewan's agriculture is about two and a half times the size of Manitoba. So, proportionately, we are getting our share of the money, Mr. Speaker. If you look proportionately at the money that we have received in comparison to other provinces, we have gotten slightly more than the size of our agriculture production in comparison to Saskatchewan.

So, if you look at the size of the industry, of course Saskatchewan would get more money than Manitoba, but we have a package of money that will help us work with Manitoba producers.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, they expect our provincial government to negotiate joint programs to provide maximum benefits to both our agricultural producers and to our environment. The federal government has provided Manitoba with \$4 billion—\$4 billion, Mr. Speaker—of transfer payments to help with important programs just like these, yet there seems to be fewer dollars available to help our producers protect the environment.

Mr. Speaker, this government has failed. This minister has failed our agricultural producers. Shame on this government. Shame on this minister. I ask the minister: What steps are taken to ensure that Manitoba producers have access to funding beneficial management practices?

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite would say that this government has failed our producers. I would ask him to look at the record.

It is in this department that we had the highest percentage of overexpenditure because we are standing by our producers during difficult times.

We have stood by them and we will stand by them, Mr. Speaker. We have stood by them and have worked with them on environmental practices, and, as the details of the program are worked out, we will consult with the producers. In fact, Keystone Agricultural Producers were just in Ottawa getting their slant on how they want this program to be delivered.

It's not all finalized, Mr. Speaker, but we will work with the producers and there will be a program there and Manitoba has gotten their fair share.

Would I like more, Mr. Speaker? Absolutely. I would like the National Water Program to be in there, which the federal government did not put in.

**Manitoba Sustainable Agricultural
Practices Program
Public Communication of Details**

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, the spring planting season is just around the corner. Many producers are finalizing their plans in terms of which crops to plant as well as machinery and equipment purchasing decisions, and we know the livestock industry is facing many challenges.

The MAFRI Estimates book references the Manitoba Sustainable Agricultural Practices Program. Unfortunately, details of this program have not been made public and producers are forging ahead without knowledge of the program.

I'd like to ask the minister: When will details of this particular program be announced?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, we've finalized the bilateral agreement on the Growing Forward portion, which includes the environmental portion, just at the end of the last fiscal year, at the end of March.

As I had indicated in Estimates, and I will indicate again, we are working through the details of how those programs will be delivered and what will be available, and we will work with the producers, as we have in the past, to design the programs.

We will work with the producers and that will be available very soon, Mr. Speaker.

Carbon Credits Trading

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, we have already effectively lost at least one year in between programs.

Now, it appears that greenhouse gas reductions will be targeted under this new program. Producers need to know which best management practices will be offered under this program, so that proper management decisions are taken.

Mr. Speaker, producers and the industry are also making decisions regarding the trading of carbon credits without the knowledge of the program.

I ask the minister: How will this new program affect the industry's ability to trade carbon credits?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Certainly, Mr. Speaker, there are discussions going on on carbon credits and how they should be traded. Some producers are making a decision on selling their land off. As I said to the member in Estimates, people have to be very careful when they are selling these credits because there are some risks. There isn't all of the framework in place that should be.

But our government has taken the lead. The member knows full well that this government supports the cap and trade model, and we will continue to work in that model. But, as far as producers selling and making decisions, although there is some trading being done in the Chicago Climate Exchange, there are still a lot of details to work out.

And, again, I say to the member we have just signed the agreement. We have not lost a year because the funds that were there last year will carry over, Mr. Speaker.

* (14:00)

Mr. Cullen: Well, Mr. Speaker, other provinces have been trading carbon credits for some time now and many Manitoba producers are trading carbon credits.

Mr. Speaker, producers and, in fact, the entire industry needs to understand the role that this government will play in the new program; in turn, how will the policy developed by the government impact the ability of the industry to buy and sell carbon credits.

I want to ask the minister specifically: If a producer signs up for a BMP under this program,

does he give up his right to trade his carbon credit and, furthermore, does he give up any future increase in the value of that credit?

Ms. Wowchuk: This is a very interesting area and lots of people are interested. There is information on the Web site. The member asked me this question in Estimates, if a producer takes advantage of BMP funding, will the producer get the credit or will the government get the credit, and I said to him then and I will say it to him now, if the government is paying, the government will get the credit.

So those are the things that the producers have to be very careful on, and we spelt that out. Those credits, you have to figure out who pays for it, and those are the things that are being worked out. Details will be worked out with the producers as we move forward, Mr. Speaker.

Cattle Industry Presence of Anaplasmosis Disease

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): Since January, the Canada Food Inspection Agency has been testing cattle herds in the rural municipalities of Lac du Bonnet and Alexander for the presence of anaplasmosis disease in the animals. As of last week, five farms in the area had infected animals.

So I ask the Minister of Agriculture: Can she provide the House with an update? How many animals are infected and is the disease under control?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Yes, indeed, there has been testing for anaplasmosis and there are herds that have been quarantined until the results are available. I do not have the specifics of the number of cattle that are tested, but I can return to the House and provide that member with the information.

Mr. Hawranik: I thank the minister for that. Mr. Speaker, anaplasmosis has been detected in Canadian cattle only seven times since 1969, yet five cattle herds are infected in the Lac du Bonnet-Alexander areas. I also understand that infected animals are being culled from their herd and slaughtered.

I ask the Minister of Agriculture: Will she ensure that the farmers whose cattle are being slaughtered are adequately compensated to ensure their continued survival?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, in each case when there is disease control or infection control that has to happen, if it involves CFIA, there is a formula in place on how people—if their herds are disposed of,

as to how they will be compensated, and that is the same thing that happens now.

Mr. Hawranik: Mr. Speaker, anaplasmosis is a disease that destroys red blood cells and produces symptoms such as anemia and jaundice. The cattle infected with this disease are being slaughtered and their meat is entering the food chain for human consumption.

So I ask the Minister of Agriculture: Is she satisfied that the checks and balances are in place for the protection of our food supply?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, I have no doubt that neither CFIA nor the Chief Veterinarian in this province would put our food chain at risk. There are rules that are in place when you are dealing with a specific case of an infection or virus or anaplasmosis.

Those rules are being followed, and I do not believe that there is any compromise of our food system.

Bill 2 Enforcement Concerns

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): A constituent of mine, Dave Shelvey, has raised some important questions with regard to Bill 2, The Animal Care Amendment Act. Mr. Shelvey's business has received designation as a Manitoba Star Attraction by Travel Manitoba. He is well respected in our province, the country and the United States as a skilled breeder and an exporter of reptiles.

Mr. Speaker, what assurances can the Minister of Agriculture give Mr. Shelvey that animal protection officers inspecting his reptiles will have the knowledge base to make an accurate assessment of how they are being cared for?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, I have received a copy of a letter from Mr. Shelvey. Mr. Shelvey raises reptiles and he is concerned that people may not have the expertise that he has.

I can assure the member that this bill is not about shutting down businesses. This bill is about people being able to know where their pets are coming from and that they are raised in a safe environment. I can assure the member opposite that the staff and the inspectors will work closely with Mr. Shelvey and draw on the expertise that he has.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Shelvey had presented some correspondence to committee, has

also met with somebody in the department, and still has some very serious questions.

Mr. Shelvey is a key supplier of reptiles for the Assiniboine Zoo, as well as to the retailers in Manitoba and beyond. There is also a high demand within the entertainment industry for his animals and his related experience.

Mr. Speaker, with respect to inspectors, could the minister clarify when, under Bill 2, a vet will be required to inspect Mr. Shelvey's operation? Will it be done on an annual basis, or will it be done if a concern is raised about the way the animal is being cared for?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, as the member has indicated, Mr. Shelvey has raised some issues. Staff have met with him to talk those issues through, and we recognize that he has a lot of experience with the reptile industry.

He supplies an important product to the Assiniboine Zoo and to other parts of Canada. We will work very closely, and staff will determine with him when an inspection is necessary and what steps he should follow once the bill is passed.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to hear the minister say that her staff will continue to work with this individual, because her staff have indicated the bill is going through as is.

Mr. Shelvey has been in the business for 15 years, and he knows that if he wants to stay in business he has to sell healthy animals. The amendments state that licences will be required for breeders and retailers in Manitoba.

Will the Minister of Agriculture tell the House whether businesses outside of the province who sell to Manitoba will be required to obtain a Manitoba licence before any business transactions can be made? We haven't gotten any answers yet from this minister, Mr. Speaker. I'm giving her an opportunity now.

Ms. Wowchuk: The member talks about whether—but she's happy that the bill is going to pass. I hope we can move that bill along. It is important. It is a bill that we have brought forward in recognition of comments made by many people about how animals are treated, where animals are raised and how they should be treated, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Shelvey has had the opportunity to raise his concerns. My staff have met with him, and we will

continue to work with him to ensure that he has a viable business. Those are the steps we have to take.

The member seems to imply that we haven't talked to him, in one breath; in the next breath she says we've talked to him. Yes, we have talked to him, we've heard his concerns, and we will continue to work with him.

Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Driver's Licences Recall

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, can the Minister responsible for Manitoba Public Insurance tell the House how many driver's licences had to be recalled and reprinted because MPI made a spelling mistake, and how much is it costing the ratepayers?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Acting Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Act): I'll take that question as notice on behalf of the minister, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Graydon: This careless error is just one of many examples of how badly this government has mismanaged MPI, Mr. Speaker. Whether they're spending \$13 million on enhanced ID cards that very few people want, raising vehicle registration fees by 150 percent or buying a shopping mall for \$81 million, this NDP government has proven time and time again it can't manage our Crown corporations, especially MPI.

Can the minister explain how Manitobans are supposed to have any confidence that the enhanced driver's licences will be functional and secure and when will MPI even handle regular driver's licences?

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, we don't accept the basis of the question whatsoever. It sounds to me like a speech to sell MPI, once again, from members opposite.

Members on this side and Manitobans are going to be able to continue to support MPI because of its record of having among the lowest rates anywhere on the continent and, I understand, among the lowest rates, if not the lowest rates, in this country.

I also remind members opposite that it is under this government's watch that MPI has been sending cheques back to Manitobans, Mr. Speaker, because of the rates. At the same time, there are coverage improvements that are under way.

* (14:10)

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Speaker, the minister would know that according to MPI's latest annual report, Manitoba no longer has the lowest average insurance rates in the country.

What Manitoba does have is an insurance company that is wasting millions of dollars of ratepayers' money on poor decisions like enhanced ID cards that nobody wants and downtown shopping malls.

Can the minister explain to MPI ratepayers how much cheaper our auto insurance would be if this government quit wasting ratepayers' money on careless mistakes and poor decisions?

Mr. Mackintosh: My understanding is that Manitobans are finding the option useful, as one that is being offered to them. It's not mandatory, of course.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I know members opposite don't like the fact that the corporation is so financially solid that it's providing such service to Manitobans. We are continuing to look at ways to enhance those services, continuing to look at how we can better lower the demands on the cost for ratepayers, which is why auto theft in this province, in no small way, has dramatically, precipitously fallen. It is because of the partnership that MPI has played in this province.

Mr. Speaker, we will not be selling MPI.

Swine Flu Screening Protocols

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Health: The incubation period for an infection is a period after someone comes in contact with the infection and before they become symptomatic. Knowing the precise incubation period for the new strain of influenza virus is going to be very important.

The normal incubation period for influenza is 18 to 36 hours with occasionally up to four days. I ask the minister: Has the new H1N1 influenza viral strain been determined to have the same incubation period as traditional for influenza A? Are there outliers? Are there people who can become stable carriers, all the things which would be very important to know.

Can the minister tell us the precise protocol which is involved, when somebody comes from Mexico to Manitoba, to make sure that they're

properly screened and that Manitobans don't become infected?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I can assure the member that specific epidemiological questions about the nature of this illness will be addressed by our provincial Chief Medical Officer of Health at the briefing this afternoon. He can ask those questions. I wouldn't purport to answer medical questions.

I can say to him that, of course, as everyone following the coverage of this illness, there are varying opinions. I can let the member know, of course, that as per our pandemic preparedness plans, there are protocols in place for our first responders, for our front-line workers. Infection control measures are in place and are being emphasized in the name of this particular illness.

Mr. Gerrard: Where is the plan? Why don't you table it? Why don't you give us the basic details of this influenza strain?

We know that there's a lot of confusion. The public needs to know if you're going to be able to plan properly to deal with people coming from Mexico to Manitoba. We have, may have, quite a number of farm workers and others coming here. We need a precise protocol so that during the incubation period, anybody coming from an area where there are people who've been infected can be followed until we make sure that they don't infect Manitobans or animals in Manitoba which may be susceptible.

What are the precise protocols? What is the minister doing? She needs to let people know. Will she?

Ms. Oswald: Well, yes, Mr. Speaker, of course we've committed to provide a briefing every day on the issues and developments concerning this illness. We know that there are protocols in place with Citizenship and Immigration Canada. There are protocols in place for people coming into the country at borders.

I would think the member, as a doctor, would know that with human-to-human contact of this particular illness and its spread into many of the United States now that the sole concern isn't only about Mexico; it's about other sources as well. I'm sure he would know that. We have plans in place from infection control, from communications, from surveillance, all the way across the board, as we had prepared for in our pandemic plan.

I encourage the member to ask specific health questions to Dr. Kettner later as we have provided him the opportunity to do so.

Winnipeg Regional Health Authority Brian Postl's Salary

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Yesterday I asked the Premier the question, how many tax dollars are being used to pay the CEO of Winnipeg Regional Health Authority? He indicated: "I assume the number is public." Mr. Speaker, you know what happens sometimes if you assume something.

Well, Mr. Speaker, does the Premier support the public's right to know how many tax dollars are being given to Dr. Brian Postl, including the tax dollars used to fund his pension and any other source of income that is derived from tax dollars? Does the Premier believe that the public has a right to know?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Yes, and I also think the public has a right to the balance that is necessary, comparing salaries with a pediatrician and other CEOs of other major health corporations. I think Dr. Postl's salary—as I said, he's a pediatrician—is in the middle. There are salaries of over \$700,000 in some provinces with other issues of bonuses. Dr. Postl's salary, I believe, is going to be made public in June of this year.

Everybody's salary should be public. I don't know whether the member has FIPPA'd it or not, but it is public information.

Hometown Manitoba Update

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): It seems when members opposite do get around to asking questions related to agriculture, their primary objective is to so discord and plant false information on the record, as was the case with the question from their critic, the Member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler).

This government has been a champion for rural Manitobans, which includes people in rural communities. Last week, the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives announced the results of another rural success story, and that is Hometown Manitoba, a program begun by her as our minister.

Could the minister provide the House with an update on this important program?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Indeed, I thank the member for this question, because it gives me the

opportunity to talk about Hometown Manitoba, a program that was launched in 2004, Mr. Speaker, a program that has had more than 1,440 applications that have been approved.

This year, the investment, Mr. Speaker, will be \$751,000, and in three categories: meeting places, main street enhancement and, in fact, this year we've added a new category of tree planting.

Mr. Speaker, 365 applications, one for every day of the year, have been approved and we will see improvements right across rural Manitoba. I would encourage every constituent in rural Manitoba to look at that program and try to get applications from their area, because it will help your community.

Highway 75 Morris Bypass

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, residents and stakeholders need answers when it comes to Highway 75 and flood proofing.

In Estimates last week, the Premier said, and I quote: ". . . but a bypass has to go past St. Jean. It's not a perimeter highway around Morris." When asked about plans to keep Highway 75 open during flood events, the Premier also said: "It won't be around Morris. The water is over the highway from Morris to St. Jean."

Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux): When is he going to announce his plans for a bypass starting south of Morris at St. Jean?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): I want to point out that two of the routes that are being contemplated by the Department of Infrastructure include requirements for the Letellier Bridge, but three don't, so I would point that out as well.

The issue of Morris, I know there's a lot of—first of all, Morris, I believe, lost 14 days in '96 and lost 44 days in '97. We've lost one day in '05, 18 days in '06 and, obviously, a lot more this year.

So the issue of transportation on Highway 75 is very important. I know members opposite tried to buy land in the 1990s, and then when people were concerned about it in Morris, in terms of their businesses, they stopped the purchase of land.

* (14:20)

Mrs. Taillieu: Mr. Speaker, in Estimates last week, the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) said, stay tuned, when asked when he

would be announcing plans for Highway 75. The people in Morris have been waiting for three years since the last flood, and if he hasn't been working on this for the last three years, he should have been.

Mr. Speaker, when is the minister going to announce the plan for Highway 75, either through Morris, west of Morris, east of Morris, or is he just waiting for a photo op like he did on Highway 2?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, the members opposite, in government in the 1990s, started to purchase land and then stopped.

We know that we've done a lot of work on the bridge. It would have to be 12 feet high. It would only get to Morris. It would go across the Morris River. It would deal with the Red River flooding, but it wouldn't deal with the flooding between St. Jean and the Plum River and the other parts of Highway 75.

So we're now looking at a west route and an east route, a number of routes, Mr. Speaker. There's going to be extensive—I would say that even with the Letellier Bridge, one landowner has held us up for a couple of years. One landowner has held us up for a couple of years, so this is not as simple as the member opposite described.

It's not simply the issue of Morris. It's broader, wider, longer and more expensive than just Morris, Mr. Speaker.

St. Norbert Bypass Future Plans

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Well, Mr. Speaker, in Estimates, when questioned about the plan for Highway 75, the Premier indicated there was an issue at St. Norbert. The Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) denied there was a bypass around St. Norbert but did say, and I quote, but that's not to say that in years to come or in the future that that is seriously going to have to be looked at.

Mr. Speaker, I know the department has plans on the books many years in advance of a project being completed. Can the Minister of Infrastructure indicate today if there are future plans to bypass St. Norbert?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, there are five issues of transportation: the twinning to the Saskatchewan border, the interchange at Highway 16, the northwest section around the airport. There's a weakness at Headingley that has to be dealt with.

There's also a weakness at St. Norbert where the Perimeter Highway is inside the city, as opposed to outside the city, and, yes, there's a weakness at Highway 75: 18 days, 44 days in the 1990s, something close to that in this decade.

That is one of our transportation weaknesses. There are four or five weaknesses. We're slowly dealing with them. The twinning is done. The Highway 16 interchange is agreed upon and moving. The northwest quadrant around the airport, check. We've got that agreement with the federal government. We're also dealing with the other three issues. Headingley, St. Norbert and Morris, Mr. Speaker.

Charity Raffles Licensing Fees

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): A community in my constituency wants to hold a charity raffle to raise money for a new arena, but this government is taking \$4,500 in licensing fees right off the top; \$4,500 is a lot of money to take from a community raffle.

Can the Minister responsible for the Gaming Commission explain why his government is so addicted to gaming revenues that he's taking thousands of dollars from community charities?

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Lotteries Corporation Act): On behalf of the Gaming Minister, certainly, this government is interested in allowing communities to engage in raffles in various ways to raise money. I don't know details. If the Member for Minnedosa wants to provide those, we can provide a better answer, but, indeed, it's very important that we do have a system in place that allows anyone who purchases a ticket on any draw, on any raffle, to know that it is being conducted appropriately and fairly so there's an equal chance of being successful.

Mrs. Rowat: Manitoba distributed less of its gaming revenues to charity than almost any other province this last year. That's not a record this government should be very proud of.

Fewer charity gaming licences are issued in Manitoba than almost any other province, Mr. Speaker. The message is clear. This NDP government only supports gaming activities if they're the ones profiting from it. The community is doing its part to raise funds for a much-needed arena. It's discouraging that this government wants to stand in

the way and demand nearly \$5,000 simply for a raffle licence.

Can the minister explain why his government takes such a big cut of charity gaming revenues when other provinces take much, much less?

Mr. Swan: Certainly it's possible for communities, for groups, to conduct raffles and draws which, again, are conducted under the auspices of the Gaming Commission and, indeed, it's possible for those communities to raise money for very good purposes.

Mr. Speaker, I do take exception at the Member for Minnedosa talking about Lotteries. The Manitoba Lotteries Commission actually has a tremendous record of putting money back into every single community represented in this Legislature, and I know that in Souris, in Minnedosa, in various communities that the member herself represents, Lotteries is very pleased to be providing money into the communities to support things which I believe everybody in this House can support.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Leona Nickel

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate a very special constituent of mine. On April 14, Mrs. Leona Nickel was presented with Altona's 2009 Volunteer of the Year award for her endless hours of volunteer work over the past many years.

Volunteers play a key role in keeping rural communities like Altona thriving. When a volunteer has risen above the rest, went above and beyond what is expected of them just out of pure kindness, they will be rewarded.

Mrs. Leona Nickel has been a behind-the-scenes volunteer for many years and, more recently, shared a paid position in palliative care. She has taken part in the palliative care since the death of her mother many years ago. Since that time, she has served in the capacity as a palliative care support facilitator, a bereavement support and grief support facilitator.

Leona was a church board member for many years in Altona where she taught Sunday school and was a girls' group leader, also a Bible study leader and a Presbyterian representative. She's also an active member in the choir and has been for 30 years.

In 1991, Leona's mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's and later became a resident in the Eastview Personal Care Home. Leona visited her mother often and noticed how few programs were in place for the residents. This was all the prompting she needed and has been organizing singsongs and musical jamborees, as well as weekly bun making, ever since.

In 2004, Mr. Speaker, the Alzheimer Society presented Leona with a distinguished member award for her involvement in fundraising and programming dating back since 1994.

She's a volunteer facilitator for a monthly support group for family and friends of Alzheimer's patients in Altona. She also volunteers her time organizing bake sales, raffles, workshops and doing presentations on Alzheimer's disease to grade 3 classes.

I would like the members of the House to join me in congratulating Leona Nickel for receiving the Altona 2009 volunteer award. She is an epitome of volunteers. She never wants to be front and centre, but she has no problem rolling up her sleeves, stepping in where she's needed.

Congratulations, Leona.

Portuguese War Veterans Memorial

Ms. Flor Marcelino (Wellington): Winnipeg will soon become the home to North America's first memorial for Portuguese war veterans. The Winnipeg Chapter of the Portuguese Association of War Veterans is an association which works with Portuguese war veterans in Manitoba.

After becoming established five years ago, the veterans, under the leadership of the association's president, Pedro Correia, decided that it is but fitting to build a memorial to recognize Portuguese war veterans.

There are over 400 war veterans currently living in the province, and they all served during the Portuguese colonial wars in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau from 1961 to 1974.

This memorial will honour past, present and future veterans who not only fight in wars but are also a part of NATO and several peacekeeping missions around the world. This monument is scheduled to be unveiled in the second week of September at the Chapel Lawn Memorial Gardens in Headingley. This location was a generous donation by the cemetery which recognized the importance of

this memorial to the Portuguese community in Manitoba.

On March 21, 2009, Mr. Speaker, I had the privilege of attending a fundraising dinner, along with the honourable Member for St. James (Ms. Korzeniowski), who presented the association with a cheque for \$10,000 to support the memorial project. It was held at the Portuguese Centre on Young Street, one of the community centres of pride in the Wellington constituency.

Speaking of community centres, I have not seen many community organizations like this one, Mr. Speaker. The Portuguese Centre's operating expenses are fully funded and supported by its members. This is truly admirable and a clear testament to the character of their members. The community supports each other, and they're willing to work together to undertake the upkeep of the organization.

I would like to wish the Portuguese War Veterans Association of Manitoba all the best, and look forward to attending the unveiling of the memorial in September. Thank you.

*(14:30)

Brandon's Ranking as Best Place to Live in Canada

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): It's with a great deal of pride that I rise today to extol the virtues of my city, Brandon. It is, without question, the finest small city in which to raise a family and enjoy a superb quality of life.

Mr. Speaker, don't take my word for it. Brandon is one of Canada's top 10 cities to live in, according to *MoneySense* magazine. In order to create its list, the magazine considers 24 factors that affect basic quality of life. Brandon has all the amenities of a big city, but it retains its small-town atmosphere. People still know their neighbours and neighbours still help their neighbours.

Brandon boasts a university, Assiniboine Community College, an arts centre and a one-of-a-kind convention and recreation facility, the Keystone Centre. And who can forget, Mr. Speaker, the Brandon Wheat Kings and the Brandon University Bobcats.

With a population of 48,000 people, Brandon was the smallest city to make it to the top 10 list, as it enjoys many qualities that big cities do not. *MoneySense* magazine commended Brandon for having one of the lowest unemployment rates in the

country, as well as affordable housing prices. That, combined with short commute times to work, allows residents to live without stress that residents of large cities have to deal with on a daily basis.

This was not the first time Brandon has made it to the top 10 list, as Brandon was featured previously in *Chatelaine* magazine's top 10 cities. Even though Brandon is forced to endure a harsh winter, which does not favour our position on the list, the city makes up for it, Mr. Speaker, with its warm, friendly western Canadian hospitality.

Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased that Brandon has been included in *MoneySense*'s list of top 10 Canadian cities in which to live. I, and many other residents of my community, have known this for many years that Brandon is a world class city in which to live and to prosper, and now, perhaps, the rest of the country can play catch up with the city of Brandon.

Safeway Men's Curling Championships

Mr. Gregory Dewar (Selkirk): Mr. Speaker, I'd like to draw attention of the House to two recent sporting event championships hosted by the Selkirk community.

First, Mr. Speaker, the 2009 Safeway Men's Curling Championships was held in Selkirk February 18 to 22. The winner was the Jeff Stoughton team who defeated the Kerry Burtnyk team 7-6 in the final. Joining Jeff Stoughton was third, Kevin Park; second, Rob Fowler; and lead, Steve Gould.

As members will know, the Stoughton team followed up their win in Selkirk with a very successful run at the Tim Horton Brier, where they made it to the championship final losing to the powerful Kevin Martin team.

Mr. Speaker, also, we were pleased to host the Telus Cup, April 20 to 26. Six teams from across Canada competed in the championship with the Winnipeg Thrashers acting as the host team. After a week of exciting, fast hockey, the team from Québec won the bronze, the Calgary Buffaloes won the silver and the Notre Dame Hounds the gold.

Both events were great successes. Large crowds were treated to first class entertainment. Volunteers and sponsors answered the call for support and ensured the event was well-run and well-funded.

Our community has a proud history of hosting provincial and national sporting championships. I would like to congratulate and thank the host

committee of the Safeway Championships, co-chair, Bonnie Schmidt; the Telus Cup chair, Rob Cox; over 500 volunteers and the many sponsors who supported these events and guaranteed their success.

Mr. Speaker, I know I speak on behalf of our community when I say we look forward to our next championship sporting challenge.

**Winnipeg Regional Health Authority
Brian Postl's Salary**

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, as I look to the Premier's (Mr. Doer) and the Minister of Health's (Ms. Oswald) chairs, I would like to put a challenge to the two of them, and that is that if you take a look at the CEO, Dr. Brian Postl, and try to get an understanding in terms of how much that particular individual receives in tax dollars on an annual basis, I believe that it is, in fact, something which the public has a right to know.

In fact, if you listen to the answer that the Premier gave yesterday, the Premier, himself, has said, and I quote, I assume the number is public. Well, Mr. Speaker, here is what I can tell the Premier, and that is that, in 2006, Mr. Postl received \$387,325, as reported in one document. In 2007, he received \$373,531, which gives the impression that he had a decrease in pay. I am told that he didn't have a decrease in pay, but rather he took a lump sum of money and put it into a pension in which the government is also contributing to. I've had correspondence through e-mail saying that there are additional monies, committees that he is receiving additional tax dollars.

So my challenge to the Minister of Health and to the Premier is: Will they provide the actual dollar value that Dr. Brian Postl receives on an annual basis courtesy of the taxpayers of Manitoba? The Premier, himself, said that he assumed that it was known. Well, if I am missing a document, I'm interested, will the minister or the Premier show me where there's a public document that shows the monies that Mr. Postl is receiving beyond those two figures that I've already indicated? I know there's more. I have no idea in terms of where it is that the government has hidden those figures. I suspect it's not public, and that's the reason why I've been asking for this Minister of Health and this Premier to share, through me, to all Manitobans, just how much Dr. Postl makes at the taxpayers' expense.

**ORDERS OF THE DAY
(Continued)**

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade): Yes, on House business, Mr. Speaker, I would ask if you could resolve the House into Committee of Supply.

Mr. Speaker: Okay. We will now resolve into Committee of Supply.

Would the Chairs please go to the appropriate rooms where you will be chairing. In the Chamber will be Education, Citizenship and Youth; Room 255 will be Finance; and Room 254 will be Advanced Education and Literacy.

**COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
(Concurrent Sections)**

ADVANCED EDUCATION AND LITERACY

* (14:40)

Madam Chairperson (Marilyn Brick): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Advanced Education and Literacy. Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Diane McGifford (Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy): No, I think in the interests of time, I will not make an opening statement.

Madam Chairperson: I thank the minister. Does the official opposition critic, the honourable Member for Lac du Bonnet, have an opening statement?

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): No. I'd waive the opening statement in the interest of brevity and just indicate to the minister that we would like to proceed on a global basis first and then go line by line later.

Madam Chairperson: We thank the critic.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for the department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 44.1.(a) and proceed with consideration of the remaining items referenced in resolution 44.1.

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

Ms. McGifford: Madam Chair, shall I then introduce the staff? To my immediate left is Heather Reichert, who is the Deputy Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy; and then sitting behind is Sid Rogers, who is the Secretary to the Council on Post-Secondary Education; Tom Glenwright, who is the Executive Director of Manitoba Student Aid; and next to him is Lynette—I'm going to get it—Lynette Plett, who is the Executive Director of Adult Learning and Literacy; Andrew Henry, who is manager, Finance and Administration; Josh Watt from the Council on Post-Secondary Education; and Margaret McDonald from the Council on Post-Secondary Education.

Madam Chairperson: We thank the minister for introducing her staff.

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

Mr. Hawranik: Yes, as I mentioned earlier, I'd like to have a global discussion first, then go line by line. We've traditionally done that in this department, as we do in other departments as well, and I would ask that we do that.

Ms. McGifford: Yes, that's fine with us. Thank you.

Madam Chairperson: Then it is agreed that we will proceed in a global manner, with all resolutions to be passed once the questioning has been completed. Agreed? *[Agreed]*

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Hawranik: If I could ask the minister, within the last 12 months—and she may not be able to answer that here, in this forum; she may have to get back to me, I acknowledge that—but within the last 12 months, can she indicate to me who has left the department and who has joined the department in the last 12 months and, where, specifically, have they come from, whether they've come from other departments or they were new hires, and if she can give me that information? As I say, she may not have that information today, but I'd appreciate that at some point in time.

Ms. McGifford: Madam Chair, we just have totals. The total staff hired in '08-09 was 22, broken down as follows: via competition, 17; via direct appointment, 4; via Order-in-Council, 1.

If the member would like me to comment on the Order-in-Council appointment, I can do so.

Mr. Hawranik: Yes.

Ms. McGifford: That's my—would the member like me to comment?

Mr. Hawranik: Sure.

Ms. McGifford: That's my executive assistant, and her name is Liz Parsons.

Mr. Hawranik: Further to that, in terms of the numbers, if—and as I say, she may not be able to answer today, but I'd like to get an indication as to who has joined and who has left, specifically.

Out of those 22 staff members who have joined, and others who may have left, where they have come from, which departments, perhaps, if they came out of province, or not, that kind of thing, and all in the last 12 months. So I'd appreciate getting that at some point in time. I don't need it today, but, certainly, if I could have that within a reasonable period of time.

Ms. McGifford: Would the member like those individuals identified by name or merely where they came from?

Mr. Hawranik: I think both. If I could get by name and where they came from, whether they were a lateral transfer within government or they were new hires, and that kind of thing. So I'd appreciate that.

In terms of the vacancy rate within the department, can the minister indicate what the vacancy rate is at this point?

Ms. McGifford: Yes. It's approximately 4.5 percent.

Mr. Hawranik: Can the minister indicate what the target vacancy rate is for the year?

Ms. McGifford: Madam Chair, it is approximately 4.5 percent.

Mr. Hawranik: In terms of vacancy at 4.5 percent, how many positions would that be within the department?

Ms. McGifford: That's four to five positions, simple math, right here.

Mr. Hawranik: Madam Chair, does the minister keep statistics in terms of graduation rates within the post-secondary institutions, in particular, immigrant student graduation rates?

Ms. McGifford: Well, I think staff are looking through that information. But one of the things that

the member would probably know is that I'm almost certain that universities and colleges don't call on individuals to identify themselves as immigrants, just as they don't call upon individuals to identify themselves as Aboriginal. It's self-selection, so it's very hard to keep track of all of those figures.

Having said that, I do have some graduation levels. For example, the latest—or the earliest, depending on your perspective—they go back is 2007, at which time there were 6,910 university graduates and 4,093 college graduates, for a total of 11,003 post-secondary education graduates. Those are from the public system. We don't have figures for the private system. So I don't have '08 figures for the member. But I don't have them broken down in terms of how many were Aboriginal, how many were immigrant, how many were whatever, because that isn't part of the identification system.

*(14:50)

Mr. Hawranik: I would expect that the minister keeps records in terms of whether they are resident or non-resident of Manitoba. If she could provide me with the graduation rates that have been identified within the public post-secondary institutions with respect to non-residents versus residents.

Ms. McGifford: We'll have to look for those figures and get back to the members. I know we have—I believe we have the numbers of international students who graduated, but I appreciate that non-resident and international are quite different. For example, we have students from British Columbia who are non-resident but not international.

Mr. Hawranik: We're calling them international students, so that's what I'm after, actually, is the graduation rates for international students.

Ms. McGifford: Now it would appear I have the enrolments for international students but not necessarily the graduation rates. Is the member interested in the enrolment numbers?

Mr. Hawranik: No, I'd be interested in the graduation rates of international students. If you don't have that number handy, as I say, I would appreciate you getting back to me at some point in time.

Ms. McGifford: We will attempt to get those numbers from the universities and colleges. I'm assuming they have them; they haven't shared them with us to date.

Mr. Hawranik: I thank the minister for that.

I refer to a comment made by Ovide Mercredi done in 2007. I'd like to have the minister's comment with regard to it. That's Chancellor Mercredi who indicated that the University College of the North should lower its entrance standards with a goal to increase access for Aboriginal people, and I would suspect that the minister knows about those comments. I'd like to hear the minister's view with respect to that at the university.

Ms. McGifford: This question was brought to the table last year as well.

I believe, first of all, Chancellor Mercredi was quoted out of context, and I believe his point was that if students aren't ready for university or college, it is incumbent, especially on an institution like University College of the North to provide bridging programs in order to allow those students to access university and/or college. So his point was that preparation may be necessary and a lack of preparation should not preclude a student from attending university or college, but the college or university should provide them with this bridging education.

Mr. Hawranik: The minister may appreciate I'm not necessarily critical of Mr. Mercredi's comments. The reason I bring up the question is there are numbers of other universities in Canada, and in particular Athabasca University in Alberta, that admit some students to university, who haven't even graduated from Grade 12 and don't have an equivalency, provided they have additional work experience that would be relevant to taking courses at the university like that. It's called an open university, and I'm sure the minister knows what that means.

In terms of an open university, is there some thought toward perhaps making University College of the North in particular—because it's really designed to help northern students who perhaps are disadvantaged in terms of location and that kind of thing and access to materials and resources—is there some thought to making University College of the North an open university similar to what might occur in Athabasca University in Alberta?

Ms. McGifford: Well, there are a lot of layers to that question. First of all, I want to assure the member that I didn't take his comment as a criticism of Ovide Mercredi. I understood he was looking for an explanation as to why this might have been said.

Secondly, I think the member is aware that the universities have their own acts, and part of the act is

that they have control over academic matters. So they do set the standards for admission to universities. However, having said that, my understanding is that University of Winnipeg, University of Manitoba and Brandon University all have mature student programs where a student can attend university at the age of 21 whether he or she has completed grade 12, and the success of that student is weighed and measured, and then the student can continue.

So I'd say, in many ways, we do have an open university system at this time, but, if I may just add that the question with the initial comment, Ovide Mercredi's comment, the question there was his interest in having students not only attend university or college but be prepared to succeed in university or college.

Mr. Hawranik: Now that the minister has somewhat thawed the tuition freeze—it's not completely thawed yet, but, in any event, now that there's some progress being made toward increasing tuition fees in the province, I just ask the minister, will the government be reducing any global funding to universities with any rises in tuition or is it intended that the global funding for universities will continue and increase above inflation?

Ms. McGifford: I can't really make announcements about next year's budget today. We're working with this year's budget. But I do assure the member that this government has increased funding to universities and colleges considerably every year since we've been in government. Nobody knows where our economy is going to be next year, and I can't speak for Treasury Board or for the whole of government, but my belief is that we will continue to increase funding to universities and colleges.

Mr. Hawranik: Obviously, with increases in tuition, it seems to be a bit of a measured increase this year, obviously, and it may accelerate in future years, but with increases in tuition, will the minister at least commit to increase funding for bursaries for lower-income students to make sure that they are compensated for that increase in tuition, at least for the increase in tuition?

Ms. McGifford: Well, I'm not sure that the tuition increase was just measured. It's well in excess of CPI, for example. The day that I announced the tuition freeze, the member may remember that I also announced \$2.5 million in additional funds for university and college students. One million dollars was for special programs under our Bright Futures

envelope. Another million went to the Manitoba bursary, which, by the way, is now at \$9.2 million, and \$500,000 went to enrich ACCESS programs.

Mr. Hawranik: Does the minister have any indication as to how much the increase this year will raise for universities?

Ms. McGifford: Is the member wanting to know what it'll raise for universities or universities and colleges?

Mr. Hawranik: Yes, for clarification, universities and colleges.

Ms. McGifford: About \$6.5 million.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): I do have a couple of questions that I was wanting to get on the record. I guess one would be related to the tuition freeze. Because it is an interesting point to time, I'm wondering if the minister could provide two figures: the average cost to take a first-year course program for a B.A. at the University of Winnipeg, University of Manitoba and Brandon University back in 1999, and that cost today.

* (15:00)

Ms. McGifford: I can provide the—pardon me, may I ask the member, is it just Brandon and University of Winnipeg you want?

Mr. Lamoureux: The three: Manitoba, Brandon and Winnipeg.

Ms. McGifford: In 1999, the tuition at University of Manitoba was \$3,376 and, thereafter, until this year, it grew to—it shrunk, pardon me, to \$2,943; University of Winnipeg, 1999, \$3,332 and then in '08-09, \$2,998—this doesn't reflect the increase, the member, I can give you that in a second—Brandon University \$3,193, shrunk to \$2,847, and the increase for an arts student was approximately \$135.

Mr. Lamoureux: The only other real substantial fee, and I'm talking really the first-year student, would be—they call it the ancillary fee—each university has one of those, I understand. Again, does she have the dollar value of '99 compared to 2009?

Ms. McGifford: I think we do, but I just want to point out to the member, while the deputy's looking for those figures, I want to point out to the member that ancillary fees mean a lot if things, and the member may not be aware that they include, often, student fees. They often include health fees that students pay, so not all of the ancillary fee goes to the institution.

Mr. Lamoureux: Yes, I realize that.

Ms. McGifford: In 1999, the average other fees was \$196, and in 2007-2008 it was \$338, including health-care fees.

Mr. Lamoureux: I just want to get on the record in regard to that. The other issue that I was wanting to provide brief comment, and I understand that we're in limited potential time today, is the issue of many constituents, and I would suggest that many Manitobans, that would look at the possibilities of going abroad. There are two countries that I would focus some attention on, possibly even a third, but that being India and the Philippines, where someone immigrates to Manitoba and then after having their child go through our public educational system, they graduate grade 12, and often they think, well, maybe it would be kind of nice to be able to go to university back in the homeland and get that first year of university or possibly more than that. But then the issue, more often than not, is: Well, if they do that are they going to be able to transfer those courses over?

I've had opportunity to have some discussions with Brandon University and the University of Winnipeg, very briefly, and it seems that there might be some movement in that direction in terms of possibly recognizing some of those types of courses. I wonder if the minister can provide comment. Realizing the academic independence of our universities, I wonder if she can just provide comment as to what her government's position would be on the issue of allowing people to go back to their homeland, get that first year and feel confident in knowing that that first-year course would, in fact, get some recognition here.

Ms. McGifford: Well, Madam Chair, of course, the member may know that several of our universities do have international agreements with other countries, and, just anecdotally speaking, my daughter, for example, went to university in France for a year. There's an exchange program between the University of Winnipeg and several French universities, and I believe that's also the case at University of Manitoba with several international locations. I also want to assure the member that, personally, I am a great champion of the internationalization of education. I think it's very important, not only for students to come here, but for students from here to go away.

In October I was in Korea, and I attended a conference where these matters came up. Certainly, I can't even say I've become a convert, because I've

always believed in the importance of international education, not just education but professorial exchanges, projects, all of that sort of thing. I think it's very important in taking down walls and making us a more universal kind of world.

As to the specific locations, India and the Philippines, as the member said, that is a matter for the universities to decide. I'm sure that there would be lots of good will to encourage those kinds of initiatives. I actually haven't spoken to any of our presidents about exchanges with India and/or with the Philippines. I don't know whether anyone—not seeing anyone here nodding that indicates that they have, doesn't mean that it won't come about. Thank you for the idea.

Mr. Lamoureux: I applaud the minister's openness to the idea. I can tell you, there's a difference in terms of that international student mentality, right or wrong—somewhat mythical to a certain degree. You know, if I go abroad I get that education, it broadens their basic knowledge, and it gives them a difference sense of quality education. I think that there's great value to that.

But quite often in some of the other countries like the Philippines and India, we just don't seem to get that same sort of recognition. It pleases me that the minister—and I would very much appreciate next year, if we could have that dialogue. I, too, in turn, will look into it more with the idea of, hopefully, that we'll see more exchanges taken between our universities both here and India and the Philippines.

I emphasize those two countries primarily because a great number of the immigrants that we are getting today and we've gotten yesterday, a lot of their children now are graduating grade 12. This is one of the options that I know more and more are looking at. I appreciate the minister's comments. I'll pass on my concerns to the universities and look forward maybe to having a more detailed dialogue next year on the issue.

Ms. McGifford: I don't know very much about university education in the Philippines, but I do know that there are many distinguished universities in India, particularly in engineering and science. Certainly there are opportunities for our students. If our universities and colleges choose to develop those opportunities, and actually I know they have in some instances, then I welcome it.

Mr. Lamoureux: I know that, for example, I note that St. Thomas or the University of Philippines—

there are universities in the Philippines, for example, that are older than Harvard and some of the more world-renowned universities. I see that the minister has an open mind, and I'll look forward to the dialogue we have next year.

Mr. David Faurichou (Portage la Prairie): I just want to clarify that the duties and responsibilities of the minister's department extend to the adult learning centres.

Ms. McGifford: Yes, they do.

Mr. Faurichou: Currently there's a very active adult learning centre in Portage la Prairie in which we are, as a community member—

An Honourable Member: I think there are three.

Mr. Faurichou: Yes. The active adult learning centres, I will clarify that. There is more than one we are very proud of.

I would like to ask the minister—level of support for the programming that ultimately leads to employment of certified teachers in teaching the curriculum. Could, perhaps, the minister explain what formula her department works with in order to provide what ultimately is seen as the salary or wage for the certified teachers engaged in the curriculum teaching within the adult learning centres?

* (15:10)

Ms. McGifford: I'm sorry. Is the member asking me how adult learning centres' salaries for teachers—the teachers at the adult learners are determined? I don't think that my department has a formula. I believe that the salaries are dependent on whether they're connected with the school system, and, therefore, follow a teacher's contract or whether they're negotiated.

Mr. Faurichou: Well, this is what still is an area of confusion for myself in trying to understand the relationships between the adult learning centres and the school divisions. I know there was a determination by the department that the school divisions would be effectively responsible for any deficits that the adult learning centres would ultimately end up with if they were the accrediting body for that particular adult learning centre. This was a recent development and there are school divisions now that are gravely concerned. Although the adult learning centres in Portage la Prairie have not run deficits, the Portage School Division has served notice to the adult learning centres that they

will not be the accrediting body for the particular course credit recognitions.

I'm just asking, though, the formula of funding for adult learning centres, does it extend to basically providing for a certain level of wage for the accredited teachers in those facilities?

Ms. McGifford: I'm little confused about the member's comments, Madam Chair, on school divisions being responsible for deficits. That certainly isn't the case. I'm not sure of the source of this information, whether we need a little bit more information here. I'm quite confused here.

Mr. Faurichou: Well, then, you'd best be communicating to the Portage la Prairie School Division. This is of grave concern to the Portage School Division, and the Portage School Division has served notice to the adult learning centres that they will not be the accrediting body for the adult learning centres in Portage la Prairie, and they have and will continue to look for institutions that they can work with.

It is an area that I am concerned about and whether it's coming from the Department of Education or Advanced Education, I don't know. Madam Chair, it is definitely a documented fact that the Portage la Prairie School Division has served notice to the Portage Learning Centre that they will no longer continue with supporting them with their accreditation based upon their exposure to deficits that the adult learning centre may have.

Ms. McGifford: I'm advised that we are aware of the situation in Portage, and we are working with the particular ALC.

Mr. Faurichou: Well, then, further to that situation in Portage la Prairie, I will ask the minister about the funding formula as to whether or not there is a component within the level of support that the adult learning centre receives that considers the level of remuneration that certified teachers employed in the adult learning centres receive.

Ms. McGifford: I'm advised that there is not a funding formula.

Mr. Faurichou: If there is not a funding formula that takes into consideration the level of wage that teachers are paid, how then is it that the department actually funds the adult learning centres? What is it based upon? The number of hours of instruction, the number of students, courses provided? Could the

minister elaborate on what is within the consideration towards the funding?

Ms. McGifford: Well, of course, the first element of funding is a decision made by Treasury Board. This year our adult learning centres received a 4 percent increase. The way in which department people determine funding to adult learning and literacy too—of course we're responsible for literacy—is receive applications and study those applications. We're in very regular communication with the adult learning centres. I know staff visit adult learning centres. We have statistics about adult learning centres like number of registrants, numbers of hours open, number of graduates, numbers of individual courses that are completed. Funding is determined in consideration of monies available and then all these other elements that I just described to the member.

Mr. Faursehou: Is the minister in consideration of reviewing the current practices of determining the level of funding? I know she referred to Treasury Board, but I think that a clear and determined analysis should be made of the adult learning centres. Because where the bottom line is, the level of support for an accredited high school course being delivered in adult learning centres is being funded at approximately half of what an accredited course being funded in a high school setting is at the current time.

So I ask the minister if she will commit to evaluating, on a comparative basis, an accredited course delivered to a student in high school under the K-12 program and the same accredited course delivered within her department in an adult learning centre?

Ms. McGifford: Adult education and adult learning centres is less expensive because there's no gym, there's no bussing, there's none of the other kinds of bells and whistles that come with public school because we're talking about adults, often going to school in the evening, et cetera.

If the member has some very clear information he'd like to share, I'd certainly appreciate having it. I do want to point out that I'm sure the member has read the Levin report, and I'm sure that he recalls reading that Dr. Levin felt that adult learning centres were extremely important and was very complimentary, by the way, about our adult learning centres and suggested that we might want to go in even newer and more exciting directions and suggested a review. Since the staffperson at, who is the executive director, Lynette Flett, who's with us

today, is the new person, we had decided it was a good time to do a review of adult education and we are going to do that.

Mr. Faursehou: I'm very familiar with the adult learning centre having been on the school board at the time when the centres were set up in Portage. Commitment to this type of education is absolutely vital to our province and the future of the individuals that are seeking out more education.

But I just want to leave with the minister that there is in, not only Portage la Prairie, but other centres, a true feeling that even recognizing that there's no bells and whistles in here, that the department is, indeed, getting a very, very cost-effective delivery of education to a point where, perhaps, it is a little too much insofar as we do want to recognize the valuable resource that we have with the certified teachers within the program. It is from my own personal perspective that a certified teacher should be recognized with a level of remuneration regardless of—at a level that is fair regardless of whether they're in the public school system or within the adult learning centres.

* (15:20)

I hope that this will be a consideration within the review. I don't believe there is anyone out there that is looking for a substantive change in how the courses are delivered but definitely the level of support for those course deliveries is being requested.

Ms. McGifford: As always, I thank the member for his advice.

I want to make clear to the member that I have been unfailing in my support for adult learning and literacy. I think the community knows that. I recognize that it's an extremely important part of a seamless system. We were successful in getting bursaries from the Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation for adult learning.

I'm really proud of our record, particularly successful in graduating Aboriginal learners. I know we need a system for adults and I think this one is working very well. I take this opportunity on the record to thank all the teachers who do work so hard and industriously on the part of adult learning and adults, young and old, in Manitoba.

I've just learned myself—one of my staff members has done some checking—that there is no deficit in the Portage centre that was alluded to

earlier. Apparently, there's some concern that there may be, but there is no deficit and we're certainly working with these people. So I think the member needn't be alarmist or worry about that. Thank you.

Mr. Faurchou: I said that there was the potential for it, recognizing that there is no deficit, but, obviously, the Portage la Prairie School Division, with the change in responsibility for a deficit, is concerned to a point where effectively they've asked the centre to look for a different accrediting body.

That's the fact. If you want to take all the time in the world to try and dispute the fact, so be it, but in any event it is the change in policy.

The other consideration I have here is another change in policy by the department, and, as the minister is aware that her department does support continuing education, in Portage la Prairie starting this September there will be a licensed practical nursing program offered through Assiniboine College, and there has been a change in policy by her department in the level of support for individuals seeking to advance themselves through a career in education.

The previous program that was offered in rural Manitoba, persons that did have gainful employment and wanted to become a nurse were able to take the nursing program even though they did not qualify for employment insurance. That has now changed and if you don't qualify for employment insurance, you don't have that level of support if you want to go into the nursing.

I would like to ask the minister why she has changed this policy in reflection upon the critical shortage of nurses in rural Manitoba.

Ms. McGifford: Well, first of all, I wanted to point out that there was no change in policy regarding adult learning centres. The policy has always been in place, so there was no change in policy.

On the particular matter of the practical nurses, we're doing some BlackBerrying and digging because nobody is quite sure about—well, we're frankly baffled. *[interjection]* Oh, I beg your pardon. Apparently, I'm now told it's Competitiveness, Training and Trade. You've got the wrong department.

Mr. Faurchou: Well, it's always rather confusing as to who has what training program and what educational program and whether or not it's considered a training program or an education

program or a literacy program. It's rather difficult to try and keep up with what is, in fact, happening.

If there has been no change in policy as far as accrediting agencies responsible for adult learning centre deficits, then I stand to be corrected. It was just now that the Portage school division has finally twigged on to that fact, that they are responsible for it, and they're no longer willing to expose themselves to a potential additional cost to their division.

So that's just disappointing that is the fact. So they will have to look for another accrediting body.

So I will take this other matter to another minister. Thank you.

Ms. McGifford: I've just explained to the member opposite that this department is responsible for college education, university education, student aid and adult learning and literacy. Apprenticeship, Rewarding Work, all those kinds of programs are now with the Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade (Mr. Swan).

Mr. Faurchou: Well, this is an Assiniboine College program, but what you're saying is the supports for students comes from another department.

Ms. McGifford: Yes, I'm informed that the sponsorship comes from CTT, yes.

Mr. Hawranik: I'm glad to get back into the stream of questions, but that's what happens sometimes when you let others ask questions. I don't have a lot of time, so I'd like to be able to keep my questions brief and the answers hopefully brief, as well, so we can get through more of these.

In 2008, there was a news release issued by the government indicating that the Province would contribute \$47 million towards Project Domino at the University of Manitoba. In the budget in 2008, \$4 million was allocated toward Project Domino.

Can the minister indicate how much money is allocated for this fiscal year to Project Domino?

Ms. McGifford: Madam Chairperson, \$14.5 million.

Mr. Hawranik: Is this project still on track, to be completed by the end of next year?

Ms. McGifford: I'm informed that that's optimistic, that we didn't understand that to be their deadline. But, of course, it is the university who's running Project Domino, not our department.

Mr. Hawranik: Is the contribution still at \$47 million from the Province or is that increased?

Ms. McGifford: Absolutely.

Mr. Hawranik: With Dr. Levin's report, in terms of tuition increases, and I know that the minister has made a decision this year in terms of how much the tuition will increase at universities and colleges.

What I'm concerned about is the long-term increase. I think students would be concerned about long-term increases, and I believe they don't plan on a year-by-year basis. They're in three, four, five-year programs, long programs, and they certainly would like to know what the minister has in mind in terms of increases in the long term.

Has the minister given that some thought, or is she about to make a decision, or when will she make a decision? Will she make the decision on a year-by-year basis, or will she be making a decision or an announcement soon regarding to a long-term plan?

Ms. McGifford: Well, thank you for the question.

When I was asked this question by the media, when I first announced the end of the tuition freeze, I said to them that we would really have liked to have had a three-year plan, which I think would be very good, both for universities and for students. There were a couple of complicating factors.

One was that the Levin report was out after the budget this year, which was unfortunate, but we accelerated the budget in response to Manitobans' need to know where we were going in this complex economy.

I also said that, given the economic climate, it was very difficult, at this time, to predict what operating funds would be and what tuition would be.

I can tell the member today, as always, this government is committed to affordable, accessible education. They'll be no sticker shock. We will follow with the spirit of the Levin report, and, perhaps, the letter, in that our tuition increases will be modest.

* (15:30)

Mr. Hawranik: I take it from the minister's comments, that now the budget, the '09-2010 budget is out, she would be likely making a decision with respect to tuition increases on a three-year basis.

Ms. McGifford: I would like very much to be able to make that kind of recommendation to Cabinet and to Treasury Board, and my department will be working on it in the near future. We would like to have a tuition policy. I agree with the member that it

is good for students to know and, as well, it's good for the other stakeholders to know, universities and colleges.

Mr. Hawranik: I understand that the Adult Literacy Act came into force in January of this year, and can the minister indicate what level of financial commitment has been made in the budget with respect to the implementation of that act?

Ms. McGifford: There was a 4 percent increase to the literacy grants this year, or to the literacy program, and we have approximately \$400,000 for the design and implementation of the strategy which we're currently working on.

Mr. Hawranik: Getting back to Dr. Levin's report, can the minister outline the consultative process that Dr. Levin followed prior to making his report?

Ms. McGifford: Well, it is in the report and I can't really speak for Dr. Levin. It was his work, but I can speak anecdotally by saying that I understand that he consulted with students. He consulted with the institutions. He consulted with the business community. Oh, yes, he consulted with high schools, I believe, superintendents. There was also a—I don't remember the electronic term—a place where you could write—a Web site, and so individuals could write in their ideas and whatnot to Dr. Levin.

Mr. Hawranik: Can the minister indicate whether or not that process was directed by the department or herself, or was it a process that was formulated by Dr. Levin himself?

Ms. McGifford: Well, I just want to tell the member if he knew Dr. Levin he would know that no one directs him. He directed himself.

Mr. Hawranik: Madam Chairperson, one of the recommendations in Dr. Levin's report indicates that—one of his recommendations is that tuition fees should be increased gradually but should remain below the Canadian average. Is this one recommendation that the minister will likely be following?

Ms. McGifford: I can't make a commitment to follow it or not to follow it. It will have to be considered on a go-forward basis.

Mr. Hawranik: Another recommendation made by Dr. Levin is that the Province should set targets for participation and graduation from post-secondary education at levels above national averages with equitable participation from all social and economic groups.

Madam Chairperson, can the minister indicate if she's going to follow this recommendation, what specifically will she do to achieve this goal and if she could indicate what plans have been discussed and what has been recommended?

Ms. McGifford: Well, we do like this idea and we know that any targets established would have to be in conjunction with the post-secondary institutions. But I want to point out to the member that in order to implement this recommendation, we need to pass a data management strategy and we will in, I believe, the fall, have some legislation which is necessary for us to have before we can really implement this because of the complexities and legalities, et cetera, of collecting data.

Mr. Hawranik: Another recommendation in the report indicates that Manitoba should improve the flow of information about post-secondary education so that students and parents can make well-informed decisions. Would the minister agree that this also should include timely information; information that's provided well in advance, prior to a student making a decision as to whether or not to go to a particular institution?

Ms. McGifford: Yes. In fact, I've always felt that we needed to do more work on this particular issue, and we do intend to do so.

Mr. Hawranik: A further recommendation is that the Province should put in place a research and evaluation strategy to assess the impact of its policies. Is this something that's being planned by the minister as well?

Ms. McGifford: Yes. We're looking into it. Part of the data management strategy is also to have the ability to do research, which may be necessary here.

Mr. Hawranik: One of the statements in Dr. Levin's report indicates that the government should consider redirecting resources from relatively ineffective measures, such as tax credits, to more effective strategies. I ask the minister, isn't this really a condemnation of the current tax credits that are out there?

Ms. McGifford: I don't think it's a condemnation. It's one person's opinion. I mean, Dr. Levin believes that income tax or tax measures aren't particularly successful in encouraging accessibility, and I think the member has to be aware that this report is about accessibility.

Other persons have different points of view. But, if the member is referring to the income tax credit rebate, the one that students receive after graduating when they can claim that portion of their—or deduct portions of their tuition from their tax, that isn't an access strategy on the part of government. It's a retention strategy.

Mr. Hawranik: Considering the nature of that comment made in the report, is the minister looking at evaluating each of those tax credits with a view to determining whether they are effective and they do do as they were supposed to do?

Ms. McGifford: We're certainly looking at them. The member may know that students also don't particularly like tax credits, which I find odd, but they don't.

Mr. Hawranik: Probably because they don't pay any income tax until they start working.

Can the minister indicate whether there's any deferred maintenance costs that are in the budget, or any indication as to deferred maintenance within the post-secondary institutions across the province? If so, could she break down how much deferred maintenance there is at the University of Manitoba, say, for example, versus the University of Winnipeg and Brandon and the colleges across the province?

Ms. McGifford: Last year we announced \$40 million in deferred maintenance, and it's going to be—it's spread over two years.

Mr. Hawranik: Has that number increased this year?

Ms. McGifford: No. The \$40 million announced last year was spread over two years.

Mr. Hawranik: In terms of the budget for post-secondary—or for advanced education—is there any travel by the Premier (Mr. Doer) or any delegation led by the Premier that was paid for by her department over the past year?

Ms. McGifford: No, I don't believe so.

Mr. Hawranik: With regard to ministerial travel, could the minister indicate how many out of province trips she had taken in the past year, and details of those trips, such as the purpose for which those trips were taken. She may not have that information today, I can appreciate that, but maybe you do.

Ms. McGifford: Where would the member like me to begin? What month?

An Honourable Member: At the beginning.

Ms. McGifford: At the beginning of what?

Mr. Hawranik: April 1 of last year.

* (15:40)

Ms. McGifford: April 1, 2008. Well, in September, I went to Fredericton, New Brunswick, in order to attend a CMEC conference, and in February of 2009, I went to Saskatoon to attend a CMEC conference, and the Aboriginal summit was also linked to that.

Mr. Hawranik: Can the minister indicate how much money comes from provincial funds with respect to research at the University of Manitoba?

Ms. McGifford: Research money is funded through STEM.

Mr. Hawranik: And how much provincial money goes into STEM?

Ms. McGifford: I refer the member to the Estimates of the Minister of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines (Mr. Rondeau).

Mr. Hawranik: I noticed in last year's Estimates a question was given to the minister with respect to the University College of the North and whether or not it had yet been accredited. Can the minister indicate whether that university is accredited at this point?

Ms. McGifford: No, they're working on their accreditation application.

Mr. Hawranik: I believe that the response given by the minister in 2007 at the time was that University College of the North was working on growing its numbers in terms of the numbers of students that would attend the University College of the North.

Can the minister indicate whether or not there's a minimum number required before accreditation, and whether or not that number has been reached by the University College of the North?

Ms. McGifford: Actually, universities aren't accredited. Of course, I think the member is referring to membership in the Association of Universities and Colleges. I don't know all the ins and outs of being accredited by that body, but I'm getting some information.

I'm informed that one aspect is size and then there are many other aspects. For example, I know library holdings is one. The member may know that recently the Canadian Mennonite University was accredited. Of course, it became a university in 1997;

it was accredited, I believe, in 2008, so it was an 11-year process. I don't know whether it will take the University College of the North quite that long, but it is a very complex process. It doesn't happen overnight.

Mr. Hawranik: Can the minister indicate how many political staff she has in her office?

Ms. McGifford: Yes, I can. I have one political staffperson in my legislative office and one political staffperson in my community office.

Mr. Hawranik: In 2007, the University of Manitoba purchased the Southwood Golf and Country Club for, I believe it was at that time, \$10 million. Did the Province contribute toward the purchase of that property?

Ms. McGifford: No, we did not.

Mr. Hawranik: I know that at the University of Manitoba they constructed a \$6.7 million—at least it was projected to be that—15,000 square foot centre called Aboriginal House. Can the minister indicate whether or not the Province contributed to the cost of that construction?

Ms. McGifford: Apparently, Madam Chair, not directly. Apparently, not directly. By the way, it is beautiful. It is beautiful.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): I just had one constituency question I wanted to ask the minister. I wrote to the minister a few weeks ago and I was asking about an advanced learning centre to be located in Morris. There hasn't been one there for several years now, and the community is looking to establish an adult learning centre in the town of Morris. There are several people in that town that—well, maybe not at the present time, due to flood constraints—but have been travelling to other communities for their advanced education.

So, I'm wondering if the minister would look favourably on establishing an adult learning centre in Morris.

Ms. McGifford: I'm informed that department people have met with the folks from Morris and that they will continue to meet, and if they're interested in continuing the process, certainly, they're open to receiving an application from folks in Morris, and they will, certainly, once an application is received, they will review the application based on the needs in that region and the program plan.

Mrs. Taillieu: Thank you very much for that. I'm just wondering if you can tell me when the meeting was, when it took place. Was it recently?

Ms. McGifford: Apparently, the meeting took place a couple months ago and there have been subsequent telephone calls.

Mr. Hawranik: I refer to a letter, January 6, 2009. Perhaps the minister can update me in terms of—because I didn't see any announcement, in particular, that would indicate that the contents of the letter have been acted on by the Province. That's a letter from Doug Adams to the Premier (Mr. Doer) in January 6, 2009. He indicates that Brandon University had been working on a plan to develop a new fitness centre, and it's a badly needed facility at the Brandon University. The Premier apparently had said he would commit money through the Canada-Manitoba Infrastructure Program. I'm not aware that that particular project was funded, and I wonder if I could ask the minister whether or not it will be approved and, perhaps, a timeline as to when it might be.

Ms. McGifford: Well, we're certainly supportive of the wellness centre at Brandon, and I understand it is one of the infrastructure projects that has been forwarded to the federal government. We think it's Building Canada.

Mr. Hawranik: I have many more questions, but not enough time. Perhaps I'll be able to ask the minister at any time about questions. But, in any event, perhaps we can proceed at this point, in any event, on a line-by-line basis.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you.

Resolution 44.2: BE IT RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$532,205,000 for Advanced Education and Literacy, Support for Universities and Colleges, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 44.3: BE IT RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$42,329,000 for Advanced Education and Literacy, Manitoba Student Aid, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Shall the resolution pass?

Mr. Hawranik: Just a brief question with respect to the Manitoba Student Aid line. I notice that there's a

4.4 percent decrease. Can the minister indicate why Student Aid has decreased by that amount?

Ms. McGifford: That's the end of the Canada Millennium Scholarship Fund, which is a federal program, but I believe it's going to be offset by—the accountant to my left tells me it's a decrease in expense, and it's going to be offset by a decrease in revenue from the federal government.

Madam Chairperson: Honourable Member for Lac du Bonnet.

Mr. Hawranik: Sorry, I wasn't going to ask a question.

Madam Chairperson: Oh, sorry. Okay.

Shall the resolution pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

Madam Chairperson: The resolution is accordingly passed.

Resolution 44.4: BE IT RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$20,879,000 for Advanced Education and Literacy, Adult Learning and Literacy, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Shall the resolution pass?

* (15:50)

Mr. Hawranik: Yes, one question about that particular number. I'm glad to see a 7.7 percent increase in that number, but will that be translated into more adult learning spaces?

Ms. McGifford: My staff are talking about it, but my understanding is an adult centre doesn't have a number of spaces. It's not limited in that way. It's not like a, obviously, like a child care centre where legislation dictates how many kids can be in a room.

Some of that additional money is because of transfers from other departments. For example, I believe last year the Francophone adult learning centre was funded through Education, Citizenship and Youth and then it transferred to our department. So, indeed, if you look at it that way, there will be more adults in the system.

Mr. Hawranik: Is there projected to be more adult students this year versus last year. Is there going to be a substantial increase in terms of your projections?

Ms. McGifford: There's a hope of increase. I can't really answer that question.

Mr. Hawranik: So this 7.7 percent increase in the number, where's the money is going if there's not going to be an increase in the number of students. That's well above the rate of inflation.

Ms. McGifford: The Member for Portage la Prairie pointed out rightly that teachers have increases, and part of it will be, obviously, going to pay wages for example, but the 7 percent includes the money that was transferred so there will be new spaces in the transferred program.

Madam Chairperson: Shall the resolution pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

Madam Chairperson: The resolution is accordingly passed.

Resolution 44.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$11,571,000 for Advanced Education and Literacy, Capital Grants, for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2010.

Mr. Hawranik: Just a question with regard to that. I notice there's a 11.5 percent decrease. Can the minister explain why there would be such a drastic decrease?

Ms. McGifford: Yes, last year, there was one-time funding for the nursing expansion at Red River.

Madam Chairperson: Shall the resolution pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

Madam Chairperson: The resolution is accordingly passed.

Resolution 44.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$231,000 for Advanced Education and Literacy, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Shall the resolution pass?

An Honourable Member: Pass.

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Hawranik: Again, the same question, 17.2 percent decrease. Can the minister explain why there's a 17 percent decrease in that number?

Ms. McGifford: It's related to assets owned by our department, and as they depreciate, so does the—

An Honourable Member: It's a depreciable number.

Ms. McGifford: Yes, exactly.

Madam Chairperson: Shall the resolution pass?

Some Honourable Members: Pass.

Resolution 44.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$600,000 for Advanced Education and Literacy, capital investments, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of this department is item 44.1.(a) Minister's Salary, contained in Resolution 44.1.

At this time, we request the minister's staff leave the table for the consideration of this last item. The floor is now open for questions. Seeing no questions,

Resolution 44.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,859,000 for Advanced Education and Literacy, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

Madam Chairperson: This completes the Estimates of the Department for Advanced Education and Literacy.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORTATION

Madam Chairperson: We will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Daryl Reid, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Reid): We will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation.

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

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): I think we were talking about No. 10 highway yesterday, to the minister, and I've just got a couple of quick questions to finish it.

I know the part north of Brandon to Minnedosa is part of the national highway system. There was lobbying. He, I think, vociferated yesterday that probably the south side should be, as well, No. 10 to the border crossing at Boissevain, Dunseith on the U.S. side, through the International Peace Garden, and I would concur with that.

There has been work done on reducing Clemity Hill [*phonetic*] a number of years ago, south of Brandon—what's referred to as Clemity Hill [*phonetic*]. Six, seven miles south, there's been, of course, the bypass lights put on south of Brandon.

So two things: First of all, can the minister just indicate to me—and I don't know if the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik) asked this question when he was in here the other day or not—what work will be done on the 1A bypass on the east side of Brandon this year? I know there's stockpiled gravel on No. 1 highway. Can he just give me an update on whether that will be completed this year?

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): We're looking at the bridge design and we're also working with CP Rail to determine the underpass and how that's going to work, but this summer there's going to be some work done, some dirt work, I believe, as well.

Madam Chairperson in the Chair

We've also hired someone to look at the design. I'm just checking my book just to make sure. Between 457 and No. 1, we're looking at doing that work. I believe that should be tendered soon, and, essentially, that's it on the eastern bypass for this summer.

Mr. Maguire: Well, 457 to No. 1 would be a considerable amount of it. Will you be doing the underpass work on CP as well?

Mr. Lemieux: No, I don't believe that we are, but we're looking at doing some earth work, some dirt work, between 457 and No. 1.

It's a substantial start. I mean we've hired someone to do the design of the bridge, but we're also in consultation with CP Rail to see how that is going to work. I've been advised that we have to build a detour for the CP part as well.

So it's a good start. It's a very good start. It's been long overdue. We made a commitment to do it and we're proceeding as quickly as possible.

* (16:00)

Mr. Maguire: No. 10 highway south, I know there's work being done to No. 2, between the No. 2 junctions, the one going to Souris on the north side, the one going to Wawanesa on the south side. Will that work be finished this summer?

Mr. Lemieux: We will have to check that particular—the specifics on Highway 10 south.

There's been a substantial amount of money, around \$60 million budgeted for Highway 10 in total—excuse me, that was a couple of years ago—on our five-year plan. We're making some progress with regard to Highway 10. I mentioned to the MLA for Minnedosa that we did shave some hills down, trying to improve the sight lines on Highway 10. More work still needs to be done.

We were held up last year—it was wet last year. Some people forget. They see it being wet this spring. But it was really wet last fall and many of our contractors had some difficulty last fall finishing up the work that they had to do. So I'm just going to check with my staff just to determine, to see what work, if any, is going to be done or completed.

Just to conclude my answer is that we are going to finish that stretch that we were working on last year, south of Brandon. Of course on Highway 10—many people forget that Highway 10 and 18th Street are essentially one and the same. So by next fall some time we will be finished, or this coming fall, we'll be finished the one section of the 18th Street Bridge and then we'll be proceeding to work on the next stretch to be concluded the following year. We are doing some highway work, intersection work actually, near the ethanol plant near Minnedosa. That's also work that's going to be done this coming summer.

Mr. Maguire: It's not part of my area of Highway 10 that comes through Whitewater; it's certainly the Member for Minnedosa's (Mrs. Rowat) area. The Riverside Bridge—what's called Riverside Bridge at Highway 10, can the minister indicate to me what the final costs were of upgrading it last year?

Mr. Lemieux: Just some clarification from the MLA?

Mr. Maguire: I'm wondering about the costs. There was a closure of one side of the bridge while it was being repaired at what's called Riverside where Highway 10 crosses the Souris River, a deep valley there. They had stop lights, one lane traffic on the east side of that road while they repaired the west side a year ago last summer I guess it was. Can the minister give me a final estimate of cost on that bridge?

Okay, I guess it would be more than an estimate by now because it's about 18 months since the work was finished. So I wondered if he could just give me a final value of a couple of projects that I'll be asking for, but that one first off.

Mr. Lemieux: We're trying to find that right now. I'm just wondering if the MLA for Arthur-Virden has a number of other requests, we could look them up or try to look them at the same time. It's a very large briefing book so we're trying to be as accurate as possible, not just take a guess at it.

Mr. Maguire: The other ones that I was interested in were—apart from that bridge—is also the bridge on Highway 2 that crosses the Souris River. There was considerable work done to it, at Wawanesa, just west of Wawanesa the last year as well. The other one, of course, was the Portage la Prairie bypass over the railroad tracks at Portage la Prairie on No. 1 highway as well.

I won't be asking for every one in Manitoba, but I wanted to just see what those were and, oh, the only other one I was interested in, as well as the cost of replacing the culverts on No. 1 highway west of Headingley and No. 1 here out by St. François Xavier. There was considerable amount of work, had to build, of course, dikes, roads, had to reroute the highway and build the highway in the ditch, I guess, out of gravel it was built, culverts were put in to maintain it. It was built over a year ago and paved and everything else, yes, yes. So if you can give me the cost of those as well.

Mr. Lemieux: Madam Chairperson, thank you, I just wanted to be accurate. We have different numbers, but as the member pointed out, the projects are complete now so we want to make sure we get the complete—the finished numbers for those projects: the Portage la Prairie overpass overtop of the tracks, the Wawanesa bridge on No. 2, Riverside and, also, Headingley. The Headingley one was at \$360,000 used to build that—I call it a little mini bypass into the ditches between the two sections of the highway, so people could still go around and use that section of highway. We didn't have to go and infringe on the east side or eastbound lanes—that gravel that was used there, the limestone was all taken back to the yard and so we reused it for other sites. In other words, it's not just a waste in material, a waste in granular material, we make use and we will be making use of that material once again, as well as the replacement, of course, of the culverts that are in place now. They'll remain, but the gravel and granular material has all been taken back and we'll reuse it.

Mr. Maguire: Then the \$360,000 would be the cost of hauling the aggregate in and hauling it back out,

or was that the actual cost of the new cement bridges?

Mr. Lemieux: I understand that's the total price. I'll double-check again when we're checking out the other three, we don't have the numbers for—the final numbers. But I'll double-check that, because you've got culvert replacement, the bypass of the limestone that was used for a good base, asphalt work, \$360,000 seems, actually, a little bit low to me, but, also, hauling that material in and so on. I'm not sure who hauled it in, whether it was Taillieu or who hauled it in, but we'll double-check to make sure the numbers are absolutely accurate.

Mr. Maguire: So there wouldn't be a cost for aggregate involved in that because it was—well, I'm just wondering what the cost of aggregate—there wouldn't be a cost then for the aggregate because you're reusing the limestone and you're reusing a lot of the base that was used in there. I know that, I mean, I drive it all the time. I saw them picking it up and hauling it away and packing it in when it went in. I applaud the fact that you're reusing it and, of course, it was paved highway around the top of it to bypass it and, of course, there are two of them, so I'm wondering if this would be double for the two of them, and this is probably the cost for—the bare cost for one of them. I don't know. I could be wrong on that.

Mr. Lemieux: Well, we'll double-check it. We'll want to make sure, because it was actually done over two years, this number may be just reflective of one year. That's why I thought it might have been a little bit higher than that amount. But the granular material, well, it was purchased from someone, sometime, even though we're reusing it I'm not sure if this was left over from other jobs and just brought there, or whether we purchased it new. Then, of course, the hauling of the granular material to and from the yard would've been the cost. So we just want to make sure that we're accurate in our numbers, that's all, so we're just going to double-check, because it was done over two, essentially, two construction seasons.

Mr. Maguire: Can the minister also provide me with the other bridges, the work that was done on those and the cost of them?

* (16:10)

Mr. Lemieux: Yes, we will, as soon as we can.

Mr. Maguire: Just to switch to another highway that my colleague's been reading petitions on in the

House, and that's No. 15, calling for the bridges to be twinned on No. 15 highway over the floodway.

Can the minister provide me with an update on progress or intentions in regard to that bridge, I guess, at this point and whether it's his intention to replace it? I've read Mr. Gilroy's comments, from the Floodway Authority, that now that they've got the floodway built on schedule and on budget, they may be able to go back and look at upgrading and building some of the bridges that they haven't been able to do in the past.

I just wondered if this would be one of them and if the minister could give me an update on the intentions of twinning the bridge, at least, at this point.

Mr. Lemieux: Let me preface any remarks or comments that I make, that I really want to thank Minister Baird in Ottawa as well as Minister Toews for their support and their acceptance or approval to move ahead with regard to Highway 44 bridge, put it back in the plan, as well as looking at, again, putting a new bridge on what is called Highway 15 or Dugald Road over the floodway. That was pre-Christmas '08 that the Government of Canada and Manitoba announced that we'd be adding two bridge projects, and we added those projects in.

The dollar figures, we're still trying to absolutely nail down what the costs will be, but those kinds of improvements, not only on the east side of the Perimeter Highway but on the east side of Winnipeg, will be a substantial improvement compared to what we've had. I think right now, as far as I know, people are working on the design of the structure, but I will double check to make sure. I'll see if the member has any other questions.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, there continues to be developments of new homes and development areas on the east side of the Perimeter Highway out in the Dugald, Oakbank area, and I wonder if the minister has plans to twin the road in that area, coming into the city from the east. I know that there's work in the Dugald area, that the minister's just referred to the area inside the Perimeter Highway as well.

If he could just give me an update on the intentions in that area as well.

Mr. Lemieux: Yes, I'd be pleased to. There really is no intention, at this point anyway, to twin Highway 15. There will be some turning lanes and so on added. There is a substantial amount of traffic that travels on 15. That's not to say that many years into

the future that it won't be twinned, but certainly the government of the day will have to look at that.

I want to take this opportunity to thank also actually the MLA for Transcona. The MLA for Transcona has raised the intersections of Highway 15 and 207, and the MLA for Transcona has also raised the intersection of Highway 15 and 206, about looking at these intersections on what would be involved to add either lights or come kind of control structures at those intersections because of the traffic.

Our department is looking at the warrants to see if they warrant lights being put up at those intersections, but I can just say that the department has been looking at these intersections now for a short while. We're looking at what kind of a solution might be put in place for safety reasons to address the traffic, because the traffic has increased over the last number of years.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, thanks for that. Certainly, I believe, from being there myself and seeing the intersections of 206 and 207, that there is a need. There is a need for more controlled sections, I believe, intersections at those areas because of the traffic, the school situation in that area, as well as just the general traffic has certainly increased in the last years, and as that area expands to the east. I concur with the minister in regard to that need, and the Member for Transcona as well, if he's raised it. I'm pleased to see that as well. I know that the Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler) is concerned about it as well. I know he's spoken to the minister before about it, so thank you for that.

I want to flip back to the west side of the province there on No. 10. I just want to raise it with the minister that I know his government, and the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers) and himself, have been involved in projects at the Peace Garden and that Manitoba is looking at it very seriously with North Dakota. I know that North Dakota put a good deal of funds into the project a year ago, and I know the Manitoba government has put some in.

I know that there is about a \$30-million plan there that Doug Hevenor, the CEO of the Peace Garden, is doing tremendous work there in regard to developing it into an international peace centre instead of just the Peace Garden. I know the government is onside with that, here, in Manitoba. I can certainly concur with it. I want to see that developed at some point. I think it's a wonderful

opportunity, not just for that region of Manitoba, but all of Canada, particularly Manitoba. That could be a very great destination place for peace talks from around the world. It's very neutral grounds to be on and a very safe place internationally, if I could say so, not because it's that far from major centres, because anything can happen nowadays in the air, but because of its tranquility, I guess, if you will and very, very close to the centre of North America and Rugby, North Dakota. So the geography of the facility is tremendous.

Can the minister indicate to me whether or not they have further intentions to upgrade No. 10 highway south? I know that there's the area from No. 2 to No. 23, but I'm thinking more of 23 south, and I know that they did repave four or five kilometres just north of the Morden municipality, up in the south side of Whitewater municipality on No. 10, a year ago last summer, I believe. I commend him for that. But I know that the people of Boissevain and that surrounding area, and there's a lot of traffic comes there from Deloraine, in the west, down No. 3 to Boissevain and up in their travels to and from Brandon in that area. I wonder if the minister can just provide me with an update on any intentions for upgrading the rest of No. 10 highway south.

Mr. Lemieux: Well, in politics, I guess, what have you done for me lately? No matter how much work a government does, there's always many, many more projects on the list, and we understand that.

Ever since the Boissevain Turtle Derby has disappeared, the community, and others, have wanted to look at other things to attract people to their area. I know that the Premier (Mr. Doer) has gone and visited the Peace Garden on a number of occasions. I'm hesitant to say it's an annual event, but he's met, I believe, the governor of North Dakota, they've met there. In fact, after 9/11, the structure from the Twin Towers, I haven't seen it myself, but my colleagues in the Legislature have been there and they've told me about it, that they have put up a monument, essentially, to the firefighters, police officers, others who died, as a result of that tragic incident.

There's a provincial park located right there. It has all the attributes of being a real destination location for tourism. There are a number of areas in Manitoba that we should be promoting and doing more. I know the Minister of Culture (Mr. Robinson), I believe, has put money into the Peace

Garden, and we're certainly looking at investing more as well.

With regard to Highway 10, and I don't mind sharing this with my critic, or putting it on the record, indeed, I will be by saying it, the reason why we, as a government, want to push for certain strategic highways to be part of the national highway system, is to be able to have a partner in Ottawa, because anything that's not on the national highway system, they're reluctant to invest money into. Not that they don't, they have, I believe, in the past. But if Highway 10, for example, south, as I mentioned yesterday, south of Brandon to the U.S. border would be put on the national highway system, I believe we could get a lot more done because right now it's provincial dollars, essentially, that are going into that highway. It would be great to be able to double that with federal dollars if it was on the national highway system.

* (16:20)

I don't believe that's the be-all, end-all rule that they use, but it is important, because any time provincial politicians have conversations with Ottawa they're wanting to put money into the national highway system. So whatever roads are on your national highway system it's important to make sure that happens. And I know that the member of Parliament, Mr. Tweed, is part of the transportation committee of Parliament, I think. I'm not sure of the proper—

An Honourable Member: Chair.

Mr. Lemieux: He's the chair of the parliamentary standing committee on transportation.

So he's very knowledgeable about transportation. He has a vested interest to make sure that No. 10 is put—it runs right through his federal riding but, aside from that, there are—in fact, the reason why No. 10 should be put on has nothing to do with Mr. Tweed's riding; it's an important artery to and from the United States. Mind you, as is Highway 59 or 75 or No. 5 or No. 12. I mean, there are a number of highways we have running back and forth or through to the United States are very, very important.

I shouldn't forget 83, either, because I've certainly heard from many people all the way from Russell and Swan River all the way down, whether it's Reston or other communities, wanting to make sure we don't forget about 83 which arguably could be our highway Route 66, the famed Route 66.

Well, 83, people would argue that 83 has that similar historical sentiment.

Having said that, maybe I'll just conclude my comment by just saying—because I know the member has other questions to ask—but just to say that we are very fortunate, quite frankly, that the government in Ottawa, through their stimulus packages, have included highways as part of this package, and bridges, because there are a number of different highways that need to be addressed in Manitoba and it will just enable us to do more work. We've already agreed to partner through and around Morris—or not around Morris, but through Morris and other sides of Morris, to address the highway situation there. This was announced a while back now by Minister Toews and myself. We would partner, I believe it was—we would split \$80-plus million, I believe, cost-share a stretch of a particular highway on the Highway 75.

So what I'm saying is that there's a number of different highways. I thank them for including highways in their Building Canada Fund, and roads, because it's an important piece to renewing our infrastructure.

Mr. Maguire: Has the minister been asked to put any infrastructure money or any money from his department, infrastructure and government services, into the Peace Garden?

Mr. Lemieux: I have not, and maybe I should clarify it. Is this an application on the Building Canada Fund application?

Mr. Maguire: No. I'm just wondering if the Peace Garden receives dollars from the provincial government each year. I know some of it comes from Conservation, and Parks, and the member for Dauphin, the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers), I believe, it comes from his department. I'm just wondering, there are infrastructure projects from time to time in the Peace Garden, and I wonder, in co-operation with North Dakota, if this minister's department, if your department, has been asked the Treasury Board here to make dollars available for that?

I would probably commend you if it was, but I just wondered, just thought I'd check and see if there was anything available that the minister has been asked and requested, either from the government or the Peace Garden directly, that he's been able to put funds into that area.

Mr. Lemieux: I know that, I believe, maybe, the Minister of Culture, Heritage, Tourism and Sport

(Mr. Robinson) may have put some money. I stand to be corrected, though. I'm not sure. I have a large department. I'm not sure what other departments are doing all the time, but I know that, certainly, Conservation has put money in. There is a park located there, Turtle Mountain, I believe, provincial park, so that would be the connection, I believe, for the Minister of Conservation, probably assisting in the parks, but I know that the applications, there's about, certainly, over 340 applications have come in on the communities component in the Building Canada Fund. I'm not sure if—Boissevain or communities—the CEO of, or anyone from the Peace Garden itself, put an application into the Building Canada Fund. That's the reason why I asked the question.

I had an opportunity, though, to meet about a month and a half ago, I believe it was, within two months, with the mayor and others from that community and the CEO. I believe the CEO was in attendance as well, from the Peace Garden, and they certainly expressed how they just felt that we need to invest in the Peace Garden to make it a real destination location for tourism and other reasons. It's very hard to argue with their case, but it's—I understand, it's a substantial amount of money. They've got a grandiose plan.

But what impressed me most about what they did, as far as the study that they conducted, was when you've got hog trucks, for example. When the hog trucks go across the border, they actually have to crack a u-turn to be inspected, and it takes a lot of time.

So, their approach to me was not necessarily the esthetic view to make this border crossing and Peace Garden more beautiful on the tourism side. Theirs was more a practical argument with me on the trucking side, on the industry side, on what we can do to better improve that port for better inspections, especially trucks carrying animals, whether they be pork or beef or other product.

So they were very knowledgeable, and I appreciate it. It was an education for me to understand better the point they were trying to make.

We did receive money under the MRIF package for the Peace Garden, I believe—M-R-I-F, that stands for Manitoba Rural Infrastructure Fund—but, I'm not sure how much. I would have to check to see how much money.

But their argument was that we need to invest more, and it's very difficult to argue against that, except that everyone has to prioritize when they're putting their budgets together and how much money one can spend in a particular year.

Mr. Maguire: I'd just appreciate it, if the minister could, if he has a number that came from his department, not the government, and if he hasn't, that's fine. I mean, if there was no money that went in from Infrastructure, and maybe there's no request from it. I don't know.

But, I do know that they do have a good plan, a solid plan, and Mayor Anderson, Reeve McCallum, Mr. Hevenor from the Peace Garden and their councils, I know, are certainly working heavily in that regard. Certainly, they have a vested interest in trying to beautify their communities and look out for economic activity in those communities. But I expressed to you earlier that I think it's more of, probably, it's an international destination as opposed to what we are faced with today.

The Peace Garden just celebrated its 75th anniversary a few years ago, and we need to continue to look at the development and using it as an international site for peace talks and other venues. There could be many other activities that take place.

From a purely logistics point of view, their case is very good. Those trucks do have to turn now right in front of the north-bound traffic coming up from the States into Canada and the crossing, unload into facilities, backup, unload, reload after inspections and stuff. It's very time consuming and a very poor flow of traffic in that area at this point. So I would certainly support them in their efforts and their presentation and support the minister in anything he can do in that regard to smooth that flow out in that area.

I just wanted to go back, and in the last question, probably on bridges and that sort of thing that I'll ask, is that the minister—a year ago I think it was—announced \$65 million for bridges in a three-year program. I believe it was for bridges; \$35 million was to be used last year. I just wondered if he can tell me how close they came to using the \$35 million, if there were things that just weren't able to get done last fall and how much that might have been?

Mr. Lemieux: Yes. If I can conclude the discussion on the Peace Garden, is that they made a very good presentation. I will double-check to see if any money came directly from Infrastructure and Transportation,

my department, into the Peace Garden. I don't believe it did. I don't believe we did, except the portion from the Manitoba Rural Infrastructure Fund. I know dollars were certainly provided under that.

* (16:30)

They would like to see it increase, as you mentioned, for logistics, but, also, the impact of what that has on tourism traffic. Their argument is that, when you're checking trucks, backing up traffic, it's backing up the traffic that's trying to come into Canada, and we don't want to be slowing that traffic down at all. We want those Yankee dollars. We want the U.S. dollars being spent in Canada and want people coming into Manitoba.

I should mention, as a government, we are certainly looking at Highway 75 as being our main trade artery to the United States or from the United States to Canada. That decision has been made not just from us, but because that's what industry uses. They use 75, a four-lane highway, and you know, under circumstances like this spring, it's the second-worst flood we've encountered in the last hundred years. So some of the highway is covered with water. But also I-29 is covered with water, also in North Dakota, and I'm not sure if it's dry yet or not.

But, having said that, we are working with the North Dakota government—my department, officials in my department—and the DOT people in North Dakota are working together to see how they can improve the border crossing at Emerson, Pembina-Emerson crossing. We need to do something to increase the flow or improve the flow there.

But I have also asked my department to take a look at the Peace Garden crossing, as well, to see what we might be able to look at when we're talking to our officials and DOT in North Dakota, to raise this with them. I don't believe they've had a chance to meet yet, since I've asked, but they will be raising this and putting it on the table too. So you get No. 10 crossing and 75 crossing looking at making the traffic—and primarily trucks that we're talking about, in the sense of trying to increase the flow.

Mr. Maguire: Thank you very much. I appreciate that. I know that the minister is well aware that Emerson, of course, is our No. 1 crossing in western Canada now as far as volume goes. The Peace Garden at Boissevain crossing is our No. 2 in Manitoba, for sure, and it's growing. That crossing's volume is certainly growing—the livestock. COOL legislation in the U.S., the country-of-origin

labelling, may be slowing that down somewhat, but there is and has been a growing volume of trade through the Boissevain area. We need to make sure that—you know, part of my queries here on No. 10, is because that is our second major route to the U.S., and if we do have to detour traffic, it won't have to go that far to get around 75 and 29. It would be, you know, quite a circumstance if that was to happen, but it is a major route, and I just commend the minister for anything he can do in that area to help improve it.

Working with our neighbours to the U.S. in regard to weights and measures, I wonder if he can give me an update on just exactly where they're at in harmonization of anything in that regard, probably more aptly so with Ontario and Saskatchewan. It might be easier to make those changes with our neighbours to the east and west than it is to the south because it's international, but can he provide me with any update in regard to the weights and measures and how we're doing in regard to bringing those into harmony?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, I thank the member for the question, and it is indeed an important one. Well, our friends and neighbours to the south of us are not only our No. 1 trading partner, but a lot of our trucks, where do they go? But they go into the United States and back and forth.

Darren Christle from my department is with the inspectors, which is called the Motor Carrier Division, and he has recently been elected, I believe, by his colleagues to be on the—I think it's called the North American motor carriers safety association. It's a very prestigious position. But to have someone from Manitoba—in the scheme of things, people look at Manitoba as a relatively small province. I guess we are, comparatively speaking, to Québec and Ontario and what we trade with the U.S. But to having Darren be the chairperson, they had a meeting here in the last year where he was given this position and had this position—it's really quite prestigious. In fact, he may be the only Canadian ever to hold that position. Most of it is always in the United States. When I say North American, you have people from Mexico, United States and Canada that are part of this organization that deal with safety issues related to weights and measures and the changes that are made, either to hours of service or just the dimensions, the length and size and loads that vehicles can carry.

We are trying to harmonize what we're doing across Canada. There has been an agreement by the

premiers, which—they're called the Council of the Federation. The premiers have an organization that they call the Council of the Federation and they've met, and they're trying to harmonize what we do in trucking from coast to coast. We're certainly looking at that, but we also know it doesn't matter whether or not Saskatchewan, Ontario agree on weights and measures or dimensions, we know that you can't totally get away from being unique, because you enter British Columbia and it doesn't take you very long to realize that you've got Golden and others that have huge mountains that you have to cross and so on. So you'll never get a truly harmonized system in the sense that there are going to be differences between provinces, whether it's British Columbia and Manitoba or B.C. and Saskatchewan. We're always going to have some differences.

Mr. Maguire: I have a few more questions in that regard, but my colleague from Morris would like to ask a couple of questions as well.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Just a question to the minister on the Trans-Canada Highway through Headingley. As I know you're aware, in the federal budget there were earmarked funds for that highway. I'm just wondering what the status of that project is at the present time.

Mr. Lemieux: Just wanting to make a comment prior to—I had an opportunity to meet Mr. Fletcher, who—I believe that takes in part of his federal riding. He had mentioned that how this was mentioned I believe it was in the Throne Speech, the federal Throne Speech, they were wanting to put in millions of dollars towards making some improvements in Headingley, and highway safety through Headingley. No one can really disagree with that, in the sense that Headingley takes quite a bit of traffic going through Headingley. I think almost half the stretch, certainly—maybe a little bit more—has been upgraded and I know we're going to continue to work with the municipality to try to make some improvements there. We signed an MOU, I think it was in 2001, with Headingley on purchasing adjacent land and trying to work to make improvements overall. There is a First Nations community—Swan Lake, I think it is—that have some land located near No. 1. The department's in consultation with them. They are making arguments on the kind of improvements they want there. So there's a number of different issues that have to be tackled; not insurmountable, but we have to look at them. We have to deal with them. There are some heavy traffic flows through there, as the MLA knows. She knows the kind of traffic that

goes through there. But again, we'll try to work with the municipality to try to make some progress on that particular site.

There is money in our plan to continue the improvements. What those are going to be and when they will be that's what we're certainly looking at now, but we made improvements on the Flying J intersection, working with the municipality and the private sector; the Husky Cover-All intersection, improvements were made there as well, under the Strategic Highway Infrastructure Program at that time—it no longer exists now, it's expired—as well as the Prairie Grain Roads. I know that my critic from Arthur-Virden is aware of this as well. That program has expired—and also the John Blumberg intersection, we made improvements there as well. John Blumberg was about \$3.5 million, probably more, Husky Cover-All was almost \$4.5 million, and I think the Flying J intersection was over \$3 million. Each one of those intersections was very costly.

* (16:40)

This all ties in with taking a look, in many ways, with respect to CentrePort. As the Premier mentioned today in question period, there are a number of different areas that need to be looked at and are being addressed, and as he mentioned, a number of them have been taken off the checklist because we're addressing them. There had been a suggestion made by some people within the business community and others, I believe, also from the—at least I've been advised—from the trucking association, that governments, federal and provincial, should look at maybe bypassing, putting a bypass going around from—it's not White Horse Plains, it's François Xavier—and going around the north side of Headingley and joining up at the west Perimeter just north of the racetrack and tying it all in. There's no agreement or anything like that that says, yes, that should happen, but those should be really looked at into the future, looking at a possible solution to expedite truck traffic as opposed to slowing truck traffic going through Headingley.

That is down the road and there have been no firm decisions made on any kind of a bypass going around Headingley, but people are certainly aware of it. They're looking at it, and indeed, I believe the department even looked at in the 1990s going around Headingley as a possible bypass because land was being bought. So, to make a long story a little bit shorter, this is an important community in the sense that related to safety and highways that the

department is looking at it. We put a lot of work into it and more work will need to be done, but we have to consider what is also the long-term plan for the community.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, I thought the minister was going to talk out the two-year time frame here where the federal money expires. I'm really just concerned that, you know, there is a two-year time limit here. They want this money spent within two years, and this is the first construction season, and next year will be the last construction season so I just basically want to know when he is starting.

Mr. Lemieux: Yes, this is a federal commitment made. This wasn't necessarily a provincial commitment made. It was the federal government that made the \$6-million commitment. I'm saying that we're looking at it. We've always had money put into our plan with regard to improvements in Headingley, and we're working with the department. Since we're responsible for the highway, it's our highway, it's a provincial highway, we're very much appreciative of the federal government and Building Canada Fund's monies. They're saying they have monies on the table with regard to making improvements through Headingley.

We really appreciate it because that will really be able to help us move this further along, and there's no taking away from that at all that's for sure. The idea that changes or improvements need to be made in Headingley, I think we all recognize that we need to continue on top of what we've already done over the last couple of years, but a comment about the \$6 million or the amount of money, that was a federal commitment that they wanted to designate certain dollars to a community. That's within their right to do so. We have monies that we're looking at putting towards Headingley. This will help make those improvements come along a lot quicker. That's all I'm saying.

Mrs. Taillieu: Madam Chairperson, just one more question for clarification then because I think that I do recall the minister saying at the time when the money was announced that it was workable, doable. Now it sounds like he's kind of saying well, that's their commitment not our commitment, but I also understand, it's my understanding, that the money is to be used within the two-year time frame or it's withdrawn.

I can understand why the Province might want to just draw out the two-year time frame and not spend the money because then they don't have to spend any

money. I would be concerned about that because then there's an opportunity lost here. I'm wondering if the minister would commit to saying this project will actually go ahead in the next two years, or are we going to lose that federal money.

Mr. Lemieux: Without getting into a lot of detail, there are different pots of money within the Building Canada Fund. The stimulus package, the amount of money that they are talking about, or that some people have talked about, does have a two-year time frame, but there are other pots of money that go longer. What I'm saying, if clarification needs to be, is that Headingley is something we've always said that we need to address, the remaining concerns around Headingley. But this purchase of land, there is some engineering, in fact maybe a lot of engineering, that still needs to take place.

So, if we're able to tap into this one pot of money, that's a two-year definite time frame they put on that pot of money. There are other monies available that may be tapped into that have a longer time frame.

So all I'm saying is that we need some time to be able to do some of the work that we need to do with purchasing land, working with the First Nations community, doing some of the work that needs to be done around utilities, gas, hydro and telephone and so on.

So there's no question about the need to do work; it's just that we want to do it in a methodical way and get it done.

Mrs. Taillieu: Can the minister indicate if the engineering studies are under way and what stage they're at.

Mr. Lemieux: I'd have to take that as notice and I'll certainly be pleased to get back to you and let you know where they're at and get an update.

Mr. Maguire: We were just speaking about the weights and measures, and the minister referred to the comments about North Dakota, our international neighbours to the south. Can he just bring me an update on Saskatchewan and Ontario and any harmonization of weights and measures between Ontario and Saskatchewan?

I know he just commented on the U.S. side there. Maybe I missed it. If he did mention it, I apologize, but I wonder if he could just bring me up to speed—I think he just referred to Saskatchewan—to see where we're at in harmonization of weights and

measures on our trucking industries, particularly, on our roads in Manitoba.

Mr. Lemieux: There are two pieces here: One, just to conclude my comments on Headingley, the department has advised me that they are looking at the functional design, and they're pretty well complete. Also, the detail design needs to be done. There's a section between Flying J and Blumberg that needs to be looked at. There's a section near Cameron Street, which is near the Swan Lake First Nation, and there's also the section that goes actually right through Headingley with Nick's Inn on one side, Subway on the other, that particular stretch, and it's quite narrow. So there are some challenges about making those kinds of improvements.

So it's not an easy project, but we mentioned before that we're committed to ensuring that safety is improved in that stretch of highway. As I said, functional design is pretty well complete. A more detailed design, land purchase, utilities, also have to be done.

With regard to weights and measures, there's a council of deputy ministers that meet on a regular basis. This issue has come up and they continue to discuss it. There are some disagreements on different issues, as I understand it, but they are trying to work their way through it to make sure that whatever they decide, it will be in the best interest of the consumer, safety and all the provinces. It's not an easy solution to come up with, but I know that they're getting closer and closer to coming up with something I believe that all of the provinces will be able to live with.

Mr. Maguire: Two things: I guess I'd go back to the first question would be in regard to the—thank you for the comments on that—but the other one reminds me of the bypass that the minister is talking about on Headingley when they're building the CentrePort Canada Way and bringing it out to the Perimeter and the talk about a perimeter highway going north or a bypass of highway going around the north side of Headingley connecting to No. 1 again.

* (16:50)

Has that plan gone so far as to say that it would connect before the Assiniboine River again at St. François Xavier, or would there be new bridges built over the Assiniboine River and take it further west than St. François Xavier before it reconnects with No. 1?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, all of this is quite hypothetical, I guess, and in the world of politics we don't comment on hypothetical issues. There are many different ideas being thrown around. There are people who want to go, maybe if they had it their way, would go from Portage la Prairie all the way to the north and tie into the CentrePort. Where this would connect on the east side of Headingley, how far from the weigh scales between the weigh scales and St. François Xavier, there haven't been a lot of detailed maps made or anything like that, but people are looking at it, because you have to realistically look at this.

These are suggestions made from either trucking associations or individual trucking companies saying, if you want to use CentrePort more effectively and you want product moving in and out of there, you have a 100-kilometre four-lane highway or two-lane highway moving in and out. Realistically, people have to look at it. In fact, I believe, even your former government in the '90s looked at a bypass going north of Headingley, but they took it off the drawing board, I believe, as they did the bypass going around Morris.

If we're talking about an inland port that we truly want to make international and want to make it the inland port of Canada certainly, but of North America, we'll have to take a look at all options. That's all I'm saying. As Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, we're looking at all options. All options are on the table. There are many different options, but there is no decision made or agreement made with our partners to bypass, at least at this point, to bypass Headingley. These are just suggestions that are being made by many people. We should be seriously looking at how to really streamline our highway system to improve trade going in and out of CentrePort.

The department and the bureaucrats within the department have to look at the many options, because the government may make a decision in two years, three years, 10 years to go ahead. We know, for example, the land on the northeast Perimeter, I believe, was purchased 30 years—early 1960s. Now here we are 48 years, like almost 50 years later, we are building the Perimeter Highway on the east side of Winnipeg. You have to purchase land a long time—and that went through Duff Roblin, Weir, Schreyer, Sterling Lyon, Pawley and Filmon. Many governments have been around since. All I'm trying to say is that the department plans many years in advance, and they will do so with regard to bypasses

going around many communities. You have to secure the land, because the moment businesses start to build there, it's far more difficult to secure that land afterward. That's all I'm saying is that the bureaucrats need to look at this. They have done so in the past, and they'll continue to do so in the future.

Mr. Maguire: So there's no plan at this time.

Mr. Lemieux: That's correct.

Mr. Maguire: My comment earlier was in regard to bridges and the \$65 million. I think I was correct in that number, and I wonder if the minister—we kind of got onto something else there. I wonder if the minister can just inform me as to where they went with the \$35 million last year. I believe that was the number out of the 65 that they were going to use—65 was over three years. The \$35 million was for last year. Added to the \$400-million budget, I understand that \$35 million was targeted for bridges. I wonder if he can just indicate to me how that was used, perhaps where it was used, and if it was all used or whether they ran into weather and weren't able to use some of it.

Mr. Lemieux: Well, it's always a challenge with regard to budgets, because you can't go over and yet you try to spend as close as you can. You always have weather as the caveat. Anytime I make announcements, and I know the member's heard me say this before—weather providing and good weather providing.

Let me just say I thank the critic from Arthur-Virden because he knows this area very well, and he knows the challenges as well. He knows many people within transportation and he's talked to them, not only in his role in agriculture before and being on farm organizations, but he's very much aware of the challenges that highways and the people within the bureaucracy and people trying to plan the challenges have in front of them.

Bridges take a long time to design. Madam Chair, they take time to design. They need good, trained people to do it, and you also have to take into consideration environmental approvals from DFO and Navigable Waters. That has been a bit of a challenge. Thank goodness that Manitoba—I sent a paper representing my western colleagues to Mr. Tweed and his committee to try to ensure that Navigable Waters be placed under Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, which it is now, and I believe that minister will have a better idea what's

happening and have a better look at Navigable Waters now that it's there.

If I can just continue, the bridge expenditure in '09, '08-09, was in the range of about—I can get more accurate numbers, but between \$35 million and \$40 million, and bridge expenditures expected to be ramped up this year, you know, around \$60 million—between \$55 million and \$60 million. I mean, we're going to try to spend it obviously as much as we can. Again, the caveat, weather providing, we'll be able to do it, and again, the design, environmental approvals, all those things are important.

So, Madam Chair, increasing expenditures on bridge inspections, that part is—you know, we're now doing upwards of a thousand bridges or thereabouts, level II inspections annually to ensure that our bridge network is safe.

More inspections are happening; more dollars invested in bridges, and we also have a lot of modern-day technology in our bridges. We have sensors put in the bridge, the bridge at Headingley. ISIS Canada is very, very important in this area. So a lot of things happening in bridges, a lot of things on roads that all of us can be very proud of, and I know my critic from Arthur-Virden is very supportive of anything we can do on roads and bridges.

Mr. Maguire: Can the minister indicate—yesterday we were talking about the Jackson bridge north of—on 83 highway. He indicated that they're going to go to tender right away on that. Can he just tell me what type of bridge that will be? Are they replacing the bridge, or what type of work will be done on that bridge?

Mr. Lemieux: The bridge itself, we're trying to get the details. I think it's been tendered already, but we'll have to take a look at the details in the tender or take a look at what—if it hasn't been tendered already we'll certainly look at the details of what will be in the tender for the bridge, the actual make-up of the bridge. But I know, at least I've been advised, that it's going to be an RTAC-level bridge.

Mr. Maguire: I know he's just checking to see, then will the bridge that's presently there be taken out and replaced?

Mr. Lemieux: My understanding is that when we remove bridges—well, I'm going to clarify this, but the tender's going out tomorrow on that particular bridge, I've been advised, which is good. It's going to be moving and work will be happening, hopefully relatively soon. It's approximately in the range of

\$3 million, this particular structure, which is a substantial investment. When the bridge is taken down, my understanding is that, depending on what material it is, we don't scrap-yard it. We try to use parts and pieces of bridges if we're able to use it, whether it's guardrails or other things. We try to make use of those components. We just don't demolish the whole bridge and just take it away. We try to make use, as we did with the gravel and granular material west of Headingley in the by-pass. We did when we made those improvements on the concrete culverts. We try to make use of the material if we can. Thank you.

Mr. Maguire: So the present bridge will be replaced?

Mr. Lemieux: Yes, it's going to be tendered tomorrow. Sorry, Madam Chairperson. Let me just say it will be. It's going to be replaced. I just had a concern on my side that if there's salvageable material, that we do it, that we just don't scrap it all. There are places where, if we can't use it, possibly rural municipalities can use the material on some of their bridges and so on.

Madam Chairperson: The time being 5 o'clock, committee rise.

FINANCE

* (14:40)

Mr. Chairperson (Rob Altemeyer): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Finance.

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

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Once again, my welcome to the minister and all of the members of the staff of the Finance Department.

I'd like to, Mr. Minister, if I could, start on a different direction with respect to the public sector and the numbers of employees that are currently employed by the Province of Manitoba. Does your department or do you know, Mr. Minister, just how many civil servants does the Province of Manitoba currently employ?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): I do. Properly, that comes up under the Civil Service Commission, which is a separate part, or we can deal

with it now. I don't know that I have my material here. I'll have to just check that, because I didn't anticipate civil service questions under Finance, but we may have the material. We can get it for you. Looks like the secretary to Treasury Board has information for us.

So we have with us Diane Gray, Deputy Minister of Finance; Bruce Gray, no relation, Senior Assistant Deputy Minister; and Tannis Mindell, Secretary to Treasury Board. We'll see what we can come up with for you.

In terms of full-time equivalents, 13,798.56, on a Monday.

Mr. Borotsik: Maybe, perhaps, the minister should give me the Friday statistics, then, because as of March 31, 2008, my data does tell me, and this comes from government of Manitoba Web site, that there were 14,065 employees. Now that also included regular full-time employees, casual, as well as contract.

Do the minister's numbers include the contract and casuals?

Mr. Selinger: Full-time equivalents can actually mean more people because of all the things you just said: part-time people, casuals, at different times of the year. For example, the spring to fall season, we have a larger civil service than we do in the wintertime because of all the seasonal work we do in various departments such as Conservation.

But the staff full-time equivalent complement is 13,798.56. It's true, as of February 28, that translated into actual folks working in the civil service of 14,534. That was Friday.

Mr. Borotsik: And I was looking for the Friday statistic. Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. I appreciate that. So 14,534 is the number.

Can the minister or does the minister handle or through his staff know what the current vacancy rate is in the civil service?

Mr. Selinger: I'll take that question as notice and try to get the information for him. I don't know if we'll be able to do it in the next hour, but I'll get it for you.

Mr. Borotsik: I would appreciate that. I do know that there are some vacancies, and we'll go through it line by line, but this is more of a global issue with the public service and where we're heading.

Does the minister know how many civil servants took advantage of the government's Voluntary

Reduced Work Week Program last year and perhaps in comparison of previous years? Has it been widely accepted by the civil service? Has it been moderately accepted, and is it growing or is it decreasing in the voluntary component to it?

Mr. Selinger: I don't have an exact count of how many people have participated. The value of it has been around \$2 million. That's subject to verification. There's been slight growth every year. We have provided for some additional days, which allows some people to get more time off without pay if they wish. But it's a program that's valued of, I would say between \$2 million and \$3 million, and I think it's in the lower end of that estimate.

Mr. Borotsik: Thank you. As I understand the program, Mr. Chair, it's positions that don't have to be backfilled. It's positions that can take some voluntary reduced work where there doesn't have to be any others hired to cover off the employee that is taking that time off because that obviously would defeat some of the purpose. Am I correct in that assumption, that it is just simply individuals who wish to take voluntary time off and not having to have it backfilled with other employees?

Mr. Selinger: First of all, I should clarify it. There's no right to this program. It's only on management discretion. Management has to believe that the work can be covered for the days that they're asking off. No, it's not normally backfilled by hiring a casual or providing more salary for somebody else, but for, you know, a short period of time, a manager will make a judgment whether his shop can handle the demands on it with that person being away, say, three weekends, four weekends, six, whatever it is. That could be seasonally adjusted demands on the workload, but we assume that there will be a saving to the public sector through participation in the program. We estimate that saving being in the order of a couple million bucks.

Mr. Borotsik: Is there an opportunity for the department or the minister and his staff to actually review the program to see if, in fact, there is an actual saving of that \$2 million to \$3 million? Again, I'm not disputing that the program certainly has validity if, in fact, it could be beneficial for both the employee and the employer. But is there an opportunity to review the program, and do you review the program on an annual basis to see, in fact, that it is working in the fashion in which the minister's just described?

Mr. Selinger: Yes, we take a look at it annually before we roll it out again to see if it's doing the job properly, if it causes significant or important service disruptions. Once again, it's at the discretion of the managers how many days the person can be eligible to take, including zero or more, and the manager has to assure their managers and senior authorities that they can perform the functions for which they are funded and mandated to provide the public. Service to the public comes first, and then if they can continue proper services to the public for the period of time that the individuals are asking for the unpaid days, then they have the discretion to allow that individual to take those days and to save the actual salary dollars that would have been paid out if they were working.

Mr. Borotsik: Does the minister have a target of his own as to what the optimal size of the civil service could and should be within the province of Manitoba? The reason I ask that question is the minister's probably aware that in Saskatchewan, just recently, there was a freeze on hiring in the bureaucracy. They've tapped or capped the hiring into the bureaucracy. There's been some suggestion that increases in civil servants should be based on increases in population in general terms as the growth of the province should include the growth of the civil service.

Has the minister or his department looked at any optimal numbers in civil servants or civil service numbers within the province of Manitoba?

*(14:50)

Mr. Selinger: Well, there's no frozen, optimal number because government's program changes every year as we bring in new legislation. You bring in legislation for water quality, you need people to provide the service of inspecting and insuring you have water quality.

You bring in a program on something we discussed in question period today with respect to any kind of pandemic, and there are resources that are required to do that and we looked at that a few years ago under avian flu.

So it's a shifting target. The growth has been relatively small in Manitoba in the last decade. If you look at page B12 in terms of growth and expenditure from '99 to '07-08, our growth in expenditure per capita has been the second lowest in the country, just to give an indication of how we do relative to others.

To further underline the prudence with which this public service operates, over the last six years, our percent change in the number of provincial employees in the tax supportive side of government, I'm not counting Crowns here, has been the second lowest percentage increase of all the jurisdictions and a very significant number.

For example, I'll just put it in comparative purposes, over the last six years our public service has grown by 1.4 percent in terms of the number of employees per capita. Saskatchewan has grown by 14 percent. That would be 10 times more. I know you like Saskatchewan as a comparison, so.

Alberta, that conservative regime of going on 40 years, has had a 22 percent increase in their public service compared to our 1.4 percent, and on it goes in the west. We're the lowest in the west. I know the member likes comparison to the west. We have the lowest growth in public servants of any jurisdiction in the west. I would appreciate a question in question period on that. We'll get this information for you.

Mr. Borotsik: Yes, I would appreciate if the minister would table that document that he is reading from at the present time so that we can analyze it and study it, because the numbers that I have, quite frankly, are between 1999 and 2007; Manitoba had a 14 percent increase in its public sector employees per 1,000 workers.

I have also had statistics, and statistics—you can find any statistics to speak to any particular issue the way you like to speak to that issue. I was also under the impression at one point in time reading a schedule that Manitoba had the highest percentage per capita, civil service per capita, and the only one that was higher was Newfoundland at that point in time. I would have to find that number in order to confirm that and I will pull it out of my documents.

But Manitoba does have a fairly high level of civil service, and my question simply was: Is there anything optimum? The answer I got from the minister was that there's nothing optimum because policies change and as policies change people are hired. I guess the same is true, if policies change and policies are discontinued then I suspect that those individuals would then be able to be transferred to the other positions.

But, again, is it the minister's suggestion just simply that the civil service will grow only as necessary or as the government sees necessary?

There won't be any controls or any caps on any of that civil service increase?

Mr. Selinger: Look, I would appreciate any data the member could supply. The information I have provided to me is Stats Canada data, and, you know, they're not perfect because sometimes in their data—I've looked at this in the past—sometimes in their data they folded municipalities and school divisions which, as the member knows, we don't directly control. But the growth in six years from 2002 to 2008, 1.4 percent, second lowest in the country. The growth from '07-08, lowest in the country.

And, gee, this is amazing, from 2002 to 2008 employees per thousand in Manitoba was the only jurisdiction in Canada that declined on employees per thousand, declined by 2.9 percent, No. 1 in the country. Everybody else went up. I'd be happy to provide this data to the member and then I'd be looking for a question in question period on that.

Mr. Borotsik: Thank you. I would certainly like to see the data so that we can analyze it. Again, the minister compares apples to apples. Perhaps civil servants such as teachers in the education field, as well as other areas, should be included in that raw data, because they are ultimately funded by the taxpayers of the province of Manitoba. So we'll have to look at what is included and what's excluded in order to make an apples-to-apples comparison, as opposed to apples and oranges.

Mr. Selinger: I just want to say that StatsCan always tries to have a comparable universe, whatever that is. They try to make sure that they're not bringing in some entities or leaving them out. They try to have a comparable universe.

So, on their apples-to-apples comparison—and we could debate whether the base is sufficient—we're the best in the country.

Mr. Borotsik: As the minister has also indicated, there are other statistics brought forward by Stats Canada that the minister doesn't wholly agree with, so there are different areas of agreement and disagreement with respect to Stats Canada. So we can look at that to see exactly, as I say, what the comparison is.

Switching gears a little bit, and this is perhaps a little bit more difficult area to discuss because I know the minister is going to talk, perhaps, a bit of hypotheticals, but there is a reality. I would like to touch on the issue of Ontario right now and the issue of harmonization with respect to PST and GST.

As the minister is aware, Ontario and Mr. McGuinty just recently have agreed with Mr. Flaherty to harmonize the sales taxes in Ontario. Has the Finance Minister been in contact with the federal Finance Minister, Mr. Flaherty? As he and I both know, this is something that Mr. Flaherty has been floating for some time now, and I think we may have even had this discussion at the last Estimates.

Has he discussed this issue with Mr. Flaherty since the latest agreement by Mr. McGuinty, and, if so, are there any proposals of any sort on the table at the present time within the province of Manitoba?

Mr. Selinger: No and no. I should point out that the Conservative opposition in Ontario is vigorously opposed to harmonization, including the wife of the federal Finance Minister, who is running for Leader of the Conservative Party of Ontario.

Mr. Borotsik: Well, that's all fine and good, and I'm not suggesting that there should be opposition or shouldn't be opposition. I'm just trying to find out exactly what the position of the Province of Manitoba is.

We do know there is a reality that the Ontario government, whether it be Liberal, NDP or Conservative, has agreed with Mr. Flaherty, who is a Conservative federally, that, in fact, they're going to harmonize their sales tax. There's up side; there's down side. Mr. McGuinty, for whatever reason, has decided that there's more up side.

Mr. Chairperson, my question simply was, has there been any discussion with Mr. Flaherty? The Minister of Finance has said no. Does he have any understanding—I mean, he's got some very talented staff—as to what the agreement is with Mr. McGuinty and Mr. Flaherty going forward?

After that question, the next question would be, how does that impact the province of Manitoba, if it impacts them at all?

Mr. Selinger: Well, one thing I'm sure of is we'll retain our competitive advantage over Ontario, even after harmonization. When you look at the affordability comparables that we look at every year, we have a much better circumstance in terms of our cost of living.

Will it impact Manitoba? Obviously, Mr. Chairperson, any change of tax in any other jurisdiction has a potential implication, but we, until this year, were considerably ahead of them on our corporate tax rates being lower. As you know, they

have two payroll taxes in the province. We call it a health and education—[interjection] In Manitoba, it's a health and education levy. I think they might call it a payroll tax; at least the opposition does in Ontario. But it's to pay for health care. It's about 900 bucks a head, as I recall.

Ontario, my God, they have a health premium of \$450. I guess they have to have a payroll tax to distinguish it from the health premium, but they have a per capita \$712 payroll tax and a \$450 health premium. So we're still very competitive compared to them in that regard.

They are going through a harmonization exercise. There has been a transition payment made available to them, and there has been an acceleration of their per capita health-care resources which is not directly linked to the harmonization exercise but, coincidentally, has occurred at the same time to the value of about a billion dollars.

*(15:00)

So there seems to be substantial resources being poured into Ontario in the next couple of years. Then there's a commitment later on to do some harmonization. There has been, somewhat, a change in the rules in terms of how harmonized the base of the taxation has to be between the PST and the GST. They've allowed for about a 5 percent carve out, which has not resolved issues of home-heating fuel and how many houses have to pay the PST. Some are excluded; some are in. I think they have a threshold of about \$400,000 on that, as I recall. I understand that it's creating quite a bit of heartburn in Ontario from separate sectors of the business community.

Mr. Borotsik: Maybe the minister could just expand a little bit. He said there was a transition payment that was identified, that transition, obviously, for any of the lost revenues that come from the harmonization itself with respect to the PST input credit. Does he know what the size of that transition payment was? He also mentioned, coincidentally, this health bonus, did he mention \$1 billion that was given, in addition, to Ontario for health. Was it a billion-dollar health bonus, as I understand it, plus a transition payment? Can he explain the number on the transition payment?

Mr. Selinger: The transition payment, as I understand it, is in the order of about \$3 billion. Then the health money was accelerated beyond what was forecast by about \$1 billion. Then, of course, as the member knows, there's lots of co-operation

between the federal and provincial government in the auto sector to the tune of several billion dollars going on it. I think the original number—I mean, it's changing very rapidly in the auto sector but, at one point, they were talking about \$6 billion, \$7 billion.

An Honourable Member: Seven.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Chairperson, the member seems to think \$7 billion.

So there have been a lot of resources going into Ontario. Ontario has some very significant economic challenges. We are aware of that. Generally, we support them in getting support to address their challenges, as we would any province that's going through a very difficult time.

Mr. Borotsik: Has the minister, through his staff, have they done any analysis, at all, as to the savings to business of the harmonization, as opposed to the cost to the consumer in harmonization? Have we looked at that detail of harmonization and, if so, are those studies available to members of the opposition?

Mr. Selinger: There has been analysis done in the last few years to take a look at this. There are distributional impacts. There's some additional cost to government in terms of revenue. There's additional cost to consumers in terms of broadly applying the harmonized tax. There are some benefits to business. There are some business sectors that are vigorously opposed to it because they feel it will hamper their ability to grow in their business sector. So there are distributional impacts across the entire economy in Manitoba for consumers, businesses, and government. Let's put it this way, the numbers are such that some sectors feel that they would have a detrimental impact on their ability to continue to grow in their industry. Other sectors would like it because there would an input credit on the acquisition of their input factors for their production and manufacturing.

Mr. Chairperson, the member will remember that the GST was brought in by the Mulroney government as a way of getting rid of the manufacturer's tax, which was a tax that was considered to be a problem for manufacturers under our free trade umbrella. So the broader base of the GST was brought in to provide a greater competitive advantage for manufacturers.

In Manitoba, we've handled manufacturing competitiveness with several other measures that we've already done. The Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit, which, when we came in just as recently

as four years ago, was non-refundable. It's now 70 percent refundable. We're eliminating the capital tax. We've made the R&D tax credit refundable. We've lifted the threshold on the small-business tax rate and lowered it to 1 percent and going to zero.

Then we've had the Advanced Manufacturing Initiative on the other side of the coin, which has worked with the manufacturers to modernize their technology lean manufacturing techniques. Then, we've had HR, our human resource initiatives.

So, Mr. Chair, we've done a lot of work with the manufacturing sector to keep them competitive without going the harmonization route, which has negative impacts for other sectors.

Mr. Borotsik: Thank you, and the opposite is also told. There's a PST input cost where now there's a GST input tax credit. In Manitoba, there is no PST input tax credit, where with the harmonization, there would be a tax credit, and there would be a cost to that.

An Honourable Member: If I could.

Mr. Selinger: The Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit is equivalent to a PST credit at 70 percent refundability. Mr. Chairperson, they're getting all of their sales tax costs refundable through the Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit.

So it's a very good investment tax credit in the Manitoba regime. Essentially, they don't have to pay sales tax on their inputs.

Mr. Borotsik: Mr. Chairperson, 70 percent, as opposed to the full tax, input tax credit, coming back from the GST at that point in time.

Ontario we know, has gone to it. I'm told that British Columbia is looking at a similar program with harmonization, whether they've agreed to it at the present time or not, I suspect that there's an election going on presently, that that won't happen until after the election.

Perhaps the minister can share with me whether there is or is not a chance that British Columbia would also embrace harmonization.

Mr. Selinger: I can tell you, just the member's statement that B.C. is looking at it, I think they would vigorously deny in this election window.

But, if he wants, I could send the transcript out there, and we could see what the reaction will be.

I can tell you, you'd be very popular with some parts of B.C. and very unpopular with others.

I have no information whether they're looking at it or not. I really couldn't comment on that, and I wouldn't think it'd be appropriate to do that. All discussions between a province and the federal government on harmonization are confidential discussions, and should stay that way until there's an official decision made by the government.

In the case of Ontario, harmonization is down the road. They're not entirely there yet. I understand it's quite controversial, and as I said, the Conservative opposition in Ontario has come out foursquare against it.

Mr. Borotsik: And as I said, controversial, yes. But they are certainly looking at it, and I guess it's behoving to Manitoba to see how that affects us in the long term. As for British Columbia, I'm certainly not going to put any words in Premier Campbell's mouth, but I have heard, via the grapevine, that obviously they are looking at it. They are looking at it. I've also heard, via the grapevine, that perhaps, and this is rumour, but only rumour and speculation, I'm told that perhaps Saskatchewan would be reducing their provincial sales tax, as opposed to perhaps even looking at harmonization, as Alberta, as the minister is well aware, doesn't have to harmonize, because they don't have any sales tax in Alberta, so it's a pretty simple solution.

If, and here we go with the hypotheticals, because this is where I know that the minister gets some difficulty, but we know Ontario is going, we know Atlantic Canada has gone, we know that British Columbia, I have no doubt, is looking at it in some way, shape or form, whether they go with it or whether they don't go with it, it's certainly up to the government's decision of that day.

How does it affect Manitoba? I know the minister has already indicated that he believes that we are well positioned from other tax initiatives to compete when and if all provinces go, and we're the only island out there. I suspect that the minister will have another hard, long look at it.

I am told that certainly there are advantages and disadvantages, make no mistake about it. There are exclusions that the Ontario government has negotiated outside of other exclusions in other jurisdictions. Again, in the analysis that the minister has done, I assume he's looked at the savings to business, and he says some business is in favour,

some business is not. I am told that for construction, for example, it can mean \$190 million a year; for transportation, it could mean \$43 million a year. For manufacturing, it can mean \$90 million a year.

* (15:10)

Is there a balance there with respect to savings and costs? I guess I'm just asking the minister, and I don't expect any definitive answer, but should the other provinces fall like dominoes, where does that put Manitoba and where does it put this minister's government with respect to the tax harmonization? Or does he just continue with the tax regime that he's talked about with respect to manufacturing and business?

Mr. Selinger: We review options to keep Manitoba business in a competitively positive situation every year. As I said earlier, we will take—we have an ongoing review of these kinds of files.

It is impossible to deal with hypotheticals right now. I do not hear what you've heard in Saskatchewan in my discussions. I've heard nothing from B.C., and I think B.C. would be hypersensitive about any, even suggestion they were looking at it, at least until May 12, and probably thereafter.

What will happen is we'll just have to see how it unfolds. The reality is that it's our job, is to make sure Manitoba business can be competitive, and we've done that and we'll continue to do that. And how we do it will depend on the circumstances around it, the resources we have available and where we need to make the most significant changes. But we take a look at it, based on the conditions in front of us at the time and what the challenges are in front of us at the time, and how we can best respond to that.

Mr. Borotsik: Just one second, please. I was looking for a specific document, and I can't find it, but that's fine.

Okay, thank you for your answer, Mr. Minister. I do appreciate that.

Mr. Chairperson, I wonder if we can talk about, maybe in a global perspective, the user fees that are identified in this particular budget. I don't know whether it's possible, through your staff at the present time, but could you identify or give an overview of all of the fee increases that were identified in the budget 2009-2010?

Mr. Selinger: Fee changes, March 25 press release, same day as the budget, all announced by

department: \$62,000-plus in MAFRI for licences for pet breeders, pesticides and fertilizers; Manitoba Conservation, firewood surcharges up, hunting fees up, wastewater management registration fees up, environmental licence fees up, park entrance fees down, for a net \$2.2 million; Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, distance learning fees up \$47,000; Manitoba Finance, tax rebate discounter fees up \$26,500; Manitoba Justice, small claims filing fees, speeding fines and court costs recovery up for a total of \$4.3 million; Manitoba Labour and Immigration, inspection fees, registration fees, testing and exam fees up, for \$169,000; Manitoba Water Stewardship, land rental rates and water use and bottling fees, for half a million, \$501,600; for net user fee changes of \$2.9 million. And that doesn't count the increase in the property tax credit of 50 bucks, nor does it count the farmland school tax rebate going to 75 percent from 70 percent.

So that was put out the day of the budget.

Mr. Borotsik: Those identify the total fees anticipated in being collected, and the traffic tickets themselves, was there a sliding scale of increase on the traffic tickets that's identified in that press release, or do you have the sliding scale at another document?

Mr. Selinger: It is a graduated rate; the more you speed, the more you pay. It's a voluntary tax. Nobody has to pay it.

I could give the member some information on previous questions if he wishes me to just change tack for a second.

An Honourable Member: I'll come back to the traffic tickets here.

Mr. Selinger: Vacancy rate as of February '09, 6.37 percent and '08-09, estimated savings, \$3.8 million on the Voluntary Reduced Work Week Program and 2,561 individuals participated. That was up about 40,000 from the previous year. So that's a little better than I thought in terms of savings.

Mr. Borotsik: That's a rather good statistic actually if, obviously, the people are taking advantage of it, the civil service are taking advantage of it. As you had said earlier, it's done on a management basis and there's obviously no backfilling, so there is a real saving there of some \$3.8 million. That's very good.

Back to the sliding scale, you say it's a voluntary tax to the traffic tickets. Do you have the increase? Was it a 5 percent increase, 10 percent increase on

the sliding scale? What was it looked at for traffic violations?

Mr. Selinger: I have to get it for him. It's a graduated scale. Every kilometre you go faster than the prescribed speed limit, your fine goes up, and it gets pretty pricy if you're really really racing along. I'm assuming nobody's going to be driving—very few people would want to drive a hundred kilometres over the speed limit. Around 20 kilometres over the speed limit, I think the fine was in the order of high 200s, \$300, in that range. It's something that's intended to discourage speeding and it applies in your part of the province as well, Cliff. *[interjection]* That's what you paid? Excellent. We appreciate the contribution.

Mr. Borotsik: I've just been informed by a colleague, and he received this only because of information gathered from some of his constituents, I'm sure, is it was \$285 for 130 kilometres, but I guess the point I'm trying to make is I do understand there's a sliding scale. I guess what I'm trying to get to is what's the percentage increase. Is it comparison of 2008 to 2009? If it was \$285 for 130 in 2009, was that \$235 for the same speed limit last year? Was there a 20 percent increase in fines? Was there a 10 percent increase in fines?

Mr. Selinger: Actually, the fine per kilometre of going over the speed limit has not changed, but what has changed is there used to be if you were 10k over, you paid a certain fine and then nothing happened till you were 20k over. Now, if you're 11k over, it's higher, 12k over, it's higher, 13k over, it's higher. So the rate has remained constant, but the application has been intensified to disincense going over the speed limit on a per-kilometre basis as opposed to a block amount. So there's no freebie between 10 and 20k over. You pay for every kilometre over the speed limit that they can properly record and prove in court.

Mr. Borotsik: I'm sure my colleague's constituent really didn't see the disincentive being the additional cost per kilometre above. It's simply now a matter of him paying more for those kilometres as he goes above, but the traffic tickets are one thing. I understand by the press release that you've identified the full value of those fees. Do we know what the cost of the—you've identified some of the fees but the costs have not been associated.

There's been a court filing fee increase. Does the minister know what the percentage increase on the court filing fee is?

Mr. Selinger: It was the small claims filing fees. I must say, that question, I don't have the detail in front of me, or do I? *[interjection]* Okay. I usually adjust this question, but, all right. Small claims filing fee has gone up. Claims up to \$5,000, it's gone \$20 up, from \$30 to \$50. Claims over \$5,000, \$30 to \$75, so a \$45 increase. I think these fees, quite frankly, as I recall, had not been changed for several years, and they're still pretty modest, actually.

* (15:20)

Mr. Borotsik: Even in the last few the minister identified, that's well over 100 percent increase in fees. Modest or not, that's still a substantial increase.

Mr. Selinger: Seventy-five dollars.

Mr. Borotsik: A couple of wrap-up questions. My colleague who just left, unfortunately—I do recall asking the minister when we identified some capital loan borrowing requirements. There was \$50 million from Manitoba Lotteries. I can't recall if there was an answer forthcoming on that as to where that \$50-million capital from Manitoba Lotteries was.

As well, Mr. Chairperson, under the loan requirements they're showing the loan authority requirements—Manitoba Lotteries Corporation is looking at about \$104 million in borrowings. Did we get an answer?

Mr. Selinger: I'm looking at the Minister responsible for Manitoba Lotteries (Mr. Swan), and I haven't been able to read his lips, but I can say that we're working on it. We haven't verified the information yet. When we do I'll provide it to you, and I'll provide it in writing.

Mr. Borotsik: Thank you, Mr. Minister, it's just that my colleague who has since left the table was inquiring about it. I do know we asked the question. I don't recall ever receiving the answer, but again, the borrowing's \$104 million, as I outlined on page B8 of the budget, and the \$50 million of borrowing requirements for new cash requirements for Manitoba Lotteries. If you could confirm that, I would certainly be appreciative.

A couple of other wrap-up questions before we get to the line by line, which we'll be getting to shortly. On the budget document itself, if you go to, and again this goes back to reviews of different programs. If you go to page D20 on the budget book, it does list the numbers of dollars identified in different programs and tax expenditures. Under section C, other Manitoba tax measures, it's got the

Tuition Fee Income Tax Rebate. It shows a tax expenditure of some \$9.7 million. The question I have is that what was anticipated or expected under that particular program? Is it higher? Is it lower? Do you review that to see if it's, in fact, got some fairly decent uptake? Is that a real number, or is that just a projection based on hope? What was the original uptake on the program from the previous year, the 2008-2009?

Mr. Selinger: I'm informed that's the actual number for the '07 year when they claimed it on their '08 tax return.

Before I go, I do have those tables that I indicated to the member so that he can ask me a question tomorrow in question period on this. I'd like to table those, send those across. That's the one that confirms where the lowest number of employees per thousand—the only one declining in the last six years and then the lowest '07-08 and the second lowest over '02-08 for the number of provincial employees, excluding Crowns.

Thank the member for letting me get that on the record.

Mr. Borotsik: As I indicated, I will make sure I analyze it to make sure it's apples to apples and we'll see exactly what is included there in civil servants, services as to whether we agree on the inclusions or the exclusions.

As for the \$9.7 million for the 2007 year, 2008 filing, the minister, needless to say, being part of Treasury Board, would receive the program analysis. Is this the number that was hoped to be achieved? Is it higher? Is it lower in the program? I guess the reason I ask that question, does the Finance Department, or do the minister and Treasury Board look at how the programs are actually working as to how they were being put forward to the Treasury Board? Is this higher, lower than what was anticipated?

Mr. Selinger: It's in the range of what we anticipated. Yes, we do look at these things to see if they're performing as we thought they would based on our assumptions. The member will know that this will increase in the future. You can only claim up to one-sixth of your credit, so every year there will be new people claiming their one-sixth, as well as previous people that had started continuing to claim for an additional five, four, three years, depending on how long they'd been in the program. The program

will expand as a tax expenditure in the future. It will cost more as we go forward.

Mr. Borotsik: What is the suggested tax expenditure for this budget year, 2009-2010?

Mr. Selinger: Based on careful analysis by federal-provincial relations and a thorough check at this table, subject to further reflection upon leaving the room, we think it will probably go up, you know, first year 9.7, next year you double it because you have another cohort coming in, and then next year you would add another layer, so it would be about \$27 million to \$30 million until you get your full maturity of the first group at six years. Then they drop off, Mr. Chairperson, so we think it'll probably stabilize over six years, \$60 million, \$70 million, \$80 million, in that range, depending on how many people take advantage of it.

Mr. Borotsik: Are the numbers of people taking advantage of it as proposed when the original proposal came forward?

Mr. Selinger: Roughly. The member will remember, might recall that we've designed it so people educating themselves outside the province who wish to return can take advantage of it as well. That's a bit of a harder number to quantify, but we could recruit people from anywhere in the world to Manitoba. This is actually something that I'm glad the member has raised because employers could take fuller advantage of this in terms of recruitment. They could offer a salary and benefits package, but they could also offer this rebate for somebody, a skilled engineer, a scientist, a university professor in Brandon. These are all—you know, a newly-minted Ph.D., for example, could claim this and it could be an additional element of attracting somebody to come to Manitoba. It wouldn't necessarily be the most important element, but it could be an additional element, and I think employers have not fully, as I've talked to them, hadn't realized, seen it, from that perspective in terms of a recruitment tool, so I think it could be valuable in that regard.

Mr. Borotsik: That's pretty much where I was heading with that particular discussion point. Has it had the uptake that the minister had hoped it was going to have when the program was put forward? There are advantages. The minister's also aware that other jurisdictions also offer similar type programs with respect to tax advantages on tuition fees. Is it being used the way the program was designed to be used, I guess, is the question I have? I would hope so. I think there is an advantage there. What one has

to do is make sure that people are aware of it. Part of a program is marketing that program and has it been marketed properly to get to the proper people to look at taking advantage of it?

Mr. Selinger: Generally, we believe people are using it as intended. I think the member's right. I think employers could get fuller advantage of it. Has it been promoted? Well, it's been promoted by the CGAs; they've been running ads on it all this spring; you might have noticed that. We've had our own campaign last year. I don't think we've done one this year specific to it, but it is getting better known.

Certainly, when I meet all the various business organizations, I never hesitate to let them know it's available. Along with the co-op education tax credits and the apprenticeship tax credits, I think we could all do more to promote these in the Legislature at our level as we interact with various groups. But, yes, we have put information out there to employers, but also to institutions to let them know as they talk to people. Then all the private tax preparers, if they're on the ball, which I assume most of them are, would make their customers aware of it when they look at their circumstances in filling out their tax return. But we're getting take-up in the order that we expected we would, yes.

* (15:30)

Mr. Borotsik: A couple of questions and then we can go to the Estimates book. The budget package, these wonderful documents that I have here, the Estimates and expenditures and the budget and the speech, our caucus office asked for a copy of those documents and they were informed that they would have to pay \$25 in order to get a copy of the budget documents.

I do know that the minister goes on a post-budget excursion throughout the province of Manitoba, and I know that he and his staff do make available those budget documents and books to any numbers of people that would attend those post-budget excursions. Is there not a possibility of members of the opposition and caucus receiving a copy of those without having to pay the \$25?

We were asked when we asked to go—we asked for the one document on file. We were told we had to fill in a request and along with the request add \$25. I just find that it's somewhat—I suspect there are those budget documents sitting somewhere in a book somewhere in the minister's office somewhere. Are

they not made available to caucus and other members of the opposition?

Mr. Selinger: Well, I'm a little surprised to hear that. I will review the policy to make sure we're treating the opposition at least as well as we're treating the public, but I wouldn't want them to think that they should get special advantage but we would make sure they're treated at least as well as the public.

They're available on-line to anybody 24/7. There is a CD disc, I think, that's available. Is that free? Yes, the CD disc is free, available to anybody. The printed copy, a few years back we tried to reduce the amount of volume of trees we were using on this, but I will make sure the opposition's treated at least as fairly as we treat members of the public.

Mr. Borotsik: I do thank the minister for that because had I been on top of my game, I'm sure I could have received a couple of extra copies during the minister's budget excursions, but I didn't at that time take advantage of it. But it's true, I mean if the public were going to be getting copies through the minister's office, I would hope that members of the opposition could also receive a copy.

I also think anecdotally there was, as I understand it, a reeve of one of the municipalities wanted to have a copy of the budget and he was also told that he could not get it unless he paid \$25 for his municipality to receive a copy of the budget document. So the minister may want to check into that.

I would suspect that these municipalities should, in fact, be treated not unlike the public as well, and I'm sure the minister would be, as she's seems to be very proud of this, to put that budget into the municipal offices.

Mr. Selinger: I've just been informed that we do actually charge departments, but it's provided free in lockup. It's an incentive to attend the budget process. That's why you got your free copies, but I'm going to make sure that we treat people fairly.

This has been a small point of concern among people, but it is available free 24/7 on-line and I know the AMM has good access to broadband and the Web. I'm a little surprised. If there's one specific municipality that hasn't received it you should let me know.

So we'll take a look at it and see what we can do to make sure people are treated fairly. I think I have given copies out at my budget consultations, post and

pre. The reason it was given out in Brandon this year was because the weather caused a delay of the lockup event out there so we provided it after to people because they'd missed the lockup opportunity.

Mr. Borotsik: I'll know next time to get extra copies from the budget consultations then, now that we know that they are available to some and not all.

Mr. Selinger: You have to be able to carry them out of the room.

Mr. Borotsik: I can handle that. I have staff that certainly can assist.

The last question I have and then we'll head—I'm sure the minister is excited about going line by line. The TIF legislation that is being proposed at this time—as it's being proposed, the Finance Department would have access to and control of any TIF revenues that are generated from the TIF legislation.

I wonder if the minister can explain, or at least he could answer, are there suggestions that TIF would be used for any of the infrastructure that is now required for the IKEA development in Winnipeg.

Mr. Selinger: I'd have to check on that. I'm not directly the minister responsible for the IKEA. I'm not aware of it being proposed to be used for that.

The one proposal I am aware in the City is to use it around the rapid transit development out to Jubilee Avenue. The first leg of that been sent, you know, housing projects related to that, close to it.

Of course, it's certainly applicable to the CentrePort situation. The City has used a version of it for infill condo projects and apartment blocks in various parts of the city. The one I'm most aware of is in the Fort Rouge area.

So they're starting to see the value of using the tool more. It's available all across Manitoba right now for municipal taxes. This bill, which we would like to see passed, would allow for incremental education taxes. The education system wouldn't lose anything. They would get the tax yield that they're currently getting plus any increases in that current tax yield. It would be the difference based on the new project. So we wanted to make sure school divisions weren't worse off and the tax difference would be made available for a project to reinvest in it for a specified period of time relative to that project. Then it's available in perpetuity after that to school divisions and to municipalities.

In other jurisdictions where it's been used, Mr. Chair, it's a way of getting projects done in areas where costs might be prohibitive because they're older neighbourhoods or there are brown fields that need clearing or the nature of the project itself requires long-term commitments, that you can use the TIF as a planning tool around.

It's been a fairly successful policy tool in the United States, all across the United States, everywhere from Minnesota to Portland, Oregon, and Chicago. We're the first jurisdiction in Canada to bring it into play.

I think it's a useful tool because the value of any kind of tool is that the municipality or the local organization that wants to take advantage of it can use it as part of their business planning. They don't have to go seek a grant after the fact. They can factor it in and then if they get their plan approved by the relevant authorities, that allows their plan to show some sort of viability to bring a project into fruition. So we're bringing it into Manitoba. We hope the opposition will pass it this spring.

Mr. Borotsik: But as the minister has indicated, he does not know of any desire or decision to use any of the TIF funding for the IKEA infrastructure that is being proposed for south Winnipeg, and the minister is aware under the legislation that the Finance Department would be the keepers of the purse on the TIF funds.

Mr. Selinger: The first version of the bill had me in charge of the fund. The second version of the bill tweaked that. I'd have to see the second version. We tweaked it in response to some of the concerns from the opposition that it—I think there was some wild allegations that it would be a slush fund or something that would be under my control which I—I'm not seeking those kinds of resources. But I think we wanted to make sure that the money was properly applied on the projects. I'd have to see the revised version of the bill to let the member know how it's been structured now.

Mr. Chairperson, it was introduced by the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs (Mr. Ashton). The reality is that it's a tool for development and it—judiciously used by developers, municipalities and provincial governments. It can facilitate economic development such as CentrePort, such as rapid transit, such as a commercial strip or a residential area. It could be applied in an older neighbourhood on a broader basis or it could be applied to a specific

project, a specific building project or something like that.

The fund is established by the Minister of Finance. It's administered by the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. I think that's the current version of it. That just gives the member some further clarity. I think the member would be best advised to look at the specific language in the bill right now. If he has any concerns, let me know and we can see what we can do.

Mr. Borotsik: If we can get through some questions with respect to the Estimates themselves now. We can go, I think, eventually, line by line. I do have a colleague here with some questions with Corporate and Consumer Affairs.

* (15:40)

First of all, if I could talk about, just briefly, the Treasury Board. Can the minister tell me who the members of the Treasury Board currently are? The political members of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Selinger: Political members?

Mr. Borotsik: Political members of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Selinger: Minister Wowchuk, Minister McGifford, Minister Struthers, Minister Lemieux, Minister Irvin-Ross, myself—and Minister Chomiak, yes.

Mr. Borotsik: So there have not been any changes since last year to the Treasury Board structure. It seems that those were the same ministers from last year as there are this year?

Mr. Selinger: Correct.

Mr. Borotsik: Can the minister give me a description or a list of the political staff that are associated with the Treasury Board?

Mr. Selinger: I'm not sure there are any political staff associated with Treasury Board. There's a technical appointment. That would be the associate secretary to Treasury Board, Mr. Woodbury. But I wouldn't describe them as political staff. I would describe them as people—well, they're technical appointments. They don't have the same full status as a civil servant. They serve at the pleasure of the Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council. They don't have the same protection as a full civil servant would have.

I'm not sure if there are any other technical appointments. *[interjection]* Oh, yes, Rachel Whidden, as well, who does policy work for us.

Mr. Borotsik: Would the minister have the number of staff currently employed by his department? We did talk about the total civil service, and we got the numbers on that. Do you have the total numbers of employees, FTEs, in the Department of Finance?

Mr. Selinger: Including Treasury Board, both sides of the operation? *[interjection]* Yeah, 500; for '09-10. We've put in 575.98 full-time equivalents.

Mr. Borotsik: That's a decrease, Mr. Minister, I think, from the previous year.

Mr. Selinger: According to this document, it is, yes. Schedule 4, page 15 in the purple Estimates book.

Mr. Borotsik: Yes, that's the number I was looking at as a decrease of some six FTEs. Is that common, to have a decrease? We just talked about an increase in the civil service in general because of programs. A decrease in the Finance Department of five FTEs, is that common?

Mr. Selinger: Well, we always try to lead by example, and this would be it.

Mr. Borotsik: The vacancy rate for the department at the present time, what would be the staff vacancy?

Mr. Selinger: I'll have to get that information, but it looks like as of March 31, about 8.93 percent vacancy rate.

Mr. Borotsik: If memory serves me correctly, it was a similar vacancy rate at the last Estimates last year, around the 10 percent vacancy?

An Honourable Member: Yeah.

Mr. Borotsik: Around 10 percent vacancy in the last year. I do appreciate the fact that there are vacancies. There are people that come and they go, and you have to fill them with competitions and the like, but it seems that it's always running around that 8 percent to 10 percent vacancy rate.

Mr. Selinger: Last year, the comparables were 10.95. It's 8.95. It's 3 percent down from last year.

Mr. Borotsik: There always seems to be that 8 percent to 10 percent vacancy within the department at any one point in time. I take it the minister's anticipating filling those vacancies at some time, or are those positions being redundant?

Are there some positions that are completely vacant for an annual period, and, if so, would you review those FTEs to see whether they're actually necessary, and would you then take them off of FTE and just reduce the numbers necessary?

Mr. Selinger: We're managing the budget envelope with tighter overhead costs this year. If managers believe they can leave a vacancy for a period of time without impairing service, they can do that. Now, they may fill that, say, five months in or three months in and then have another one come open and open it for three or four months. This is a more flexible approach than freezing the establishment because, in most cases, these positions are needed, but there can be some transition time, there's recruitment time, there's training time and, for a shorter period of time, we can have a vacancy rate related to retirements or staff turnover. We can shrink the establishment if we, for example, modernize technology and we don't need all the people to do things that were done before. If we redesign how we want to deliver service, there could be changes.

But managers are encouraged to live within budget, and one of the tools they have to do that is vacancy management. Then, of course, they also have an obligation to provide service, and they manage the dynamic between keeping it vacant and providing service. Within that, they will fill positions as required and then another one may come open and they'll leave that until they can appropriately fill it. So it's part of our overall requirement.

As I indicated in the budget speech, a third of departments have received 1 percent or less increases this year. Some of the tools they are going to use to manage those modest increases are vacancy management. That's one of the tools they will have. But that is a better approach: let the managers manage than to go with a freeze and then doesn't let key positions be filled when they may be required to be filled. The managers have the ability to put staff where they need it and then find efficiencies and savings elsewhere. I believe that's a better approach given the size of our civil service and the requirements to be pretty agile in providing service as circumstances change.

Mr. Borotsik: Yes, I've always had a management philosophy of let managers manage. They know the job function certainly better than those who try to micromanage. So it's certainly a sound management philosophy.

I guess the point I was trying to make is, if there are certain positions that have been vacant for any period of time and they can do without those vacancies, those positions, is it the manager's responsibility then to come forward and remove that FTE from the list?

Mr. Selinger: We review that with departments. If we see a pattern of persistent underfilling or a position that hasn't been filled for a number of years, we will review the need and necessity for that. For example, the comptroller's office reduced three FTEs. They had a growth in previous years to meet some requirements. Taxation was able to eliminate one and Treasury Board eliminated one.

I have to tell you, I think, our managers are working hard to make these things work because our public service on a per capita basis, as I indicated earlier, is one of the lower per capita public services. If you can verify it otherwise and demonstrate that, but from what I see on the ground and when I look at other levels of government, I look at it anecdotally, and what I hear and see on the ground, our public service is pretty hardworking and delivers a lot of service relative to other jurisdictions.

I can give you some incredible stories of people that used to work here and have gone to other provinces, and whereas it took one layer to make a decision here, it takes nine layers of approvals to make the exact same decision in another jurisdiction.

We're pretty lean, we're reasonably flat and we provide a lot of service. We provide a lot of service to the public at a reasonable cost per capita relative to other jurisdictions. So I know our public servants work pretty hard. I mean, there are exceptions to every rule, but, on the whole, I think we get very good value for the money. I know our public service is well regarded across the country because they have opportunities to come together on departmental basis, on central agency basis, and we always get very good feedback for the quality of programs we put forward and the ability to deliver them in a cost-effective way relative to other jurisdictions. We have a lot of people coming to us asking how the heck we do it, and then looking for ideas on how they can do it better.

We have lots of areas where we think we can still improve. We do strategic reviews every summer in certain policy envelopes or program areas. We look at ways for streamlining and improving service and redeveloping the mission of a certain program to take account of new realities. So it's an ongoing

process. It's a dynamic system, and it has to be because we are in a dynamic province with lots going on.

Mr. Borotsik: Yes, and the reason I talk about the vacancies, I do know that some of the departments' budget for the vacancies. As a matter of fact, when I asked the question about the year-end lapse of some \$65 million, that's a flexibility that's built into the vacancies that you have at 10 percent, so there is that \$65-million year-end lapse.

* (15:50)

As to the minister himself, the question I always like answered: How well-travelled has the minister been this year with respect to interprovincial as well as international travel? Can we inquire as to where the minister's been, where he's been, and why he's been there?

Mr. Selinger: You can. I was at a Finance ministers' meeting in May '08, May 29 and 30. I'm trying to remember where the heck that was.

An Honourable Member: It was Montréal.

Mr. Selinger: Montréal. Thank you. Yes. I remember it now. It's coming back vividly.

On June 16 and 28, I went to Australia, and then I was in Québec City in September. In October, I was at the International Francophonie, that was in Québec City as well. Then the federal Council of the Federation meeting on the economy, October 19 and 20. November 3, federal Finance ministers' meeting again, that was, as I recall, in Saskatoon. Was that Saskatoon? No, that was Toronto. Then December, I believe was in—No, I think it's the reverse, wasn't it?

An Honourable Member: No, Saskatoon was December.

Mr. Selinger: Saskatoon was December. Right. It was biting cold there. Then in January, I was in Ottawa again, and then this March, I was in Boston promoting purchases of our Manitoba bonds, our Builder Bonds.

Mr. Borotsik: Thank you. It seems the minister was better travelled this year than he was the previous year; there are only a couple trips in the 2007-2008 Estimates. This is certainly better travel and modest. Certainly, most of the travel being in Canada, as opposed to international, which I congratulate the minister on keeping in touch with his provincial colleagues and compatriots.

Was there any travel where the Premier (Mr. Doer) or delegation went with the minister and the Premier's costs were allocated to the minister's department?

Mr. Selinger: No.

Mr. Borotsik: Thank you.

I have a colleague who would like to ask some questions with respect to, I believe, Consumer and Corporate Affairs again, if the minister would allow.

Mr. David Faurschou (Portage la Prairie): I do know that we ran out of time yesterday.

One final area of concern: I wonder whether the minister had opportunity to view the television program where they evaluated some significant deficiencies in new homes in Ontario. In fact, they brought on a celebrity contractor, *Holmes on Homes*, to assist. What, though, was of significant concern is that right across Canada, all new homes have a new home builder's guarantee afforded the purchaser. However, in the television programming, it was highly evident that there were huge deficiencies in the level of support to new home buyers for significant problems with the home.

I would like to ask the minister as to whether or not he is still comfortable with the current state of affairs with our new home builders' guarantee insurance.

Mr. Selinger: Well, I have recently met with the home builders about these kinds of programs. As you can imagine, they think they've got a pretty good program. They have shown an openness to looking at ways to strengthen it. I've encouraged them to do that. We will meet again on it.

Their concern is that you don't have a level of expectation that if a door doesn't shut properly, that the builder has to come back for several years to fix it. Our concern, as a government, and I think you'd share with me, is that major defects have some protection so that, if somebody sunk their lifesavings into a condominium or a home, they don't wind up having a program that doesn't support that.

So we're talking about this. I think Manitoba Home Builders have shown an openness to consider how they might strengthen the program, and my officials are in discussions with them on that. Then, I'm hoping that we will meet again once they've taken that discussion further down the road and see what's possible.

So we are looking at alternatives on that. It's not related to that program. It's a discussion we've been having for a while. It's just like buying a car. If you have a reasonable warranty program, you have greater confidence in the product you're buying.

So I've asked them to look at that. Particularly during challenging economic times, people are more concerned about their employment. They're more concerned that their dollars get what they think they're getting. So I've asked them to look at it as a way of building confidence in the Manitoba home-building market, which is a good one. We don't have a lot of complaints that I'm aware of. As a minister, I've received extremely few complaints about new homes being built in the province. I can't think of any complaint I've actually had. There may be some, but I'd have to check my records. There's nothing fresh in my mind.

That being said, there may be opportunities to improve the coverage and protection for people, and I've asked them to consider that. They have told me they would seriously pursue that with our officials.

Mr. Faurshou: Well, I appreciate the minister's openness, because if anyone viewing this program, it would scare the living daylights out of you and, clearly, gun shy is the term for it in buying a new home.

The other instance that was revealed within this program was that homes are supposed to be inspected by bona fide well-trained individuals, and there were deficiencies documented but not to the extent that they were played out to be.

I would like to ask the minister whether the minister is considering, I believe, the program that's in B.C. where individuals that are inspectors of homes are duly licensed and insured for errors and omissions.

Mr. Selinger: We're not actively pursuing that at the moment. Anybody buying a major asset like a home usually makes arrangements to get somebody who they think is knowledgeable to look at it with them if they're concerned about it.

We're not presently planning a licensed inspector regime in Manitoba. I've been talking more about the warranty protection, and there are private consultants available that an individual can engage when they want to buy a home, that will give them an opinion on the quality of it if they wish. You know, a consumer has to make sure they're getting an informed opinion from the person they ask. At this

stage of the game there is not active consideration going on with a licensing regime. The member will know in B.C., there are some very unique circumstances with the extremely expensive homes and wetness and water damage, and it's been a big issue out there, I think, going back at least 15 years. So they've had some very specific circumstances which have not transpired in Manitoba. We haven't had those kinds of problems.

Once again, I would have to say that based on the number of complaints I've received, the quality of homes is quite high in Manitoba. A lot of the homes are being built to Power Smart standards now, and there is a look at it strengthening building standards in the Department of Labour in terms of energy efficiency, and these things tend to have beneficial effects in terms of overall quality as well.

So I think we're reasonably well-served subject to any more complaints I might get. But I've asked them to proactively look at how they could strengthen the program.

Mr. Borotsik: I think we're prepared for clause by clause.

Mr. Chairperson: Seeing no further questions, we will now move to voting on resolutions.

Resolution 7.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,121,000 for Finance, Treasury, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 7.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$6,554,000 for Finance, Comptroller, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 7.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$18,049,000 for Finance, Taxation, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 7.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,431,000 for Finance, Taxation, Economic and Intergovernmental Fiscal Research, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 7.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$473,000 for Finance, Insurance and Risk Management, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

* (16:00)

Resolution 7.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$7,945,000 for Finance, Treasury Board Secretariat, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 7.8: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$12,086,000 for Finance, Consumer and Corporate Affairs, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 7.9: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$3,956,000 for Finance, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 7.10: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$44,121,000 for Finance, Net Tax Credit Payments, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 7.11: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$903,000 for Finance, capital investment, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for Estimates of this department is item 7.1.(a) Minister's Salary, contained in Resolution 7.1.

The floor is open for questions; seeing none—

Resolution 7.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,233,000 for Finance, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

This now completes the Estimates for the—oh, the honourable Member for Brandon West.

Mr. Borotsik: I just would like to make a comment. The minister certainly had given his comments. With respect to the civil service, I would just like to say that all members of the minister's staff have shown total professionalism, and I do appreciate the fact that they did have the information available to them, and the information that wasn't available certainly was forthcoming. So I would just like to congratulate the minister and his staff for a job well done. I know they're going to miss these wonderful meetings now every afternoon, but we'll be here same time, same place next year, so thank you.

Mr. Selinger: Thank you. Thank you for your comments and thanks for your questions.

Mr. Chairperson: This completes the Estimates for the Department of Finance.

AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND RURAL INITIATIVES

Mr. Chairperson (Rob Altemeyer): The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives.

Seeking the advice of the committee, shall we briefly recess to allow that minister, critic and staff the opportunity to—

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Chairperson: Seeing no recess, we will continue.

Will the Committee of Supply please, once again, come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, as has been previously agreed.

Questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner. The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Chair, no, I won't be too hard on the minister this afternoon. I'll be very, very specific with a couple of questions.

I did raise issue in the House as it pertains to the level of funding for our ag societies which, ultimately, do spawn some fairly major tourism attractions here in the province of Manitoba. I'm speaking specifically of the Austin Threshermen's Reunion and the Royal Winter Fair in Brandon. It has been, shall I say, stable funding for quite a lengthy period of time. With the demands on these

particular volunteer organizations that make these events happen, the stable funding won't cut it any longer.

Is the minister ever considerate of what has taken place in other jurisdictions across Canada and encouraging a colleague of hers at the Cabinet table—that being from Tourism—that perhaps some additional funding from Tourism, recognizing that Tourism does have the Star Attraction signage for these particular events and venues? So, already, the Austin Threshermen's Reunion and the Manitoba Agricultural Museum is recognized as a Star Attraction and outside of signage, I don't believe they get any funding from Tourism. The funding that they are receiving from the Department of Agriculture is no longer adequate.

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): The member is accurate when he says that the funding has remained stable. There haven't been changes in it. But I would share with the member that, in fact, in other provinces, ag societies are not funded in the way that ours are through this department.

Ms. Flor Marcelino, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Sometimes the ag societies in other provinces look at us with envy, that we are able to continue, whether it be with ag societies or whether it be in programs like 4H where we have continued to maintain that connection and that commitment from our staff to work with them. So there may not be an increase in granting of funding, but you have to also account for the staff support that is there as well. We work very closely with them.

Along with ag societies, we support the Agriculture Hall of Fame. We give them an annual grant. We do some branding projects with them. The Manitoba Agricultural Museum gets grants. Centennial Farm—there's a budget for that.

As well, I have to just share with the member, he talks about tourism and I was just at Capturing Opportunities the other day in Brandon and one of the things that we announced was an agri-tourism strategy. We've done some work on that and now we're working very closely with Tourism to be sure that agricultural events are included and we're working on this strategy. We will be bringing a group of people to look further at how we can enhance tourism and agriculture. Fairs, roadside

market gardening, all of those kinds of things, bed and breakfasts, all of those are very important and we value them and want to continue to work to enhance and have people become more aware and see more of Manitoba.

As the economy tightens up, people are looking for things to do closer to home. They talk about the hundred-mile diet; well, I talk about hundred-mile recreation, and there are a lot of things that all of our little communities have and we're supporting them.

* (16:10)

Mr. Faurshou: I do appreciate the minister and, certainly, the staff recognize the value of some of the events and organizations that she mentioned, but I still come back to the last statement I made, that the viability of the events is in jeopardy based upon the current level of funding and the ability of the agri-community. It may be a slight bit of an exaggeration, but with the testing of boilers for the Threshermen's Reunion as a requirement now, the statement was made that we may not have a single boiler to fire up in two years' time, and that will see the end to that particular event.

Ms. Wowchuk: Along with that, the support that we provide, I want the member to know that Culture, Heritage and Tourism provided \$129,700 for the operating expenses at Austin Museum. So, not only in this department, but in other departments, and that's why—that sort of ties in to what I'm saying about an agri-tourism strategy and why both have to work very closely together and look at how we can do further promotion of those rural events because there's a lot of our history there.

Mr. Faurshou: Well, I thank the minister for additional information, but I don't think it changes the bottom line, the statement that was made that they don't think they'll see a boiler fired in two years' time.

Now, another point that I would like to ask: In the times of cost cutting, is the department no longer supporting the Century Farm program that was one that was recognized throughout the province as one that celebrated the family heritage and continues operation by one single family of a farm for over a hundred years. Has that now changed?

Ms. Wowchuk: Absolutely not. We still provide signs to Century Farms. In 2008 we provided 36 signs to Century Farms and four replacement signs.

Mr. Faursehou: So, in a go-forward, there has been no change in funding, staff allocation, or support for Century Farm recognition?

Ms. Wowchuk: No, there has not, and there is no plan to do that.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Just to follow-up on the announcement that was made on Friday by the minister and also with the Minister of Culture, Heritage, Tourism and Sport (Mr. Robinson), the minister outlined that \$129,000 has been allocated for the Austin Museum as one of those projects that would be receiving money. My question is, could she outline for us the format on how this money will be targeted to increase tourism through agriculture and how much money will be made available for those groups and sectors to access?

Ms. Wowchuk: I did not announce a fund of money. What I announced, that there would be an agri-tourism strategy put in place to look at how tourism and agriculture could work together with the variety of people that are involved in various aspects of tourism on the agriculture sector: bed and breakfasts, fairs, rodeos, all those variety of things. I was just pointing out to the member opposite, when he talked about the Austin Museum, that not only was this department supporting them, but Culture, Heritage and Tourism was supporting them, and that those were funds from Culture, Heritage and Tourism, but they have nothing to do with the announcement that I made on Friday.

Mr. Eichler: Back to the announcement then. On the committee that's going to be struck, how will that committee be formatted, and how will the representatives be selected in order to pursue those partners that she's trying to attract in rural communities? *[inaudible]* be done in consultation with the ongoing organizations that are there, I know in particular in the Interlake region we have the Interlake Tourism organization which does a fantastic job. Are these the types of individuals and organizations that the minister's planning on consulting with or working with in order to provide that Agri-Tourism Advisory Committee?

Ms. Wowchuk: The member is accurate when he says that we have a broad range of people that are involved in tourism and pointing out the Interlake Tourism group. Those groups do some very good work in their area. So what we will have—and I should say that since I made the announcement on Thursday last week there's been a lot of interest.

People have been coming to us and saying, you know, they're interested in working on this. So that's quite good.

So we will look at sectors, but we also have to look at the geographic areas to see that we have a broad representation, but we will be working very closely with Culture, Heritage and Tourism as we establish this advisory council because it's being done on their model of how their advisory council works. So we'll be working closely with them, Travel Manitoba and the Tourism Secretariat.

Mr. Eichler: In regard to the committee then and the appointment, Madam Acting Chairperson, is there a specific number of representatives that the minister is looking at putting on this particular advisory committee, and will they be appointed or will they be selected by recommendations brought forward by other organizations?

Ms. Wowchuk: The department will have the final say of who's going to be on the committee, but we'll be seeking all kinds of guidance because, as I said earlier, there's a broad range of people, and we want to be sure that we cover off the sectors but also the regional areas.

It's our intent to have this council made up of 12 to 15 people. So what I'm saying—about in that range of people and have them meet about four times a year.

Mr. Eichler: Could the minister explain: Will there be a budget for this particular group as far as expenses and attending meetings? I guess, lastly, will there be any dollars attached to it in order to assist in growing the agri-trade industry that's been proposed in this particular sector?

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

* (16:20)

Ms. Wowchuk: Yes, there is a budget. We budget about \$9,000. There will be a staffperson that works with them, but the \$9,000 is to cover their travel. There is no honourarium that is attached to this.

We have to remember that this is developing a strategy. Once they develop some of these strategies and build on the work that we have been doing, we have to also—*[interjection]* We've been doing a lot of work on this. There was a study that was done. Based on that study, that's how we came up with the suggestion and the project for the advisory committee.

The goal is to develop strategies, but, ultimately, for it to be successful, we have to have buy-in from the industry, and there will be various things that will be done to encourage the buy-in from the industry.

Mr. Eichler: Yes, there has to be a buy-in. We all realize that. On the study, who did the study and how was it developed in order to obtain the information to determine, first of all, how the structure would be set up and how it might work in consultation with Manitoba Culture, Heritage, Tourism and Sport.

Ms. Wowchuk: It's important that we move on this, that we get this work done, because we're aiming towards Manitoba Homecoming 2010, so a lot of work is being done to get there.

There was a group of people that worked with a consultant to develop the provincial agri-tourism strategy. We worked in partnership with Travel Manitoba, the Tourism Secretariat, Manitoba Country Vacations Association, Manitoba Culture, Heritage, Tourism and Sport and Manitoba Regional Tourism Network. So all of these people came together and developed this.

One thing, they developed a paper and one of the recommendations was to put this committee together to review the strategy. So that will be the first work the committee does, is review the strategy and then look at how we can make these improvements and have it done for Homecoming 2010.

Mr. Eichler: I think that gives me a good background on that particular issue.

The minister did mention about Homecoming for 2010, and I refer back to January 16, 2001, where the Province outlined the new vision launched for agriculture industry and goals set to be achieved through to year 2010.

I was wondering if the minister could update the House in regard to that particular project and whether or not those goals will be achieved. If not, what are the concerns that we need to be looking forward to in order to meet those particular initiatives?

Ms. Wowchuk: It's very interesting that the member should ask this question, because I was at a meeting on Saturday where somebody asked the very same question. They said, you've done your vision 2010. You're in 2009; have you met the goals? What I said, then, was that's a benchmark that you set, but you don't. Nobody has gone back through the pages, page by page, and said have you met this, have you met

that. What we have done is used that as a benchmark as we do our priorities and strategies. It's an ongoing process.

We did that vision, and then we did the Creating Opportunities that we did the consultation on where we had input. Now we are working on the Growing Forward Initiative and all of them are building on it. Having been asked the question twice, once on Saturday and today, I think that I will pull out that document again and—there it is, right there; he has it; I have one in my office and—just look at it. I would venture to guess that we have been pretty close to the mark on some of the things that are in that vision statement. In other cases, we have far exceeded it, and we will continue to build on that benchmark, work with all of the other things, because it is ongoing. The world changes, our economy changes, opportunities change, and so we just build on it.

Mr. Eichler: I suggest to the minister that, yes, I would suggest that she does dust it off and have a good look. Actually, it's some excellent reading. As far as I'm concerned, I think that we as leaders in our communities have a responsibility to ensure that we do have a vision not only for our livestock producers, but our province as a whole.

I commend the staff and the minister to take that initiative. There are some concerns in there. I won't get into them today just because of the lack of time. We do need to wrap up tomorrow, according to my House Leader.

In regard to the 2010, I think this ties in quite well and that's on the economic development success that was in the press release of April 24, that the minister just got back from last week. It talks about the interagency services to develop economic success.

I'd like to ask the minister how this is going to be working with those existing facilities that are already under way and how they're going to phase this in in order to work with the stakeholders to discuss those initiatives that will be so important to the economic success of the province, in particular, agriculture.

Ms. Wowchuk: We did release a report. I can say to the member that this report that was drafted, the various people that are involved in economic aid development, whether it be municipalities or community futures, or regional development for corporations or economic development people, they were all consulted. They were brought into the same room and talked about how we were delivering

services, how we might be able to improve on those services, and this report was written. That's the first one, and now we have to go to the next step.

Again, when I made the announcement and released the report on Friday, I said to people, you were part of developing this report and now I want you to look at it, and now we have to look at how we can move to the next phase and implement. As there was consultation at the first phase, there will be consultation again, because there are some very good people out there. What tends to happen, as we've seen, is that people sometimes operate in silos, and there isn't enough communication or linkage between the various delivery mechanisms. So we want to look at how we can improve on that and people will be involved.

* (16:30)

Mr. Eichler: The consultation, could the minister outline for us the people that actually were involved in that consultation process? Was it the Community Futures people? Was it departmental staff or others that were part of that consultation process?

Ms. Wowchuk: There was a variety of people that participated in a few meetings. There was meetings with municipalities, municipal leaders. Mr. Chair, there was the Community Futures, regional development corporations. There was the Aboriginal economic development agencies, the non-Aboriginal economic development agencies, local governments, leadership organizations, and government of Manitoba departments and agencies were involved or consulted with.

Mr. Eichler: The minister, in her previous comments, had responded in regard to the second phase process that was going to start dealing with the recommendations and discuss some ways to move forward on that. Will there be staff appointed to this particular project? Will it be new people that will be involved, and will there be a board that'll also be appointed to deal with this particular initiative?

Ms. Wowchuk: As I said, people are just having the opportunity to review what was said at that process, but, certainly, we haven't finalized the process about how we're going to deal with the next phase. Certainly, staff will be involved and those people that were involved before. I anticipate that there will be additional consultation with rural and northern economic development stakeholders so that they can have the opportunity to give feedback on what they

saw, what they heard and how we can then move to the next step of making improvements.

Ultimately, this is about the service that we deliver and how we might be able to deliver it better and be there in a very open way when people are looking for economic development services.

Mr. Eichler: Also on the weekend we saw a significant project that was being developed in The Narrows in regard to a new hotel and waterslide. Will this be part of the job or the success of this particular economic engine to assist in other developments such as this to help move forward growth in rural Manitoba to see that it, in fact, does have the people in place to help work through the economic challenges that we all have in rural Manitoba in regard to helping get the right dollars in place, get the right players at the table in order to ensure that those projects move forward?

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, the member raised the project in the Interlake, which, indeed, looks like a very exciting project. I hope that he will mention, also, or if he won't, I will, the insert that was in the *Free Press* on the weekend as well. We've had two good articles, two. First we had one a week ago on the value of the agriculture industry and economy of this province and, then, last week, the feature was successful rural communities. The one that stands out in my mind was Portage la Prairie and how they're having growth there. There are many communities that are having growth and there are many people that are involved in economic development. Some are big projects, some are very small projects, but each one of those is valuable to our rural communities.

So it's not about who's going to be involved with the type of projects that are here, it's about how do we give the most effective and efficient supports to people when they are doing these. And as I said, on some very large projects, many people could be involved in it, but how do we best deal with all of these.

So this is what this process is about, looking at the people that are out there delivering economic developments and removing some of the silos, so that people don't feel like they have to go to each individual office. If we could find a way that they would connect and have, very much, a single-window approach to some of this, I think we could streamline and encourage business a lot more. Because, sometimes, when you have this idea,

sometimes it might be a financial issue, sometimes it might be a marketing issue, but if we could all work together in a more efficient and effective manner, I think we could help business quite a bit.

Mr. Eichler: Just my last question in regard to the economic announcement. The staff that's currently in place in regard to the economic development strategy, will there be any new positions created as a result of this or will it be absorbed within the mandate of the staff that's already in place?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chair, when we reorganized the department, we put in place people throughout the province. So we have a good team of rural economic development people. So those are the people that will take the leadership in rural economic development, and I don't anticipate new staff. It's a matter of bringing the various groups together.

Mr. Eichler: Just to follow up to that, a question was put forward by the Member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire), and that had to do with the contract for Clay Serby, a Manitoba Connects study that I was able to go and have a look at. Was this contract tendered or was it an appointment for this Serby Consulting–Manitoba Connects–and how will that report be used?

Ms. Wowchuk: That was the report we are talking about. It was an untendered contract. I was looking for somebody who would be able to lead us in the discussion. Clay Serby has a lot of experience. He was a minister in Saskatchewan, as you know, and he has worked in community economic development, so we offered the contract to him, but it was not tendered.

Mr. Eichler: Then phase two of the question was, how would this initiative that was brought forward to the minister as a result of her request for this report, how is that going to be used in rural economic development strategy as a result of how she's preparing to outline the economic development that was in her press release?

* (16:40)

Ms. Wowchuk: Serby outlined, as he consulted with that broad range of people, he came back and he outlined a number of areas that he saw where we needed to do some further work. That was part of the discussion that I had in Brandon with the various economic development people and municipal people there.

So now the job is to look at what he has identified, look at where there has to be some further work and then, just engage the people that are out there, the people that are doing the economic development, engage them in a discussion as to how we can move forward on these recommendations. Ultimately, the goal is how could we improve under the services that we're delivering. It is the people that are involved in the delivery and the people who are using this service that can tell us where we should make improvements. That's the intent. This is what he saw and we will now, very shortly, begin to do further work on it.

Mr. Eichler: In regard to the follow-up to this, and the minister referred to it, there are going to be other consultations and the process that goes through in order to implement some of these strategies that have been recommended before they become actually part of the economic growth and strategy. Will this be done by Mr. Serby? Will it be done by the staff? What's the process that's going to be followed in regard to the next step?

Ms. Wowchuk: That decision hasn't been made. I just released the report on Friday. Now staff is working on some recommendations of what the next step should be. Mr. Chair, once that makes those recommendations, we will make a decision as to whether we can do it internally or whether there is need to hire an outside consultant again. But the decision has not been made.

Mr. Eichler: As we know, this all costs a substantial amount of money in regard to advertising and cost to get people to and from meetings and result of that. Could the minister outline the details in her department about your annual advertising budget with the aim of getting your department promoted, the cost of those ads and where they aired?

Ms. Wowchuk: I may not be answering the question correctly, but if the member is talking particularly about this process, whether it was advertising done to hold these consultation meetings, there was no advertising. It was done by letter, by invitation. So no advertising budget for this particular program.

Mr. Eichler: That's good to know. Also, Mr. Chair, I do want to ask the minister, though, about her annual advertising budget and the amount of money that was spent in her particular department, the cost of those ads and where they ran. Were they all interprovincial, or any out-of-province ads that may have been run? If we could get a list of those as well.

Ms. Wowchuk: The member, first of all, asked about out-of-province advertising. We do very little out-of-province advertising. However, we have to have, when we're trying to find some French language skills for a particular position, and we haven't been able to find that, so, as a result, we've had to run out-of-province ads to try to find that particular position, and that's for the agri-energy specialist; we're looking for one for the St. Laurent office.

When there are local events, the regions have an advertising—they can advertise in the region. The corporation, AMASK [*phonetic*], does quite a bit of advertising. When it comes to programs and deadlines, it's important that we have that kind of advertising done, and that's done by the corporation. Then you'll see some advertising for AgriStability, and those are the federal ads and we do some of those jointly. We also do a weather warning service and some advertising on the department services, and that budget is about—for the weather, our budget's about \$150,000, but then there would be some extra money that the local people would—local advertising and the corporation's budget would be separate than this—I wouldn't have that number here.

Mr. Eichler: So the total weather warning was \$150,000. What's the total advertising budget then as far as total costs are concerned?

Ms. Wowchuk: I was giving examples of—I said the weather warnings and departmental services total would be about 150,000.

Mr. Eichler: Just to follow-up on that, the advertising dollars then, is there any other shared advertising the department has in regard to sharing ads in regard from one department to the other, or is this just all from her department?

Ms. Wowchuk: We don't have very much joint with other departments. Our joint advertising would be more on a cost-sharing with the federal government on the BRMs, or on crop insurance. Those would be shared with the federal government. On the weather one that I mentioned, that one would be shared with IGA and maybe even LIT, because the weather conditions are important to everybody. So that would be our share, but others could share in that as well.

* (16:50)

Mr. Eichler: Thank you, Madam Minister. I do have some other political questions I'd like to get out of

the way for today. Tomorrow we do have to, as I said earlier, try to wrap up.

In regard to your SA, you have a new one since we last had the Estimates debate. Could the minister identify her SA for us?

Ms. Wowchuk: My special assistant is Matthew Grandel.

Mr. Eichler: Is there any other political staff that have been hired or through appointment as a result since '08-09?

Ms. Wowchuk: The only other change in staff I have had is a new secretary that came into my office.

Mr. Eichler: Would the minister clarify for us whether that position was through competition or was it an appointed position?

Ms. Wowchuk: It's an appointment from my office.

Mr. Eichler: Also, could the minister describe any position that's been reclassified at this particular point from '08-09?

Ms. Wowchuk: My secretary moved on to another job so there was some movement in the office. One person moved up and that's where we got the new secretary into my office.

Mr. Eichler: Then the vacant positions that are currently in her department, is there a list of those that you can provide us with, or do you have a list that we could have access to at another time if you don't have it here.

Ms. Wowchuk: We don't have a list of the vacancies right now, but if that was something the member is looking for, we could compile it. But we don't have it here.

Mr. Eichler: If the minister could get that for us, we'd certainly appreciate it.

Then my next question in regard to the staff years, are they currently all filled?

Ms. Wowchuk: Are we talking about in the whole department, or in my office?

Mr. Eichler: In your department.

Ms. Wowchuk: No, we have vacancies. We have vacancies in the department.

Mr. Eichler: Then could we get the details on those as well? If it's not available, then we'd have it read into the record or mailed to me later.

Ms. Wowchuk: We have a total of 463 staff, and we have 56.8 vacancies for a 12.27 percent vacancy rate.

Mr. Eichler: Thank you, Madam Minister. Are there going to be any contracts awarded in the upcoming budget year? If so, what contracts would they be, and how would they be awarded?

Ms. Wowchuk: We do many contracts in this department: contracts for supplying of material; our vet services, some of them are done on contract; laboratory services are contracts; there are contracts for irrigation, and most of our external client applications are based on, you know, based on a contract. When there are grants for innovation or innovation suite of ag supports, those are when people apply for the funds, they have to sign a contract. There are contracts in research as well. So a lot of the work is on a contract basis.

Mr. Eichler: How many of these contracts would be untendered?

Ms. Wowchuk: What we're talking about is an application process that's on a contract basis. But when people make—or are applying for the programs, once they've got the funding, they sign a contract.

In the last year, we had four untendered contracts over \$25,000. So the amount of contracts that we have is—the amount of work that we do, I think, and the kinds of contracts that the member is asking about is very low. All of the other application is a different kind of contract.

Mr. Eichler: Could we get a list of those four untendered contracts for the record?

Ms. Wowchuk: The first untendered contract was for rental of audiovisual equipment for the Capturing Opportunities Conference. There was a sole supplier contract with a local company in Brandon.

The second untendered contract was for facility rental at the Keystone Centre for the Capturing Opportunities Conference. This was considered a sole supplier.

The third contract was for MAFRI's contribution to the production of *Great Tastes of Manitoba*, a television show.

The fourth untendered contract was a plot demonstration trial for new seed varieties in six locations in Manitoba.

Mr. Eichler: Since the minister has that handy, could we have the names of the companies that were appointed by this, and the amount of money?

Ms. Wowchuk: We'll have to check and get the exact details, but I can say that the second untendered contract was with Keystone Centre, because theirs was the facility. The *Great Tastes of Manitoba* was with Hummer Productions, and we will just verify the other two and bring that back to tomorrow's Estimates.

Mr. Chairperson: The hour being 5 o'clock, committee rise.

EDUCATION, CITIZENSHIP AND YOUTH

* (14:40)

Madam Chairperson (Bonnie Korzeniowski): This section of the Committee of Supply has been dealing with the Estimates of the Department of Education, Citizenship and Youth. Would the minister's staff please enter the Chamber.

We are on page 71 of the Estimates book. As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Madam Chair, one of the Hutterian colonies have been in touch with me lately. I have some 17 or 18 colonies in my constituency, so it is a rather large contingent of them. There's been some questions about funding and whether they qualify for small-school funding or what precise funding they do qualify for. These are funded independent schools in that the colony is responsible for the capital assets of the colony, but this particular colony uses the Manitoba curriculum of Manitoba teachers, and this particular colony is also less than 30 students.

So do they qualify for the small-schools grant, and perhaps if you could expand on what grants they are eligible for.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): I thank the member for the question. The Hutterite schools are independent schools and some of them are under that designation, an independent school. They are funded through a formula which takes into account all of the expenditures related to the public school funding.

That's a formula that has been around for quite some time.

Mr. Pedersen: So, in regard to the special funding for small schools that came out of the moratorium on school closures, is this colony school of less than 30

pupils eligible for any funding under that arrangement?

Mr. Bjornson: As stated earlier, this would be considered to be an independent school that is funded on a formula basis for all independent schools. As an independent school, it would not be eligible for any special grants that are designated for the public school system in that, first of all, students who would attend the school are all from the colony and no other students are attending that school as such.

The other thing that the member should keep in mind is that it is a special arrangement that allows these schools to be developed on the colony, and I don't anticipate that you'll see school closures on the colony when that is a colony-built school.

The small schools grant that was brought into place was to assist school boards in maintaining small schools and part of the grant structure that includes declining enrolment and other such grants that are for public school funding but not for the independent schools.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you. Okay, they're classified as independent schools, and for the most part, most of the colonies that I know about have only Hutterian children attending, but they are actually open to the public. If someone in the neighbourhood wanted to go to these schools, they would be eligible to go to it, right? Correct?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, I'm not aware of any situations where that has been the case where students who are not from the colony are attending any Hutterian schools. I'm not aware of that occurring anywhere in the province.

Mr. Pedersen: But the question was: Is there anything stopping them? The reason I ask is because when I was talking to Sam and he says, and he's a couple of years older than me, and he said when he went to school, there were some neighbour kids going to the Hutterite school.

Now this is a couple of years ago, so it's not current. But is there anything stopping from—is there any policy that says they cannot attend a Hutterite school?

Mr. Bjornson: I'm not aware of any policies that would prevent non-Hutterian students from attending a Hutterian school. We just know it's not something that we see in practice.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you for that answer and it may actually end up being that way. With the rural depopulation we may see that in the future that when there are colonies there that—and it's only speculation whether it's coming. It's not here now but it's something to keep in mind. It may happen sooner rather than later.

Now just so I can go back to Mr. Gross and give him some information; is there a written policy in regard to Hutterian school, the Hutterian school agreements, can he reference that or if there is not a written policy is there someone he can talk to because he's quite concerned that the school division is not allowing him to access some of the funding.

Mr. Bjornson: I can give the honourable member two names for his constituent to consider contacting. He could contact either David Yeo, Y-e-o, or Steve Power. David Yeo or Steve Power are the two individuals that he could feel free to contact if he has issues around funding.

Mr. Pedersen: They would be in your department in Winnipeg?

Mr. Bjornson: That's correct. Steve is actually sitting right in front of me and David will give us a wave from the gallery.

Mr. Pedersen: Well, I thank the minister for the answers and I will go back to Mr. Gross and have a conversation with him and I'm sure that he will be in conversation with Mr. Yeo and Mr. Power in the coming days. Thank you.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): I know throughout the afternoon other colleagues will probably take the opportunity to come in and ask a few questions that are relevant to their community.

I had the opportunity to peruse through *Hansard*, and basically the place where we left off was where we were discussing the developer of Waverley West being the minister and the kinds of decisions that were being made.

The minister indicated that a site had been allocated and that it was going to be part of the development plan. Can the minister tell us when the development plan will be tabled or will be ready to be accessed indicating where the high school will be placed, where exactly it'll be placed?

* (14:50)

Mr. Bjornson: The time frame would be between 12 and 18 months, as work is ongoing right now in neighbourhood A, as I referenced yesterday in putting it into context where exactly the site would be located. We will certainly provide updates as we proceed with this designation and as the development plan is approved.

Mr. Schuler: I didn't understand that answer whatsoever. Could the minister please explain it in layman terms?

Is the development plan complete, it's just not been tabled with the city? Is it still a work in progress? With the development plan, of course, come maps and all the rest of it where people can look to see where the future streets are supposed to go through and the site where a future high school would be built. How far away are we from that point in time?

Mr. Bjornson: How far are we from that point? Twelve to 18 months from that point.

Madam Chairperson: The member is requesting you to repeat the answer.

Mr. Bjornson: I will. I see he's got his earpiece on now. The time frame that you're asking about is approximately 12 to 18 months.

Madam Chairperson: The honourable minister, could he please repeat that one more time?

Mr. Bjornson: If I understood the member's question correctly, he was wondering at what point will we be at the stage where a clear development plan with maps and clear indications of the development, whether it's residential, commercial, or for recreational purposes or for school sites—if that's what the question is, it's approximately 12 to 18 months before we'll be at that particular stage.

Mr. Schuler: Yes, that was the question and that was the answer we were looking for.

The minister indicated yesterday that, after much chest thumping and table pounding, that the cap, the hard-line cap that he had put on for busing, that no more than an hour was to be allowed. He indicates yesterday that that was actually just a mere guideline, a target to shoot for. I'm wondering if a school division can't quite meet that target, is it just okay or do you have to report that to somebody or is it until somebody complains? How is it, for instance, if it's, let's say, an hour-and-20-minute ride and they haven't quite made the hour cap. Is there a process

that they're supposed to go to? Whom do they appeal to, whom do they speak to?

Mr. Bjornson: Again, I'd ask the member not to create this false image of me pounding my chest and pounding the table because I haven't done that. I've worked co-operatively with school divisions on many files, as we continue to do. I've never said that this is a hard and fast cap; we've said this is a target. We said that the school divisions have five years to hopefully achieve this target, and that's something that we will be working with the school divisions as they assess what costs might be incurred, if it means some acquisition of more buses and what that might mean for the school divisions, et cetera.

There's a lot of things that need to be discussed around this objective, and I think it's a very positive thing, a positive objective. As mentioned, we feel students should be spending more time in school and less time on the bus, so for them to be on a bus for more than an hour on either side of the school day, especially for the young children, that can be quite a hardship, not only for the children, but I would imagine, for the bus driver who's tasked with having a number of very young children on a bus for a prolonged period of time.

I did mention yesterday to the member that, yes, we acknowledge that in some cases that will be impossible, that people live that far away from schools, that we know that the ride will be more than an hour. What we're asking school divisions to do and asking them to co-operate and work with us to achieve this end is to make their best effort to reduce bus rides, wherever possible, to an hour. There are a lot of variables, as we acknowledged yesterday, whether it's inclement weather or construction issues or just purely logistical issues around the numbers of students that need to be transported and the distance that they need to transport them. So we're certainly cognizant as to what this challenge is to the school divisions, what it means to the school divisions.

It's not a hard cap. I wasn't pounding any tables or pounding my chest demanding that they do so. I'm asking them to work with us to find a solution to what I think is a very positive outcome, and that is to try to limit the ride time that students would have on either end of the school day.

Mr. Schuler: I don't think anybody particularly thinks it's a positive or progressive move to have children sit on a bus for any lengthy period of time. I used to take the bus to school, certainly, for elementary. Back then, reading on the bus wasn't

necessarily an option because they used to bounce around quite a bit. At least today, you've got electronics the kids can play on the bus, but still—too much time is just too much time on a bus.

That's why it's interesting to hear the minister sounding much more accommodating the last two days. This is actually, Madam Chair, I'd have to say, maybe when it comes to the hour-busing cap, the new and improved minister. He's taken a much softer line, and I'm glad to hear that he actually will contemplate the concept of working with school divisions. That's another positive that we've gotten out of Estimates. Perhaps we should have gotten the minister into Estimates much sooner.

Seeing as the cap on hour busing has—the minister is prepared to soften his stance and work with school divisions, I'm wondering if that also applies to his moratorium on school closings. His moratorium, is that a two-year moratorium? Is it a 10-year moratorium? Is it until-the-end-of-his-term-as-a-minister moratorium? How long is that moratorium to be in place?

Mr. Bjornson: I thank the member for the question, Madam Chair. That time frame has yet to be determined. What we would like to do through The Strengthening Local Schools Act is to ensure that school divisions look at a number of different options for the school within their community, and make it viable in whatever capacity as a public building that they should see fit.

There's a lot of great examples of how that has been successful in small schools, where, having been to The Pas during the Trappers' Festival, I was in a community school that had very low enrolment. But in that school they had an incredible number of programs for adult learners. They had a community fitness facility. They had early childhood education programs. They had a number of different initiatives.

* (15:00)

The intent of this bill, The Strengthening Local Schools Act, is to keep them viable. Another incredible success story is Kenton School, where I believe the student population is 13, or 15, I believe, is the number of students there. But they opened up an early childhood centre in that school at a minimal cost, because you have the existing infrastructure, and I believe the number of students enrolled in the early childhood education centre is approximately 22 or 24, somewhere in that neighbourhood. So you have almost double the students in the early

childhood education program as you do in the school program. So that'll keep that school viable for some time.

It's rather an interesting question because the member is talking about school closures after we were talking about minimizing the bus transportation, because I know the Member for Carman (Mr. Pedersen) was asking a question about a school that was down to 13 students or 15 students, I believe, somewhere in that neighbourhood, and we talked about why it's important to keep those small schools open in the community. When I was giving my answer, I heard him referring to the fact that we were talking about keeping bus rides low, bus-time rides low. The member was heckling about it's only six miles to the next community.

Well, it's a rather circuitous route that many buses have to take. As I mentioned, my own son in kindergarten, to go just over five kilometres was a 45-minute drive. So to suggest that closing a school that's only six miles away is going to mean a short bus ride, that's not necessarily the case. We don't know how far these children come from the surrounding community to be in that school. It could be quite a long route for them to go that extra six kilometres or six miles, whatever the case might be.

So, no, there's no time line right now in place on the moratorium. Over the course of 20 years, 60 schools have closed, and when you take that square footage as a public building and if you replace those 60 buildings, the cost at, you know, \$300-plus a square foot would be phenomenal as a public asset. Now, some of them were, mind you, age expired, and some of them were beyond repair in terms of the value of repair of that school versus replacement and whatnot. So some of those decisions to close schools made sense and the numbers were very, very low, and it made sense.

But to take a public building out of the public realm, out of the public domain, and it becomes a liability, we don't think is very prudent. So to work with schools to encourage community participation in the schools, to find a variety of uses within the community schools I think is a much better use of a public facility. During the committee hearings, we heard from people from small rural communities that a license to close the school was, essentially, a license to close their town.

So we hope that school divisions will be creative, work with the community and find ways to keep a public asset a public asset.

Mr. Schuler: What the minister doesn't mention is those 60 schools that were closed, school enrolment also dropped from 240,000 down to 180,000 children. That's 60,000 children less, and that's a reality we're facing. Declining enrolment certainly does have a lot to do with school closings.

My question to the minister is: Of the current schools that we have, does he have any idea if any of those schools that are currently open, do they have asbestos in them?

Mr. Bjornson: I understand that some of the older schools do have what is referred to as encapsulated asbestos. That is to say that the asbestos is inside a protective covering. It's not airborne. That being said, the school divisions are certainly diligent in assessing any issues around air quality and any risks to health. Certainly when these older schools that haven't been identified with encapsulated asbestos, if there's any major renovations that we undertake with the school division through the PSFB, that it is dealt with at that time.

But school divisions, if there is any immediate threat to health, do their best to remediate mould issues or deal with mould issues. We work with them very quickly when there's a health concern that might be raised because of the issues around asbestos or mould or the age of that particular structure.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): I just would like to ask a few questions to the Minister of Education in regard to my constituency.

I think that it's been said by the Premier (Mr. Doer) and several ministers in the government, there is support for day cares within schools. I'm specifically asking about Bright Beginnings day care that wants to relocate in the Phoenix School in Headingley. They put proposals in to the government and have been supported by the St. James-Assiniboia School Division and the municipality of Headingley. They were advised that they would be hearing something by mid-March and they were also advised that their application had been looked on favourably, but they have not been provided with any indication if their project has been approved. I'm just asking the minister if he can indicate if there is an approval for Bright Beginnings day care.

* (15:10)

Mr. Bjornson: Thanks for the question. I understand that, in this particular case, it's an issue of licensing through Family Services and Housing that would be contingent upon finding appropriate space. My

understanding is also that the school division, it's an ongoing discussion with the school division and whether or not there's appropriate space in that school for a day care is an issue. I understand that the assessment is that there's no appropriate space in the school for the day care, nor sufficient space, not just appropriate space, but sufficient amount of space for the day care.

Mrs. Taillieu: Madam Chair, that really sounds to me like the answer is no to Bright Beginnings to have their day care located in the Phoenix School, and they've been led to believe that this was being looked on favourably. They're in a situation in a church basement right now that is not acceptable. There's mould in the basement. It's just not an acceptable environment for children and babies. They've been looking desperately to find a place, and they thought that the option of going into the school would have been a good one. It's been supported by the municipality and, I even believe, that there was going to be some monetary support as well. I understand that the discussions between the St. James school division and the municipality of Headingley were quite favourable to this regard.

So, in any event, if the minister's going to deny the location of a day care in Phoenix School, when is he going to make that known to Bright Beginnings day care?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, quite frankly, that's not my decision to make; I don't approve or deny. It is an issue of licensing. It is an issue of finding appropriate space. We are endeavouring to find the best options working in conjunction with Family Services and Housing, with a number of individuals that have come forward looking for space within schools to accommodate day cares.

Part of our capital in the PSFB over the next five years—this past year and over the next four years—includes money set aside for the purpose of renovation to support day cares in schools. But what's critical is that the space that's available in the school that has been approached for that purpose, the space has to be suitable, and there has to be ample space, given other enrolment needs and enrolment issues that that school division might be facing in that particular building.

That being said, we've been successful with 10 school renovations this past year that are under way to support day cares within the school, and we'll continue to endeavour to work with Family Services and Housing to find appropriate space where

possible in partnership with Family Services and PSFB, when requests do come for day-care space. I certainly hope that the proponents for this particular group are successful in finding appropriate space.

Mrs. Taillieu: Madam Chair, then I will take the matter up with Family Services then.

But, on another particular school in my area, the École Saint-Eustache, this has opened up within the community a fair divisiveness with the suspected closure or relocation of the École Saint-Eustache. Now, I understand, though, that the indication from the department is that nothing is going to happen with the school in St. Eustache, so it won't be rebuilt either on that location or in another location, but much more significant, I think, is that it's not going to be refurbished. There's going to be no money put into that school.

Since they do have some issues with their windows and with asbestos, I believe, in the upper portion of the school, I'm wondering why the decision was made to not put any further money into École Saint-Eustache, and, in fact, why the minister has said it's not a priority.

Mr. Bjornson: Could I ask the member to point out where it is on the record where I said it was not a priority?

Mrs. Taillieu: Madam Chair, that was the indication I got from one of the trustees in the Prairie Rose School Division, that they were told that it wasn't a priority at this time. So, if the minister is saying that he didn't say that, there was an indication from the department at least that it wasn't a priority at this time, but that it could be considered in their five-year capital plan which it has been for some time.

So I'm kind of disappointed, I guess, in the approach that's been taken to just do nothing here, because there's been a large lobby effort on behalf of the community of St. Eustache to keep the school in St. Eustache. I know that it has been very passionate for them, because as we all know, when schools leave communities it leaves a large hole in that community. Recognizing that this is a French immersion school as well, and one of the only ones—I think the only one in the area, it's very important for the parents to know what the future plans are. Indeed, when this was opened up to the community for consultations as instructed by the finance board, the school's finance board, it did create quite a rift in the community and now all of a sudden it's just been dropped.

I'd like to ask the minister if he would commit to having another look at what they might do with École Saint-Eustache in terms of refurbishing that school.

Mr. Bjornson: Actually, we have been working very closely with the school division. I had an opportunity to tour some schools in the area. I didn't get to St. Eustache at that particular time, but I did have a chance to meet with the school board and advise them that the school moratorium is very specific, that schools are not to close during the school moratorium. My deputy minister has toured the school; he has met with the board; he's met with parents; he's met with a number of stakeholders and, quite frankly, the five-year capital plan did not include St. Eustache school until it was a PSFB that took a look and did an assessment and said this should be part of the five-year capital plan.

So to suggest that we don't think it's a priority is not accurate. We are looking at the capital needs in St. Eustache. We know that there were some concerns around air quality and mould and we know that the school had undertaken a mould remediation which was very successful. In fact, for quite some time they were testing the air every six weeks and now they're testing the air every quarter because there has been no indication that there's any health risk, but they're continuing to be diligent in testing the air quality.

It is a building that, after all, was built in 1948, I believe, and that building is not without its challenges. But we, as I said, we do know that it was a very important asset in that community and we'll continue to work with the school board to find a solution for the community, and that will include, perhaps, some short-term and long-term plans to address the needs for St. Eustache.

Mr. Schuler: I want to take the minister back to the question I asked in regard to schools—how many schools have asbestos? The minister mentioned that they are encapsulated and felt that the schools were quite safe.

The question was: How many schools currently in the province of Manitoba have been identified with asbestos in them?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, as the landlords, for lack of a better word, the school divisions would be the ones who are privy to that information. We don't have that information available to us, but we could certainly check with school divisions and see how many have

been identified to have encapsulated asbestos. As I said, certainly, when any issues concerning potential health threats such as asbestos, any of those issues are raised with us, we do work very quickly with the school boards to address those concerns through renovation or other measures as necessary. So we will try our best to get that information from the school boards and provide that information to the member.

* (15:20)

Mr. Schuler: I'm not too sure if the school boards are the landlords because actually that would be the Province. I think the school boards are more like tenants. As long as they have students and as long as they have children in the schools, they are placed in the use of a school board, but really it's the Province that owns certainly all the newer stock. There are a couple of school divisions that still own a few schools because, before the Public Schools Finance Board system was created, they still owned them.

I believe, going forward, what happened was the Province owns the buildings, and the schools maintain them on a certain level, and after that they have to go to the Province if there are major renovations. It's actually the Public Schools Finance Board that then provides the money for major renovations, and thus it's actually the Province that owns the building.

So I would say to the minister, I'm quite surprised that the issue that's going to be facing us increasingly as a province, and it's facing other provinces as well, is schools, the age of schools, the safety of the schools and the composition and the enrolment in the school.

So can I get a commitment from the minister that this is something that he would undertake to see how many of the province's schools, whether it's encapsulated or otherwise, how many of them actually do have asbestos in them?

Mr. Bjornson: Yes, as I said to the member, we will certainly endeavour to ask the school divisions if they can provide that information to us, but I would like to correct the member. The way it works is we build the schools and we hand over the keys to the school division. The school divisions are the owners of the school. The school divisions, as owners, are responsible for all liabilities on health and safety issues and maintenance. Of course, we provide support in our funding of schools for the purpose of maintenance, but school divisions are the owners of

the school. The Province does not own the schools. I just want to clarify that for the member.

Mr. Schuler: No, that's not true, no.

Mr. Bjornson: He's disagreeing with me, but, you know, that's the way it works. So, if he wants to make something up, he's welcome to do so, but I will assure the member every school that I've opened, and I've had the privilege of opening a number of them, has had a ceremony where the key has been handed over to the school division.

We do have a budget line in the budget to support school divisions in terms of the maintenance of those schools. So they are the owner of the school. It's that simple.

And, yes, we would like to find out—it's a very good point the member raises—how many schools do, indeed, contain asbestos and we will ask for that information from the owners of the schools, the school boards, to do so.

The capital budget is quite diverse in terms of what it will achieve this year in terms of the \$13 million to replace the heating and ventilation systems in 29 schools because, as the member said, we have some old infrastructure and that is a challenge, not only here in Manitoba, but across the country. Madam Chair, \$13 million for structural renewal projects at nine schools, roofing projects for 53 schools, that's \$12 million, and \$3 million to ensure that 15 more schools can accommodate students with disabilities. That's part of the capital investment this year, and that's 106 different projects that you'll see occur throughout the province of Manitoba through many of the schools that are indeed starting to show the effects of age.

But, you know, it's rather curious questioning today, given the fact that yesterday, after the member identified that, yes, we have had a decline in enrolment of 60,000 students over the past 20 years, he wants me to immediately build a school in south Winnipeg where the numbers don't warrant that right now. So it's a rather curious line of questioning because I know Pembina Trails School Division has actually had a net loss in excess of 1,600 students, if I'm not mistaken. I can get the accurate figure for the member, but there's been a net enrolment decline of 1,600 students.

We do know that growth in south Winnipeg, in Waverley West development, will necessitate the construction of a school, so I want to assure the member that we're planning appropriately for that.

Again, the school's capital covers a lot of needs, whether it's urgent needs or based on structural issues or enrolment issues or health issues, and we're also looking at planning for future needs so I want to assure the member of that.

Mr. Schuler: In the event that a school division declares a school surplus, does the school division have the right to dispose of the school however it pleases?

Mr. Bjornson: Thank you for the question. When a school has been declared surplus and when the school is vacant and no longer used for the purpose of a public school, the policy is that the school divisions must first entertain interest expressed by groups for public use of the building. But what has happened with the disposition of schools that are declared surplus, there's a number of different things that could happen. One being that, a good example, Deer Lodge school, Silver Heights school and Brooklands School in St. James school division were put on the public market, or put on the market, even though one of them has been purchased and is actually still being used as a school. I believe it's an independent school that now is housed in Brooklands.

When they sell those schools, traditionally, there is a 50-50 split, since we did build them and we did pay for them, but the school divisions are the owner, I just want to remind the member. The school division would take 50 percent of the profits of the sale and the other 50 percent of the monies would be recouped by the Public Schools Finance Board. But in the case of St. James school division, where these three schools, coincidentally, were on the market around the same time, the agreement was made that they would use that money to fund part of the renovations and expansion to Sturgeon Heights Collegiate, the former Sturgeon Creek-Silver Heights combined campuses.

So we look at the requests on a case-by-case basis, and in this case, it made sense that that money could be reinvested in the Sturgeon Heights campus. Certainly, we were there to support that initiative.

Mr. Schuler: So the department doesn't have to okay the school board selling the school. It's a decision purely by the school board. If they can't find anybody within the community to purchase the school, it's up to them to dispose of it as they wish, as long as they fork over half the cash to the minister's office. There is really no approval process

that has to be gone through; they can dispose of it as they wish. It can become a community club or it can become a SuperValu, just whatever. There's no approval process that they have to go through with the department. Is that correct?

Mr. Bjornson: Madam Chair, no, I'm sorry. I neglected to answer that part of the initial question. The Public Schools Finance Board would—approval would be required for the disposition through the Public Schools Finance Board.

* (15:30)

The example I was using was a unique one, where the request was made that they would recover 100 percent of the sale and permission was given for that. But we look at these on a case-by-case basis when the surplus schools are up for disposition and the policy is that 50 percent does go back to the Public Schools Finance Board, 50 percent to the school division because they, of course, have invested as the owners in the maintenance of that building. But, again, any disposition has to be approved by the PSFB.

When the minister looks at the schools, and, certainly, I understand it's not the minister himself and it's probably not even the deputy minister, I mean, there are individuals within the department who do this. When they go through the buildings, do they look at the safety of the buildings and what would be the state of the safety of school buildings currently in the province?

Mr. Bjornson: Madam Chair, as a former member of the workplace safety and health committee for Evergreen School Division it was part of our responsibility as a member on that committee to not only to look at safety issues, but it is the responsibility of the school division, as I said earlier, as the owner of the school they're responsible for all liabilities around health and safety.

That being said, we recently have hired engineers within the Public Schools Finance Board to respond quickly to any concerns that might be raised around safety. They can go and work with the school divisions and assess some of the structural issues that they might have identified through their due diligence as the owners responsible for safety issues. As such, we've been able to provide more rapid response to school divisions' concerns about safety in a building and structural issues because we have the staff to do so.

Previously they had relied on the private enterprise to come and private firms to come and do so and the schools in rural Manitoba, especially, would find it difficult to get the engineers out to take a look at the building. So we've been very aggressive in working with the divisions and getting our engineers out to look at any issues that they may raise.

That's part of what the end result of our capital projects might be. As I said earlier, \$13 million for structural renewal projects at nine schools is part of that initiative where school divisions recognize the need, work with our department, our engineers work with the school divisions and, yes, those capital projects are awarded on their basis of need to address safety issues.

Mr. Schuler: Could the minister tell the committee exactly how many school buildings are currently in use in Manitoba?

Mr. Bjornson: There are 684 public schools. By 2012, of course, we'll have 689 as you know with our announcement with the new schools in Winkler, Steinbach and La Broquerie.

Going back to the last question, the member says that the minister doesn't necessarily look at structural issues in schools, but I've had the privilege of visiting 355 or 356 different schools in the province and certainly if there are issues raised by the administration or by the school division as part of that tour, they do point out some of those issues and some of those challenges. But more often than not I've been in schools where they say here's our new roof, here's our new boiler, here's our new façade, here's the success of the capital program. But there's certainly schools that do have capital issues that we're trying to address and that's why we brought in \$310 million over the next four years.

Mr. Schuler: Of the 684 schools, what is the age breakdown of those schools?

Mr. Bjornson: Thank you for the question. Approximately 200 schools were built in the 1960s, and, oddly enough, I've been advised that schools that were built between World War II perhaps and the 1960s are in the best shape, or among the best construction. They require the least amount of work, as are schools that were built post-1970. The 200 schools that were built in the '60s, oddly enough, do seem to require the lion's share of the capital investment.

We do have a chart that breaks it down. We don't have it available to us right now, but I'll gladly provide it for the member. The average age of the schools would be—the average measure would be the year 1961, a little bit older than me, and I'm not so sure if it's—well, I won't go there. But the average age measure would be 1961.

Mr. Schuler: Well, seeing as the minister floated that one out there, you know, I wasn't even contemplated in 1961. That's, yeah, before my time.

I appreciate that the minister doesn't have that information in front of him. That would be something that, certainly, the committee would appreciate having a look at, and that can be sent at a later date.

The minister mentions it seems to be the 1945 to 1960 school range that those facilities require less renovations than the '60s to '70s, I think he said.

Can the minister tell us why there seems to be a group of schools in there that require a lot of maintenance?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, certainly, Madam Chairperson, in the 1960s, there was incredible population growth and a need to respond to that growth in a very timely fashion, so there was a good number of schools that were built in the 1960s. Also, especially in rural Manitoba, you still had a lot of the one-room schoolhouses, and there's been a lot of reorganization of school boundaries, school districts, school divisions. So, come 1960, the population growth, the reorganization of boundaries, the reorganization of school divisions, or districts into divisions, kind of combined to necessitate the rapid construction, if you will, of a number of schools.

I know, in my own constituency and neighbouring constituencies in rural Manitoba, if you look at the high school in Gimli and the high school in Arborg and the high school in Riverton, those schools were all built within a couple of years of each other because we were going from the single-room schoolhouse model to high schools being built in these areas. So you had a number of schools built very quickly in a very short time frame.

I can't speak to the construction standards of the 1960s, but certainly a lot of those schools have required a lot of attention, and I think a lot of it can be attributed to how quickly they were built.

Mr. Schuler: Just taking some of the numbers the minister has provided, and he indicates there are 684

public schools currently being used, and taking the 180,000 students approximately in Manitoba, it comes to about 263 students per school.

I was wondering, has the department looked at Statistics Canada numbers, and where do they see, in the next 10 years, the enrolment of students in the public school system in Manitoba? Where do they see that number going?

* (15:40)

Mr. Bjornson: I thank the member for the question. You might recall part of the conversation that we held yesterday with your colleague the Member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck), who talked about the growth that he was experiencing in his community. Of course, that was very much immigration-driven, but also recognizing that there will be approximately 1,000 births at Boundary Trails, that now it's also going to be driven from a high birth rate in those areas. He also spoke to the fact that the neighbouring Western School Division is likely going to see the type of growth in the not-so-distant future that had been experienced in Garden Valley and in Hanover.

That being said, these are the exception to the rule. Most school divisions are continuing to see declining enrolment, and the expectation is that the trend will continue for the next five to 10 years. A lot of the growth that you will see in Manitoba will continue to be driven by immigration, but over the next five to 10 years, we can expect to see some declining enrolment. I should also let the member know when he did his calculation on the number of students that might be in each school, a couple of years ago I'd asked the Public Schools Finance Board to undertake an occupancy assessment to determine how many students we had in schools and what the school's capacity was originally designed for as part of an initiative to support more community engagement in the school, which eventually ended up being The Strengthening Local Schools Act in Bill 28. Also, prior to that, we had established a committee through Education, Citizenship and Youth to look at community use of schools, and of course there have been recommendations made to myself from that committee on alternate uses for the schools to keep those schools viable.

I've just been handed some information that—I'll just have to digest this information for a moment, but I think I might add that to my next answer.

Mr. Doug Martindale, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Schuler: The question I have is, in the projections that are coming through Stats Canada, is there a bottom—sort of where the numbers bottom out and then it looks like the numbers might stabilize—or is there just no foreseeable end to the continued slide in the number of students in the public school system?

Mr. Bjornson: There are a couple of variables that make it pretty difficult to determine exactly what those numbers might be, of course, as the member can appreciate. But, based on existing patterns, case in point the immigration growth and the influx of new immigrants to Manitoba, but also the fact that First Nations communities have among the fastest growing population in the province, as well as the youngest population in the province, but, of course, in that regard, First Nations do remain the fiduciary responsibility of the federal government and many of them are students in First Nations schools, but we certainly have a high number of First Nations students who have tuition agreements with the public schools and attend public schools under our domain.

That being said, we can expect the declining enrolment to continue until approximately 2015, with those anomalies in mind and those variables in mind, I should say. To pinpoint exactly what the low point would be in declining enrolment is very difficult to do, but understanding of demographics, birth rates and immigration rates would suggest that by 2015, we might hit the low point and that the population may start to grow again and our student population in our schools by that time.

Mr. Schuler: So, when the department plans what they're going to do with infrastructure, do they keep that in mind as well? When the minister makes decisions insofar as a cap on busing, and the minister has indicated that any time on a school bus is hardly good use of time, but children still have to be transported. The moratorium, has he sort of factored all that into his decision making when he brought those two policies forward in the last sitting?

Mr. Bjornson: I thank the member for the question.

The policy around the school closures and around targeted bus time, again, it's not a cap; it's not a hard, fast cap, as the member repeatedly says. It is a target, and I think a desirable one, given the impact that that can have on learning for, particularly, a

young learner, who has to spend a significant amount of time on the bus.

Those considerations were based on a number of issues. One being the economies of rural Manitoba. The members often talk about rural Manitoba and the need to support our rural communities. Members opposite talk about that very often, and we know, as I said, and I've seen it. I've seen it in my own experience in living in rural Manitoba that you close a school, and it has a tremendous impact on the community.

I think of the community of Fraserwood, 16 kilometres west of Gimli, where they used to have an early school, and that school was closed. I don't recall the year, but when that school was closed, it had quite a profound impact on that community. Those children do have very long bus rides, whether they go to Inwood School, some of them go north to Arborg, some of them to Gimli, and those students used to have a school to call their own in their community.

So the emphasis was threefold. One, in terms of the bus rides, what's good for kids? How long should they be on the bus? Certainly when you look at the bus fleet that we have in Manitoba, many of those buses will be due for replacement by the school boards over time, and it's an opportunity to look at smaller, more fuel efficient buses, and whatnot, as opposed to the buses that we have seen of late. As I said yesterday, these buses, where they used to hold 30 children, can now hold 70. So the buses got longer and so did the bus routes.

But, now there's an opportunity, as they replace buses, to go to smaller buses that might be more efficient and carry a smaller number of students because reality is there's fewer students to carry. As such, they could look at making those bus routes shorter and more palatable for particularly the young learners. So, that's one aspect of it.

The second aspect is the fact that, as I said, license to close the school is license to close a community, and we heard that very loud and clear at the presentations.

The third factor is some of these small communities are underserved in a number of different ways with public buildings and whether that might be a library, or whether it might be a community archive or a museum, or a number of different initiatives that the community might see as

lacking in their community, the school is a public building that could be used for those purposes.

So it's about what's good for learners. Keeping them in the classroom longer than they are in the bus. It's about what's good for the community, keeping the school viable and keeping the community viable, and it's about what opportunities there might be for the community.

When you talk about rural depopulation, a lot of that is driven by the fact that schools have been closed. So, we would like to support our rural communities and make sure that they have more opportunities to grow and to provide services to their citizens that they previously might not have been able to do. They can do this by taking a public building and make public use of it.

* (15:50)

Now, how does this relate to urban centres? We also feel that it's better for students to have the opportunity to walk to school as opposed to being bused to school several kilometres away if their schools should close. So, yes, we're focussing on community schools, and I know where the member is going to go. What about Waverley West? Well, as I said, we're planning for that. We want a community school in Waverley West and we've committed to do that. The planning stages are there as the development proceeds.

There's a lot to be said for the value of a school in a community and the value to the community of that school. That's what we hope to achieve with Bill 28, and that's what we hope to achieve with our capital plan.

Mr. Schuler: First of all, far be it for me to correct the minister, but in the life cycle of a town, I don't think the school is the first institution that leaves. Unfortunately, what happens is commerce is the first that leaves. A business can't make it; it closes. We've seen consolidation of farming. We've seen rather than smaller farms, we've seen bigger farms. What happens then is the local financial institution leaves. That tends to be very, very hard on a community. When you lose some of the local businesses, whether it's a mechanic shop, and then the financial institution goes, and then—we had seen, in the past, a lot of the post offices closed up and consolidated. That really hurt the towns, and it ends up being almost the last thing left in town, is the school.

So, actually, if the school leaves, it's sort of the last thing to leave, and that's what, I think, a lot of communities have been fighting for, is their saying, if you take our school, you take the last thing left. That is a legitimate argument. The minister and I, we sat through a lot of the presentations, and the presentations were heartfelt. They were reasonable arguments that were put forward. Basically, the community was saying, if you take our school, it bodes very poorly for the town.

That having been said, the minister is trying to play both sides. On the one hand, every student should be able to walk to school. I point out to him, for instance, in East St. Paul there is a lot of busing that takes place from East St. Paul into North Kildonan.

I can remember when I was on the school board and, later on, when I was first elected as an MLA, I had a lot of my neighbours saying, we need a high school in East St. Paul. I said to them, I don't think you want that because if we put a high school into East St. Paul, the cost of that will be prohibitive. We've got access to three high schools with some of the most outstanding programming that you can get. In the case of East St. Paul, we knew that there was going to be sort of a wave that was going to go through. It certainly has settled down. I understand now all the students from East St. Paul are now able to attend a local school.

Insofar as the high school is concerned, there just aren't the numbers, currently, in East St. Paul, and there won't be the numbers because it's not the kind of intensive development that takes place in East St. Paul as compared to Waverley West. In fact, the latest development is 300 lots, which will be developed over the next four years, not 30,000 lots. So there's really a difference in comparison.

But, again, that seems to work. I guess what I'm trying to get the minister to say, and he's made the case beautifully for myself and for all of those who are watching Education, is there really is no cookie-cutter policy that you can place on education, because every community is so different. The minister is correct. I mean, on the one hand even, close a school in the city and the students could still walk to their school, whereas if you close one school in the rural community, it decimates the town.

On the other hand, there are all kinds of development issues and projects that haven't proceeded yet and are planned to proceed. So, really, what I'm trying to say to the minister, and that was

what we were trying to tell him when he was bringing in a lot of his caps and all kinds of moratoriums, is that each case is really unique onto itself. I think it was unwise on behalf of the minister to make all these blanket policies when there were individual cases that needed bolstering. There was a lot of room for the minister to go in and work with school boards, besides the fact that he brought it in at the last hour, which wasn't helpful either. But each community has its own challenges and has reasons for, and there are probably reasons on the other side why schools should or shouldn't close. What the minister did is he took a cookie-cutter approach, and that's sort of where I had thought the minister would go. I think he's made the case very well that there are a lot of different factors that have to go into this.

I want to go back to the moratorium. Has the minister been approached by any school division since the moratorium went into place that, under the new guidelines that he set forward, are there any indications that a school division wishes to close the school?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, first of all, I'd like to go back to the preamble and respond to that, if I may, because I think it should be noted that April 28, 2009, at 3:56 p.m., the member opposite actually agreed with me on an issue. I think that's fantastic that he agreed that, yes, closing a school in a rural community is license to close the school.

I would like to correct him though in the suggestion that I said that is the first thing I said. I never said it was the first thing that would cause the demise of a rural community. But I certainly don't think it would be in the best interest of the community that a school closure would be the final nail in the coffin for that community, and I think that keeping the schools viable in those communities is an essential part to any future development or redevelopment of that area should the tide turn in terms of business opportunities or resource opportunities or immigration opportunities that might turn the tide on rural depopulation, and I'd like to see that some day. We do see that in some communities where they have an economic development officer that is bringing new immigrant families into the community, not to the same scale as we see in Garden Valley and Hanover and Nell [*phonetic*] from what I understand potentially in Western, but even bringing 20 families to an area can have a tremendous impact on a small community. So, yes, we agree that closing a school is licence to close a

community, and I never said it was the first thing in that domino, but, again, I don't think it would be appropriate that a school closure would be the final nail in that coffin as far as a community's viability and sustainability is concerned.

Now, on the second part of the question—gee, I got caught up on the fact that we agreed on something. Perhaps I'll have to ask the member to repeat that question for me, if he will.

Mr. Schuler: Well, the minister might want to take a coffee break after he hears my next statement. There are a lot of things he and I agree on, and, in fact, if he'd listened to my opening statement, and I know he's very, very preoccupied, he would've heard me say that I happen to think we have an outstanding public school system. I entrust my everything, my most precious everything, my three children to the public school system, and they're doing an outstanding job. My children are getting an outstanding education. They've got a great teaching staff. There's a great administration. They feel secure. They feel loved. They feel challenged. They are involved in sports and music and in other activities. I think they're getting just a phenomenal education system. They've got outstanding teachers.

Sad to hear that Mr. Kampen is going to retire, I understand, from Princess Margaret School. I think that's a terrible loss. In fact, I think I'm going to clip this part of *Hansard* and send it to him and tell him it's part of the record. I don't think he should. Mr. Walter Kampen, you shouldn't retire. You're a great teacher. Don't retire; you're way too young. So there, put it on the record.

* (16:00)

Madam Chairperson in the Chair

We have an outstanding public school system, and what we do here is we challenge each other at this level because a lot of direction and a lot of decisions are made, emanating from the department and the minister's office. It's very important to challenge the minister. So, yes, we tend to focus on the things that we feel the minister is lacking in and should be doing better in. We don't always take a lot of time and focus on the things that we agree on. To that end, I just want the minister—if he needs a break to go get himself a cup of coffee and regroup after that statement, I would understand.

What I was indicating to the minister is that when he came in with his policies, I mentioned the

cap on school busing time and the moratorium is, first of all, that every case couldn't be dealt with just with his cookie cutter approach to education.

It needed a little bit more of a softer, gentler touch than what the minister came in with. Gentle isn't how I would describe the Doer government. I would describe them as heavy-handed and the rest of it, but there, I suspect, we'll disagree with the minister.

The other question that I had is since the moratorium came into place, has there been a school division that has approached the minister and indicated that the new rules that were put into place had followed the new guidelines and that they would like to entertain the thought of closing a school. Has he been approached by any school division so far?

Mr. Bjornson: The answer to that question is no. Under the current guidelines, we have not been approached. The current guidelines, though in the act are still something—there's still going to be rules developed around that. When I did have informal discussions with school boards and they asked about those, when are we going to move forward with those regulations. I didn't give them a time line, because, quite frankly, Bill 28 was designed to keep schools open, not to close them.

We do recognize that in time there will be some schools that are no longer viable, but we require community consensus for the closure of that school. We'll be developing guidelines and regulations around what consensus means and work with the stakeholders to that end. Right now the answer to that question is no. There haven't been requests under the current guidelines to proceed with the closure of the school.

For the record, when it comes to the cookie cutter analogy, I'd like to assure the member that when I bake cookies, I don't use a cookie cutter. I let them bake and become what they may, because I'm not one for a cookie cutter approach as the member has suggested. Certainly when we come forward with the policy like Bill 28, with a piece of legislation like Bill 28, yes, the policy is the same for urban centres as it is for rural communities. That being said though, you look at the unique situation of each school.

It was curious to hear the member say that when he was on the school board, he didn't want a high school in his own community. Now he's advocating for a high school in a community where the

population hasn't warranted one yet. It's rather fascinating to hear that. Certainly, we continue to monitor the demographics and monitor the need and monitor the development. That's part of the job of the Public Schools Finance Board, and we continue to work with our partners to that end.

I look forward to the next question and I don't need a coffee break, but maybe that's the member's way of telling me he needs one.

Mr. Schuler: I was listening to the minister and thinking, when the good people of Gimli decide to retire him, may I recommend to the minister that a baker is probably not his calling, because what he basically advocated was that he would mix up the cookie dough, take it out of the bowl, throw it onto a cookie sheet and shove the whole whack into the oven, and then out of that it would just make whatever it wanted to be. I would suggest it would be a very sweet kind of tasting bread, because you would just throw the whole whack onto a cookie sheet.

You know, Minister, maybe that wasn't quite the analogy you were looking for. Leave the baking to others. No wonder he buys his cookies, and his kids don't beg him to bake more cookies. Anyway, that having been said, I ask the minister: With the moratorium, was this a one-year, was this a three-year, was this end of his career and he would then—someone else would come in and have to deal with it? I think we're very perturbed to hear that the regulations haven't even been written in regard to that piece of legislation. I'd like to ask the minister, is it just that he is too preoccupied with other things, or is it that he has no intention of writing the regulations, that he just has no desire to even entertain any kind of regulations in regard to his bill and the moratorium on school closures?

Mr. Bjornson: Thank you for the question, and don't knock my cookies until you try them, honourable member. I'm actually a pretty good baker.

The intent of Bill 28 was to keep schools open, and, yes, there will be provisions for the closure of schools. But, quite frankly, it's not a priority of mine right now to develop those regulations. We feel that all the schools that had been considered for closure prior to Bill 28 should continue to be viable entities within their communities. As such, at the risk of sounding, you know, clichéd, the thinking out of the box notion for school divisions to look at other partners, community partners, to become part of that

school community to have access to the public building and to provide more opportunities for the community is something that needs to be explored further.

We had subtly suggested that school divisions do that when we established a committee and had done a space on it to look at the capacity of schools compared to the designed capacity and the regulatory capacity in terms of square footage per people when we had done a space audit a couple of years ago and established a committee to look at community use of schools. That was a big part of that discussion, that school divisions should be looking at potential partners who could provide more services for the students and who could provide more services for the community.

So I'm not in any hurry to close schools. I think we have to look at a lot of options and leave no stone unturned, to use another expression, in terms of finding opportunities and finding potential uses in partnerships in our schools that would keep them viable in the community.

Mr. Schuler: See and this is where the minister talks about thinking outside of the box and then promptly closes the lid on himself in that the regulations don't necessarily have to deal with closing of schools but could deal with what can be done with schools and what uses are acceptable and so and so forth. The minister is indicating he is not going to entertain any of those ideas or any of those concepts, and that's what's so troubling for a lot of the school system. There are just some schools where to continue the way it's going is just not feasible.

So what is it that they can do with the schools? If there is an old section of the school and they only need half a section, can they tear down the old section so they're not continuously trying to repair and renovate? You know, how can they proceed when they have no guidelines? For instance, if they want to go with middle schools or they want to amalgamate schools or if they've got schools—the minister couldn't even tell us how many schools have asbestos. I don't care how encapsulated they are, but we know asbestos is a nasty product.

* (16:10)

Again, it's in an urban setting or within a town or whatever, you know, and the community would like to go with a newer facility and want to amalgamate. They're all new ideas coming out insofar as education. As we're trying to get caught up with the

middle school concept, I understand that out of some regions out of the United States they're going back to the K to 6, 7 to 9, and 10 to 12, so the elementary, junior high, and senior high. But what the minister has done is frozen the entire system because there are no alternatives. There's a cookie-cutter approach to this and basically it's the steel fist of the minister and his government saying nyet, no, nothing. We won't even put any policies in place; we won't put any guidelines in place; we won't even entertain any discussions, and that's what is so—whether it's frustrating or confusing, about this entire process. What is it that can be done? Instead of looking at it as being half empty like the minister wishes to do, how do you look at it as being half full? What is it that you can do with these buildings? What kind of things can be entertained? I know around the communities there's discussions about community clubs because, and the minister may not know this because he is so busy in his department, community clubs are starting to age, and in a lot of the rural municipalities, and I know even in the city, they're tearing down a lot of the facilities because they've become unsafe and old. Is there an option to combine those two facilities? Is it even safe to do something like that? Is it even possible to do something like that?

But, again, the minister has said—he's slammed the door shut on any discussion. He won't put any kind of guidelines, no process how you would proceed with your facilities. There could be all kinds of great and creative ideas, and I can tell the minister they're not coming forward because, just like with his school bus cap that he brought on which now is more of a guideline, he says, and it's a nebulous target, and he'd like them to sort of come close to it this side or the other.

Well, you know, minister, with the whole issue on the moratorium of closing schools, school boards would like to know how far out of the box can they think, like, without at least something in place; without some kind of a regulation, without some kind of a guideline, without something other than the minister saying no, what is it that they can do? That discussion should have taken place. In fact, I've said this before, is that the minister said we are going to bring in a moratorium. Then there was like a comma, and the minister never completed the sentence. So, okay, so there's a moratorium on school closings, comma, and then what? Is the minister going to do like which we recommended? Is the minister going to look at a facilities review, for instance, for the city

of Winnipeg, find out where the schools are at? The minister couldn't even give me an accurate definition—I know he's going to get that for me, but what are the age of the schools? What's the shape of the schools, so on and so forth. I know the minister had received a document and he was going to give me some more information. He hasn't done that yet and I encourage him to do so.

But these are the issues that people want dealt with. So it's not about closing schools. Minister, stop looking at the glass as being, you know, 10 percent empty and look at it—maybe it's 90 percent full. But there has to be a process that school boards and parents and communities can use. So, if the minister needs me to repeat some of those questions, I'd be more than willing to.

Mr. Bjornson: Well, I thank the member for the preamble. I'm not sure there was actually a question there, but this notion of the glass half empty and this notion of discussion and consultation, it's rather interesting to hear the member talk like this because, as I've said in previous answers, a couple of years ago, I believe maybe three years ago, I asked the Public Schools Finance Board to do a space audit, to tell me how full were our schools, how many students are in a school that was designed for 600 people, 600 students. How many students are in a school that's designed for 400? I wanted to know how the school is utilizing the space. Since that time we established a committee, including stakeholders, to look at alternate uses for the school because there's a lot of space there. We know enrolments have gone down; the member himself said 60,000 students over the course of 20 years. I think that's a fairly accurate statement.

So I'm kind of at a loss to understand where the member's going with this, but community clubs—he's talking about the potential for community clubs to be in schools. Well, part of the long-term plan that is in place for the Waverley West school, as the member might recall in our conversation yesterday, is partnering and entering into discussions with the City of Winnipeg to look at community clubs on the same site as the new high school that eventually will be built in Waverley West.

Madam Chairperson, that makes perfectly good sense to me, that students could go and use the community club for fitness and recreation facilities as part of their phys ed curriculum during the day when the community club is practically empty, depending on the surrounding area and community

need. Of course, citizens in the community can also come and use the high school facility as well, for adult learning, for recreational purposes, et cetera.

To suggest that we've closed the door, I think we are opening doors here. We have opened the doors for day cares—\$5 million in our capital plan with the Public Schools Finance Board every year to look at renovation of surplus school space for the purpose of construction and renovation for day cares.

You know, I mentioned earlier I've toured 354 schools, and I've seen a lot of really innovative things that have been done by communities in their schools. I was at one school in Charleswood a couple of years ago, where they had a seniors resource centre in their school. They had addressed any issues of access for those seniors having their own entry into the school, having appropriate sight lines for supervision of people coming in and out of the building from the office.

Here's a seniors resource centre where, talking to the seniors that were there, they said, wow, this is great; I can go read to kids. My grandchildren live out of town, so now I get an opportunity to be somebody else's grandfather for the day. I can read them stories and volunteer in the classroom.

Of course, that goes through a process with the school division where they look at the volunteers and make sure that they've passed any security issues, checks and whatnot. The school divisions are the gatekeepers. They allow community use of schools on the basis of appropriate fit and on the basis of any threat to safety for the children. So they've done that, and they've made sure that these are volunteers that can work within the school. They have policies about volunteers in the school.

But there's a seniors centre in the school. So, you go in there and you have a group of seniors who are knitting and making dish cloths or booties or whatever. They're knitting, they're engaged in conversation, they're playing cards, and then they're volunteering and working in the school. I thought that was an amazing fit in that school.

As I said, I've been up to The Pas, and up in The Pas during the Trappers' Festival, when I was there, we had a very community focused school where they had a fitness centre that was open for community use. They had a child-care centre. They had support for adult learners who had children in the child care,

but they're getting their high school equivalency. There are all kinds of potential uses for the school.

So we're not shutting the door on this; we're saying, let's keep those doors open. Let's keep those doors open for community use.

There are a number of different initiatives. I recall, as part of the conversation that we had with our partners, that there was an article in the *Free Press*: New uses sought for division's old schools, or the superintendent of Louis Riel School Division saying, and I quote: The building certainly should be used to house the needs of the community. That's what Terry Borys said.

When you come back to the school closure moratorium, I can't find the quote, but somewhere in my filing system here, I have superintendents saying things like: We've been doing this all along. We've had community groups in our schools making use of that school and doing things to make our community a better place to live by providing them access to that public facility.

Madam Chairperson, when you look at the school closure moratorium in Winnipeg, here's a quote: We're all jubilant. As a parent at Chapman in Pembina Trails Schools Division, Chapman was threatened with closing after the Charleswood School dropped in student population, but the parents know the value of having a community school.

In Brandon: It's a good thing. People will maybe rest a little easier now knowing that their schools aren't going to close.

That was a parent in the *Brandon Sun*.

This is a payoff. I can honestly say I cannot imagine in my wildest dreams: a Kenton School parent in the *Brandon Sun*.

Of course, I'll reference Kenton again. It was a school with maybe 15 students, but suddenly 24 students in an early child education program.

So, for the member to suggest we're closing doors, I think the school moratorium is opening doors. To suggest there's no consultation, we had the space audit and a couple of years of consultation with all the stakeholders on what are viable uses for community schools. For the member to suggest that I'm not aware of what's happening in our schools, I visited 354 of them. Every time I go into the school, if there's a parent coalition parent room or a community access room or a senior centre or a

library—I've had somebody talk to me about the possibility to establish a museum in the school. A local artist talked about setting up an art club and teaching art lessons under the auspices of teacher supervision to students in that school.

*(16:20)

There is an endless list of possibilities. I know the Folk Arts Council is talking about having a building for education purposes, but they could actually go into some of the schools here in Winnipeg and provide cultural and heritage lessons and supports for students in our communities.

The list is endless in terms of the possibilities. Schools are doing this now. School divisions are doing this now. School divisions have the policy-making authority on what are appropriate uses. School divisions are being asked to consider new uses. We're supporting groups such as day cares on those new uses and we'll continue to work in partnership. I think that's the key. Partners in our communities to make our schools viable and make them more accessible for the public, and do so in a manner that's respectful of the fact that it is an educational institution, and do so in a manner that the policies and procedures in place take into consideration all the needs of the students and the safety and security of the students. That's what school divisions are already doing.

So to suggest the door is closed, I think, is erroneous. To suggest there's no consultation, that too is wrong. I know the member opposite, when we first came forward, said we're planning on turning our schools into glorified shopping centres which is not the intent. Commercial enterprise is not part of that discussion, and we're going to talk with our partners about what fits best, what makes our community a better place to live, and how we can partner to make that happen.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): I do have a number of questions I would like to be able to ask related to K-12, and maybe the first place to start off is where the minister is—in his last response, there were a couple of areas I was wanting to refer to. One is the education in general, in terms of quality. The other was in terms of the facilities themselves.

I know different school divisions do have considerable leeway in terms of use of a facility, and I know even in Winnipeg School Division No. 1 how wonderful a job Liz Belous does in terms of trying to accommodate all the demands on our school

facilities because it is a fairly impressive capital infrastructure that is there throughout the province. I do believe it would be a mistake to underutilize that capital.

We do need to move forward in terms of the right mixture of programming. The question I would ask the minister is, my understanding is the school division has considerable leeway in determining what sort of after-school activities are going to be at a particular school.

The question would be: to what degree does the Province provide guidelines or anything in terms of trying to assist in ensuring there's continuity through the different school divisions as to what's being done in our schools after school hours.

Mr. Bjornson: Thank the member for the question. I think if the member hadn't heard some of my comments earlier on, I'll repeat them for the member. This initiative, Bill 28, was partly as a result of an assessment of the space available in our schools, and the design space and the required space per pupil, and the amount of pupils in the school. I was talking about how I'd asked to see if the school was built for 600 and it only had 300 or whatever the case might be, a space audit to assess how much was being used for instructional purposes. Part of that discussion also led to the development of a committee that would look at appropriate use of schools for public use beyond education.

Now, the member is correct in saying there are some school divisions where they have excellent policies, where they have excellent working relationships with municipal bodies. They have excellent working relationships with recreation authorities. And wearing my municipal hat as a member of the Gimli municipal council prior to provincial politics, I was actually the town rep on the Gimli Recreation Authority, and certainly we had a representative from the Evergreen School Division sitting on the recreation authority because we had a very good working relationship in terms of adults using the gymnasium, adults engaged in learning opportunities, and then students using the local curling rink and skating rink and other recreational facilities that were developed for the community.

So what is the best model? Well, part of that discussion over three years has been looking at models that work well in the community, and part of that discussion has included talking about models or barriers that may exist. Quite frankly, I would hear

from the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, those darn school divisions, they won't let us into their schools for recreation purposes. Then I would hear from the Manitoba Association of School Trustees, now the Manitoba School Board organization, or School Board Association—I'll get that right. I need a little practice—Manitoba School Board Association would say that those darn municipal officials won't let us into their curling rinks.

So what's come out of this is a recognition that there are some really positive working relationships with recreation authorities and school divisions, and somewhere, perhaps, there are some barriers. Some of those barriers might be looking at cost-recovery, scheduling of staff to be on-site when buildings close. I know in Evergreen School Division the janitorial staff, the last one was there at 11 o'clock, so senior men's basketball or volleyball, we could play there till 11 o'clock at night before we'd be asked to leave the building. You know, I was usually pretty tired by 10:30 p.m. myself, actually, but that's besides the point.

You know, it was a really good working relationship, and I would suggest to you that I thought that, when I was first appointed minister, all school divisions had that type of working relationship with the municipalities. I was quite surprised to discover that that was not the case, and, as such, the community use initiative was a very important part of the last couple of years of discussion between stakeholders and the department. Certainly, we'll continue to facilitate discussions around what are best models of practice.

We certainly hope that school divisions and municipalities that haven't been able to overcome some of those barriers look at what's happening elsewhere, and work together to overcome those barriers that have kept kids out of the rec centres and kept adults out of the school.

So that's what I hope can come of this. This is something that has been developed locally, but we'll continue to work with them as partners.

Mr. Lamoureux: I know there is a third group that kind of gets overlooked, and I think it's an important group. That is individuals that live in a community that want to generate or create an activity amongst themselves. It could be, you know, like an open night for volleyball or basketball, and I can tell the minister that at times I get a great deal of—or I sense a great deal of frustration from individuals in the

sense that there's just nothing to book, nothing is available. So I do think that that is, you know, a third group, a vested stakeholder, if I can put it that way.

The question I would ask is: Given the minister himself will acknowledge that there is a wide variance of policies amongst the different jurisdictions, why wouldn't the Province develop a protocol model, if I can put it that way, as to here's our expectations?

Mr. Bjornson: I thank the member for the question.

This is one of the outcomes of the committee that had been struck to look at community use of schools, and we're certainly working on providing some guidelines based on feedback that we've heard from the stakeholders. That's something that we're working with Culture, Heritage and Tourism and with the Minister responsible for Sport as well.

* (16:30)

I guess, what it comes down to is that sometimes it can be hard to get gym time, just as it's hard to get ice time in a local facility. I think the fact that some of our schools are busy at seven in the morning with some of their basketball practices, volleyball practices, until 11 o'clock at night already. So it's just a matter of, no, I'm sorry but we don't have the space because they've already programmed it, whether it's for school sports or whether it includes a community component. Some of those schools are very busy.

I know that, when I played senior men's basketball, I'd be playing basketball at The Maples at 8 o'clock on a Sunday morning. I worked Saturday nights, so that was a pretty tough gig. But, the school is open at 8 o'clock Sunday morning, and we'd drive in from Gimli. We'd be playing against teams from all over the city, and that was a great use of community use of schools. The basketball games ran until 5 o'clock at night.

So the fact that people are having difficulty for programs is to me, tells me, that there are a lot of things happening in our schools. That's a good thing. There are some schools where that's not necessarily the case, whether there are some barriers that I talked about earlier.

But, ultimately, the school division, as the owner of the building and as the entity responsible for maintenance of the building, they made some decisions on that basis. Of course, if there's use of equipment as well, then that's another variable that has to be taken into consideration.

But I would hope that, out of this discussion, what's incurred is that people recognize that there are some divisions that have done an incredible job and some municipalities that have done an incredible job, and they can look at those models and see where they can improve. So we won't be prescriptive. We won't tell them this is what you have to do. We'll show them that this is what has been done, that this is what has been successful and that they should consider these policies in their own communities.

Mr. Lamoureux: I would welcome something from the Minister of Education showing how he is showing other school divisions, here's the type of model that we actually see.

I am concerned in terms of—at the end of the day, it's the public that owns these facilities, and we want to maximize the value of these facilities from a community perspective. I emphasize that it's a community social development type of perspective that we should be looking at. I have situations where, for example, caretaker availability, I believe, is more important in some school divisions than it is in other school divisions. I don't know if the minister can tell me, are there school divisions, for example, that do not require to have a caretaker present in order to have the facility being used?

Mr. Bjornson: Each division has different policies. I know that, when I was, as a teacher, a certified teacher employed by Evergreen School Division, their policy was that I could use that school, provided it hadn't been booked for other events and provided that we had left the building in the same condition that we found it, to clean up after yourself essentially, at no cost. That was the policy as a teacher employed by that division. So, if I wanted to have friends out to play basketball or wanted to supervise a league that needed the school on a Sunday, we could do that, and it was no cost to the division—no cost to the users, I should say.

Some school divisions require custodial staff to be on-site until the building is no longer in use. Some school divisions schedule staff from different time frames, that the staff will be scheduled from early in the morning until early in the evening, whereas I know that in my own school division all custodial staff would start at 3 o'clock in the afternoon and finish at 10 or 11 p.m. So that has an impact on how long the school could be used at no charge to the community or how long the school could be used where there would be some charge levied to the community.

But we have done a survey of school divisions and municipalities on user fees and policies related to community use of schools and school use of community facilities. We have done that, and the results of the survey are going to be used as a foundation for a policy development.

So that's the intent. We've had a lot of discussions to this end and we hope to show, as you said, where it works and why it works as opposed to where it doesn't work and why it doesn't work. Best practices, I think, can be modelled in every division, and we can find more use of our schools and more use of our recreational facilities by our people as well.

Mr. Lamoureux: Is it possible to get a copy of that survey of the different school divisions?

Mr. Bjornson: I'm not sure if it's posted publicly, if we've put it on-line or not, but I can provide the member with some of the information that we've garnered from this process.

Mr. Lamoureux: Whatever you could provide would be appreciated.

If I was to suggest—and I guess I would look to the minister to at least, in part, acknowledge the fact—that because of the differences of policy within the different divisions that there are probably endless examples of situations where a facility is going underutilized because of policy or different types of models. The minister, I think, brings up a good point when he made reference to, well, when he was in the school division, he was a teacher; if he wanted to be the supervisor or the chaperone of the facility type of thing that an event could happen there at no cost. Other school divisions would say, no, you have to pay this type of a fee in order to cover a cost of a caretaker, and if a caretaker's not available, then the school wouldn't even be open, or if it's after specific hours or on a Saturday, you're going to pay double time because the caretaker has to be brought in.

The Minister of Education would be familiar with parent councils, and you know how we try to get parent councils to be engaged in our schools. Well, imagine if you will, that parent councils actually had some authority that went beyond just soliciting fundraising for a local computer room or something of that nature, where they had the ability to be able to ensure that there was other utilization, in establishing a priority list. You see, I would think that priority should be given from virtually after

school to 9 o'clock to certain things, such as young people in that immediate community and activities, and then it should go beyond. You need to establish some issues in terms of what are the priority bookings, if I can put it that way. When you go to a gym and there are only three or four individuals that are in that gym, and they've booked it for a couple of hours and it's denied because of that booking where there might have been something more of benefit to the community, and what's being done in that gym by that three or four could have been done in an assembly room or something of this nature—I think that there needs to be a lot more dialogue in terms of what's actually taking place in our schools after school hours.

So I would appreciate if the minister would get back to me in terms of that survey he's made reference to, and then if you would provide comment on the other aspect of the question.

* (16:40)

Mr. Bjornson: Well, I guess I'd have to ask the member what he has against figure skaters, because when I go to the Gimli recreation centre and there's one figure skater out skating and doing his or her routine, they've got that ice time for half an hour. So should we not allow a figure skater because we could have a hockey team out there, is my question. People have a variety of different activities that they like to be engaged in, and if there are three or four people using a gym, if they've gone through a process, acquired permission to do so, if they have paid a fee for the use of the gym or if they have every other authority to be there, I wouldn't begrudge them that opportunity, depending on—if it's archery, for example, that they want to do inside a gym, I don't think you want 50 people in a gymnasium doing archery at one time. At least I wouldn't.

I don't think we can be that prescriptive. I think the member's asking us to be extremely prescriptive in terms of what are appropriate activities. Again, with that logic, we wouldn't see people doing a figure-skating routine for half an hour on the ice when hockey teams could be out there and have 20 or 30 people using the ice time for that same amount of time.

I want to assure the member that there's been a lot of discussion about this. There's been a lot of really positive input with the stakeholders on this, and there'll be ongoing discussion because part of Bill 28 is talking about community schools and strengthening community schools. That's, indeed,

part of our mandate. We want to see more community use of schools. As I said earlier, the school is incredibly valuable to the community, and the community is incredibly valuable to the school. We'd like to see more co-operation and more participation in the schools, but I don't think we want to be that prescriptive.

We don't want to limit the opportunities for community members, just because the numbers might not warrant the use of the gymnasium for a specific activity. I know, for example, when I was a student in Gimli High School, I was also a coach for the Special Olympics. We had three or four members of that team. We had our gym time, and three or four members of the team with two coaches used the entire gymnasium. Surely, the member doesn't want us to be that prescriptive and say, that wouldn't be an appropriate use of that gymnasium. We have to be flexible and responsive to the community's needs—we being our partners in the school division. It's not us to say, no, you can't do that. It's up to the community to say, this is what we want to do. It's up to the school division to find a way to work with them to make it happen, just as it's up to the school division to work with the communities to get more use of the facilities.

I've also been advised that it is on the Web site right now, that the joint use of facilities is on the Web site. I can let the member have the URL, if that's what we call it. I'll just write it out for him and provide it for him.

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Chair, sometimes it's good to see where the minister explains himself, and we'll have to agree to disagree. You see, here is where we differ.

I believe that the community needs should prevail the individual needs in terms of after-school hours. The minister believes ultimately that individual Johnny goes forward and says, I'm going to book the gym, and I'm going to have this type of activity. If the gym is available, Johnny should be given the gym, even though Johnny might have applied a year prior or two years prior in order to get the use of the gym. Because he was there before, a parent council who wants to provide a social night for kids under the age of eight on that same Friday night—but because little Johnny wants to be able to shoot arrows inside the gym, if I want to use the example that the minister gives, as a private individual. That's I guess where we would agree to disagree.

I'm more in terms of what the community needs should be a higher priority than the individual private person. Not to say that the private person shouldn't have access, I just establish that the community needs are a higher priority. Madam Chair, I look forward to having some future dialogue on that particular issue.

The other concern I made reference to was that of education. In the news, I saw what I thought was a fairly well-done documentary report where it showed kids that are having certain disorders, being hyperactive, behavioural problems within the classroom, where a teacher had taken the initiative to have the students actually do more physical activities as a part of their educational package. As a result, there was significant improvement in their educational performance. I'm wondering if the Minister of Education has individuals within the Department of Education that are, in fact, looking into that.

Mr. Bjornson: Just to get back to the preamble a bit, if I may, the member did mention that little Johnny should not take priority when it's the community that should have priority. Well, little Johnny, in my view, is a part of that community. *[interjection]* The member says, not necessarily, but first priority, in most school divisions, is given to people who live within the catchment area of the school or who do live within that community of the school division. That's my understanding. That is my understanding of most of the policies. Now, when I was talking about these people who booked the school for use, you can go on the assumption that many of them are from that community, that live in that area, because they would likely try to book the activity closest to their home. That's what is happening.

Again, what the member is saying is kind of—goes against the whole—what the member is saying, essentially, is that I should not have been allowed to coach the Special Olympics students that were in that gymnasium because there were only four of them in that gymnasium for the two hours a week that we had that activity. I would have to take exception to that. That is a community opportunity. In using the archery example, I mean, everything that the school divisions do has to be weighed on the side of caution and safety. So, yes, you don't have 50 people at archery practice in the school. If you have people who aspire to be competitive archers, then they should have access to that building just like somebody who wants to play basketball; you don't want to have 50 people shooting arrows, though, but

that person should have the same opportunity to be in that facility.

Now, I think the member could just nod to indicate if the documentary that he had watched dealt with the treadmills in the school in Saskatchewan. Yes, he's acknowledging that. I did not actually see that documentary, but I had been e-mailed from someone who had. I had received an e-mail to see if I had seen that. Certainly, that is a rather fascinating idea. Perhaps we can start by getting treadmills in all our caucus offices, but that's another issue.

The treadmills-in-the-classroom idea was a rather fascinating one, but, of course, that's consistent with what we've been doing with the Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures Task Force and trying to find a way to get our children more active in our schools and ensuring that the amount of time that's allocated for physical activity and phys ed is being met. It had previously been a guideline with respect to how many hours students should participate in phys ed, and we've made that prescriptive in terms of this is how many hours children must be in phys ed class.

So, yes, physical activity is a very important part of being a healthy learner. It'd be interesting to see that documentary, but I know there are other schools that, once they've seen that, have started thinking about that as well, perhaps. I know other schools have been ahead of the curve on the daily physical activity as well. I know I've visited schools where we've had students—actually, all students—go down before lunch and participate in 15 minutes of aerobics. The entire school student body goes into the gym and does that, and that's an early-middle-years school that does that. So there are a lot of different programs that are locally driven to address physical fitness and recognizing the value of being physically fit and physically active and how that can impact your ability to learn.

* (16:50)

Mr. Lamoureux: Going back to the preamble before the question, I'm glad that the minister has recognized that there is value in terms of prioritizing use of our capital infrastructures within our schools. At one point, he gave me the impression that he didn't see the value of prioritizing. He can read *Hansard*, and I'm sure he'll get the same interpretation that I had, and that was the point that I was trying to get at: that you do need to have a prioritization in terms of programmings after school

within our capital infrastructure, that it shouldn't just be strictly first come, first serve, no matter what it is. It's not to take away from any activity. I'm very sympathetic to the Special Olympics that the Minister of Education makes reference to. There are all sorts of wonderful things that take place in our schools.

But anyway, having said that, I'll go back to the line of questioning that we're now on and that is in regard to the treadmill documentary, and I would recommend to the minister that he watch it. I was actually quite impressed by it, and I suspect that the teacher that had taken the initiative will be some sort of a recipient of an award at some point in time, because of how it dramatically changed her classroom.

My question that comes out of it is: To what degree does the Department of Education actually look into ideas that are happening, whether it's within a school division in Manitoba or something that's happening outside of the province and looking for creative ideas that could, in fact, make a difference. Is there someone within the department that is charged with that sort of a responsibility? The minister can explain that.

Mr. Bjornson: I'll thank the member for the question. Certainly when issues arise where people have said, you should look into this, we think this is a good idea. We do put it through the department; we vet it through the department to get feedback.

Of course, when you're talking about treadmills and schools, if you're looking at a decent treadmill, they're about \$2,800 at least. The ones that I've been looking at lately, because I know the value of a treadmill both in terms of dollars and what it means for health, as you can tell. *[interjection]* Thanks for supporting that. We must be getting close to the end of Estimates here.

When there's a good idea, we do take that idea, and we vet through the department. People will provide their input on the idea and the value of that idea. We also have a Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet lens, that is based on research as well, that looks at different ideas that come to the table. A lot of people have a lot of ideas that certainly merit exploration and looking at those ideas. We'll certainly take a look at this documentary. I was really quite intrigued by it and by the suggestion. I hope to have an opportunity to see that documentary myself.

I should also tell you that there are a lot of people that look at Manitoba and say, wow, Manitoba's got a lot of great ideas. Manitoba's been a leader in a lot of areas. I can highlight a couple of those, if you will. The fact that we have mandatory physical education for grade 11 and 12. There are only two provinces that do, from what I understand. People point to Manitoba and they point to not only the mandatory phys ed, but they point to our health curriculum, I should say, as being one of the best health curriculums in the country. They point to our Education for Sustainable Development, where our deputy minister has represented Manitoba nationally and internationally, because we are recognized as leaders in education for sustainable development. Our civics education, our citizenship agenda, has been held up as a model nationally, and people point to that and say, wow, look what they're doing in Manitoba. We get that quite often.

In fact, a lot of the documents that we've written in support of special needs children, in support of multi-age classroom settings, English as a second language—we get requests from jurisdictions all over the world—learning through ICT and the fact that we're using technology as learning, not just for learning but as learning. The fact that we're being very innovative in the assessment of engagement.

These are things where people all over the world look to Manitoba and say, wow, look what's happening in Manitoba. Now that doesn't get a headline, as the Premier (Mr. Doer) likes to say. These are things that don't get a headline, but we know in the department that these are incredibly valuable undertakings. We are being recognized for that. Yes, my deputy's also reminding me that recently a report said that Manitoba should be held up as an example for the initiatives that they've brought forward to bridge the gap in achievement for Aboriginal learners.

It's a two-part question. Yes, when there are innovative ideas that are recognized in the province or nationally or internationally, we look at those ideas. We put them through a Manitoba lens, because there's a number of different issues that might arise as a result of that initiative. We also have to look at the cost of those initiatives. That's always an important variable in terms of the feasibility of that initiative, but you should also know that many people look to Manitoba, and, well, they don't say, way to go Manitoba, but essentially that's what they say in their endorsement of the initiatives that we've started here in the province. I think we should be

very proud of the work that goes on in the Department of Education.

Mr. Lamoureux: I'm kind of a Canadian Tire guy, and we got a treadmill. It only cost \$450—mind you, somewhat on sale, but a good quality treadmill. Having said that, Madam Chairperson, the idea is that we don't have to re-invent the wheel. There are some very effective programs that are, in fact, out there, and sometimes I wonder in terms of when we hear of an idea and because of, maybe, the way bureaucracy works, I'm not sure, maybe it's because of leadership from the higher levels, the idea might fall to the wayside. I look at it as there are, I suspect, a number of children that would benefit immensely if in fact there is any truth to the documentary that I had seen. I suspect that it would make a very strong positive difference. In the past, I've talked about drop-out rates and so forth, and the one child in question, in all likelihood, would not have finished school. Madam Chairperson, I know the minister will see the documentary, and he'll know exactly what the individual I'm referring to and all the behavioural problems that this particular student had. It was fairly convincing.

Madam Chairperson, I guess the question I would ask the minister is—let's say, hypothetically, he watches this documentary and he gives it kind of a thumbs up, I like it, in other words, and he wants to act. What exactly would the Minister of Education do to try to take advantage of this one idea that a teacher from Saskatchewan came up with?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, again, when there is a good idea, we take that idea, and we vet it through the department.

Now, I don't know—you know, the member talked about being a Canadian Tire guy and a \$400 treadmill. I don't know if the member uses it for half an hour every day, or if he uses it every day, but we do have to look at equipment that would be appropriate and meet certain standards. With all due respect to Canadian Tire, that might fit that particular niche for fellows like yourself and myself to purchase a treadmill for that amount of money because the amount of use that you would have—but

if you're talking about getting 30 treadmills for a school that are going to be used for half an hour and, over the course of a six-hour day, by—if you do the math, 15 students—that add up? Madam Chairperson, 13 students, sorry—13 students using the treadmill for half an hour each, then you would need a better quality treadmill, I would argue, than the one that perhaps the member has purchased.

You have to consider all the angles of these good ideas. What I would like to assure the member, though, is we have our phys ed consultant attending a conference in Banff. It's a national conference, and our phys ed consultant has been asked to be there because we are being seen as leaders on this health and phys ed initiative in our schools. This was through the recommendations of, as you know, an all-party committee on the Healthy Kids, Healthy Futures Task Force that we've acted upon these recommendations. When another idea comes up that we think is a good idea, we'll explore that idea, but to look at a budget now and look at purchasing several thousand treadmills for a good idea—we have to weigh the value of that against the things that we're already doing in support of making our learners active learners in a physical sense as well as a learning sense. We'll look at the idea and that's what we do.

When there's a good idea, we look at it, but we have to put it through the Manitoba lens and see how practical that idea would be in its application in our school system.

Mr. Lamoureux: [*inaudible*] from my own leader, but I tell you, I saw the video and I'd be interested in getting a letter from the minister in terms of what his opinion is on the documentary. Nothing wrong with designating a school as a pilot project, getting 20 of them.

Madam Chairperson: The hour being 5 p.m., 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, April 28, 2009

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