

Fourth Session - Thirty-Eighth Legislature
of the
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS

Official Report
(Hansard)

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The Honourable George Hickes
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Eighth Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, March 21, 2006

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYER

MATTER OF PRIVILEGE

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

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

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I rise at the first possible moment because I have just learned in the last half-hour that the comments the Premier (Mr. Doer) made last week have seriously misled this House, and I want to make sure that this is brought to the attention of the Legislature. It is clearly a serious problem if the Premier puts on record information which is erroneous and, therefore, misleads the House and interferes with our ability to properly do our duty as MLAs.

I will refer to the Premier's answer in Question Period on March 13, when I asked about the board appointments to the True North Sports & Entertainment Limited board. Clearly, when the master agreement was set up, some, I believe, more than two years ago, there was a provision in the master agreement that there would be two directors to best represent the public's best interests on the arena complex, the True North Sports & Entertainment complex.

I raised the issue about why there had not been a provincial appointee, and the Premier indicated that this was not an issue because there was only one director to be appointed and this appointment was in conjunction with the City of Winnipeg.

Well, I have just learned in the last half-hour that the City of Winnipeg has not made an appointment, neither has the Province made an appointment and, indeed, there are two members of the board of directors of the True North Sports & Entertainment complex who were to be appointed by the government in conjunction with the City of Winnipeg. What we are seeing is the Premier has totally abandoned his responsibility to have public representation on a very important board which has a huge amount of public money.

Mr. Speaker, my point is this: When the Premier spoke that, clearly he was putting erroneous information on the record and this is impairing myself as an MLA and the other MLAs to do our job properly when the Premier puts erroneous information on the record in Hansard in this Legislature. That is why I am rising today on a matter of privilege.

I move, seconded by the MLA for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), that a standing committee of this Assembly be asked to investigate this matter and report back to this House.

* (13:35)

Mr. Speaker: Before recognizing any other members to speak, I would remind the House that contributions at this time by honourable members are to be limited to strictly relevant comments as to whether the alleged matter of privilege has been raised at the earliest opportunity and whether a prima facie case has been established.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I will not get into the issue of timeliness of raising the matter, but as to whether it is a prima facie matter of privilege, clearly this is just one more example of the member raising an issue to obstruct the business of the House, raising issues that are intended to get in the way of the public's business in this Chamber that we have seen consistently over the last two weeks and more.

I just note the member last week, even in the face of the tragic death that we have been dealing with, was raising matters about the 100th anniversary of the crocus flower. He got up in this House on more than one occasion and then worked in collaboration with the opposition to shut down the House so that instead of debating, Mr. Speaker, he was raising frivolous matters like that.

I think it is unfortunate and when I look in the Hansard for March 13, there is nothing that the member has said that is inconsistent with the statements of the First Minister (Mr. Doer). I do note that what the First Minister had said was that the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) had written a letter to Mark Chipman congratulating him on the new arena and then joined with the Conservatives to oppose it. Perhaps he wants to dispute that and have another position today, Mr. Speaker. I notice he has

had two positions in the past. As the Premier said at the time, Mr. Bob Irving had said about the member: What a hypocrite. That is the issue that was raised and the answer by the Premier, and there is nothing inconsistent with what the member is alleging today.

I would urge the member to please deal with the issues that are important to Manitobans in this Assembly, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, I noticed he got up saying that we should have an emergency debate on the issue of the baby death. We found that to be so at odds with what had occurred and what came from this member's mouth in the week following the revelation of this poor tragedy, a tragedy I can say—*[interjection]*

Oh, I will get to your point there, sir. What we see, Mr. Speaker, when I heard of this tragedy, I was ashamed to be a member of the human race, quite frankly, and what I have seen in this House, particularly from that member, is instead a shutting down of debate in this House, of raising issues. He asks questions about Crocus. He raises questions about True North. He raises questions about Aiyawin. He raises questions about the crocus flower and the 100th anniversary.

Surely, Mr. Speaker, this member can pay attention to the opportunity for debate in this House and its potential. Yesterday, he seemed to want to say that timely debate in this House can make a difference. If it made a difference, why did he walk out of this House for over two weeks in a row? Why has he shut down this debate and worked with the official opposition on that? I think that is most unfortunate.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I do not see how this is a matter of privilege. I do not see how it is a point of order. It is a dispute of the facts. The member, I am sure, has the wherewithal to raise that in the appropriate forum. Thank you.

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

* (13:40)

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, with regard to the matter of privilege, unfortunately, I do believe that the Member for River Heights does have a matter of privilege. I say "unfortunately," because it has become a characteristic of this government to put false information on the record and then to simply stand up as the House Leader has just done and talk about a dispute over the facts.

Well, if the government could ever get its house in order and tell the truth when ministers stand up in their places to answer questions, we would not have matters of privilege like this coming before the Chamber. Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that this government can no longer be trusted to tell the truth, regardless of which minister stands in his or her place to answer a question. That has become a tragedy in this province and really casts a shadow over the governing party.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Member for River Heights was fairly clear in his question and was fairly clear in terms of why he is raising this as a matter of privilege. He did not go on at length. He did not go on about other extraneous issues. He stuck to the facts and indicated why he was raising this as a matter of privilege, that it was being raised at the earliest opportune time, and, secondly, that indeed the prima facie case would indicate that when he had asked the question in this House, he was led to believe that certain actions had been taken by the government, by the Premier and the government, when indeed that was not true.

Mr. Speaker, we could talk about a dispute over the facts, but how can we do our jobs effectively in opposition and ask questions of the government when the government can put false information in front of the public on the record and get away with it. This happens time after time after time. We have seen the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) do the very thing. He was called to order on several occasions, but gets away with it simply by saying it is a dispute over the facts. Now we see it coming right down to the Premier (Mr. Doer).

Mr. Speaker, I think it is time that matters of this nature would be referred to a Committee on Legislative Affairs and, indeed, that that committee would come back to this House to ensure the integrity of the House and that members in this House do, when responding to questions, speak the truth and only the truth.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Inkster, very, very briefly.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Yes, Mr. Speaker. I did want to comment in terms of prima facie case and what makes a prima facie case. As pulled out from doing what many of us do, a Google search, let me give you a definition: A complaint that contains all the necessary legal elements for a recognized cause of action and will suffice until

contradicted and overcome by the defendant's evidence.

Now, what the Leader of the Liberal Party is talking about is a very significant corporation, Mr. Speaker, True North. This is not a lemonade stand. The Premier (Mr. Doer) was supposed to make an appointment. The Leader of the Liberal Party received an e-mail, and I will read from the e-mail, the letter where it states: The Province of Manitoba has not appointed anyone to the board of True North Sports & Entertainment, and so on. The Premier's response was: I have checked directly. It was the Province in conjunction with the City of Winnipeg who would appoint the director to the board of directors, and so on.

Mr. Speaker, this is completely, completely out of tune with what it is that the Leader of the Liberal Party had raised, and then he just found out a half-hour ago that what the Premier has said is just not true. Using the definition that I just finished saying in terms of prima facie case, I believe there is a matter of privilege. I highlight the fact we are not talking about some lemonade stand, we are talking about a corporation that has millions of millions of dollars of responsibility and this Province, this Premier, has not even fulfilled an appointment. It is about accountability. I think this is a valid matter of privilege and would request that it do go to the standing committee of this Chamber.

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

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 30—The Fires Prevention and Emergency Response Act

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Trade and the minister responsible for the Emergency Measures Organization (Mr. Smith), that Bill 30, The Fires Prevention and Emergency Response Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. Allan: Mr. Speaker, this bill will repeal and replace the existing Fires Prevention and Emergency Response Act. It will modernize and clarify the powers of the Fire Commissioner and local fire

authorities and establish a framework for enhancing fire safety in Manitoba.

Motion agreed to.

PETITIONS

Crocus Investment Fund

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

Signed by G. Kozuska, J. Kozuska, J. Bateman 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.

*(13:45)

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

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

On March 21, 1960, in Sharpeville, South Africa, 69 citizens were killed by police during a

peaceful demonstration against apartheid laws. As a result, the United Nations declared March 21 as International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

In Manitoba, we recognize that all Canadians have the same rights, freedoms and responsibilities, regardless of their background or belief. We are a province where we not only tolerate but appreciate and celebrate cultural diversity, but we should not be complacent. While we have achieved a great deal over the past 50 years, it cannot be denied that racism still exists. To this end, we cannot give up our diligence in identifying the root causes and implementing strategies to combat racism and discrimination.

As the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry challenged us in 1991, "The problems are daunting and our proposals are far-reaching. But we believe that in the interests of justice, the process of transformation must begin immediately." We will continue to act on the recommendations of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry to make Manitoba a more just place for our Aboriginal citizens.

With over 500 different ethnocultural community organizations and more than 100 languages spoken, Manitoba is the most multicultural province in Canada. We work closely with newcomers who come to Canada from all around the globe. We work hard to build bridges amongst the variety of ethnocultural communities so that they may truly celebrate their cultural heritage and their Canadian identity simultaneously.

It is only by increasing dialogue with one another and fostering an understanding of each other's traditions and beliefs that we are able to break through the walls of stereotyping and prejudice. In a year where we have lost two champions of racial equality, Rosa Parks and Coretta Scott King, we must strive to continue their vision of creating a society where all people of race, colour, faith and culture respect each other. Today we recognize that eliminating racism is a universal goal.

In 1958, Martin Luther King stated: "History will have to record that the greatest tragedy of this period of social transition was not the strident clamour of the bad people but the appalling silence of the good." We, in Manitoba, will not be silent. Instead let us stand together in solidarity and build a province which promises justice and equality for everyone.

* (13:50)

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, I would like to put a few words on the record about today, March 21, which the United Nations has declared as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Today commemorates March 21, 1960, the Sharpeville Massacre in South Africa, where approximately 7,000 people, peaceful anti-apartheid protesters, were fired upon by South African police; 180 people were injured and 69 were killed.

Mr. Speaker, it is increasingly important that we raise awareness of the harm that racism can cause because every day our communities grow more diverse. A recent series by the *Winnipeg Free Press* and CBC revealed that over the last 20 years, traditional patterns of immigration have changed drastically. For example, people from Asia and Africa are coming to our province in greater numbers than ever before. We, as Manitobans, are fortunate to be experiencing a distinct growth in Manitoba's multicultural mosaic.

In honour of March 21, each year students across Canada are invited to submit a video addressing the need to eliminate racial discrimination in their communities. Ten videos are chosen and awarded a Racism. Stop It! award at the ceremony in Ottawa. I am extremely proud that three of this year's winners are from Manitoba. I would like to congratulate the students of Shaughnessy Park School, Archwood School and Collège Jeanne-Sauvé who submitted winning videos. These videos exemplify the spirit of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. I would like to thank them and their supporting teachers for their contributions to this worthwhile cause. It is so important that opportunities exist for young people to combat racial discrimination in a creative and educational way.

Mr. Speaker, 30 years ago we heard of the tragic death of a young girl by the name of Helen Betty Osborne. At that time, there were cries from the community that this was not given the proper attention because she was an Aboriginal girl. Today, and more recently, we have seen the death of Phoenix Sinclair and today she is in the hearts of every single Manitoban. This little Aboriginal girl has made us all sit back and think about the way we deliver our services to children.

I think we have come a long way in racial discrimination, and I am sure that all members join

me in congratulating the students on their winnings that I spoke about. I know that we all support the elimination of racial discrimination. 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 am pleased to be able to join my colleagues today in a united front against racism in Manitoba.

I think it is very important that we take this day to dedicate ourselves to eliminating the problems with racism which sadly are still present to some level in our province. It always troubles me when I am brought concerns and complaints by people in different communities, and, most recently, some from within the Black community about the problems that they are having in dealing with situations here in Manitoba.

I think it is important for each of us to do what we can, but it is also important for each of us to reach out and to spread the word and remind all Manitobans that it is collectively what we need to do to eliminate racism and to create a province where everybody has the opportunity that they should have and everybody is treated fairly without regard to race.

* (13:55)

Agriculture Awareness Day

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, I have a statement for the House.

Today we celebrate Agriculture Awareness Day. This year's theme is "Ag in the Cities," to recognize the tremendous contributions that farmers make to urban communities in areas such as jobs, food processing, recreation and much, much more. The positive impact of agriculture is truly felt throughout Manitoba, not just in the rural communities.

Today we were joined in the Legislature by Grade 6 students from Wellington School, who produced a community garden; students from Red River College Green Space Management program, who helped to grow the putting green we used for today's competitive activity; students involved in Junior Achievement in business related to agriculture and food.

A number of mayors from Manitoba communities also joined us and a number of Manitoba producers and agribusinesses. I invite all members of the House to join me in saying a heartfelt thanks to our Manitoba farmers who contribute so much to our economy.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today and recognize the second annual Agriculture Awareness Day. Our caucus is pleased to welcome producers, farm families and guests who are visiting the Manitoba Legislature today. "Ag in the Cities," the theme for this year's event, acknowledges numerous contributions producers make to the lives of those Manitobans who live in urban areas.

It is important to encourage awareness and understanding in the cities concerning the profound impact agriculture has on their day-to-day lives. Our province can be very proud of the fact that for generations our producers have been supplying quality, safe products to the cities across Canada and the world at large.

However, it pains me to know that the agriculture industry in Manitoba faces uncertainty. When farmers face hardships, every Manitoban and our economy also experience negative consequences. Every day we are losing operations that have become overwhelmed by debt and an onslaught of hardships beyond their control.

I have witnessed again and again the steadfast commitment of producers to their livelihood—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Response to ministerial statements cannot be longer than what the minister took, so I ask the honourable Member for Lakeside, to please conclude your comments.

Mr. Eichler: I ask for leave.

Mr. Speaker: Does the honourable member have leave?

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Mr. Speaker: Okay. The honourable member has leave.

Mr. Eichler: I have witnessed again and again the steadfast commitment of producers to their livelihood and responsible stewardship of the land. Despite hardship, they remain dedicated to this way of life after being hit hard by the BSE crisis, adverse

weather conditions leading to poor growing seasons, consistently low commodity prices and an ever-increasing operational cost.

This government has offered no vision, no hope for rural Manitoba to the agriculture industry in budget 2006. Instead of uncertainty, this government should offer a meaningful guarantee to secure prosperity and stability of producers and Manitobans. To start, we need to expand our slaughter capacity—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Eichler: —the stability for producers and rural Manitobans. We also need a realistic water management strategy in place, not overbearing, ill-thought-out regulations. Our farmers are the best stewards of the land.

Also, we need to work with the federal Conservative government to reform the CAIS program. We must prepare for future crises, economic insecurity and not put off until tomorrow. Farmers need a program today.

In closing, I would like to thank our farmers once again. They are the cornerstone of our economy and an essential part of our Manitoba people. 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, it is appropriate we recognize the major contributions that people in the agriculture industry have made to the quality of life we have here in Manitoba and to our health, because many of the products that we get from the farmers and from the agriculture bases are a major contributor to our good nutrition and to our health.

We thank the people in the agriculture industry for their contribution to our economy. I think it is noteworthy that we often underreport and underrecognize the contribution of agriculture. In southwestern Manitoba, for example, Brandon and area, agriculture makes up some 85 percent of the economy, a very important contributor. Even here in Winnipeg, it is significant in the major benefits that flow through to Winnipeg. So, I want to say publicly, thank you to those in the agriculture industry, to farmers who work so hard.

* (14:00)

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, I would like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today 18 Grade 6 Gardening Club students from Wellington School. These students are under the direction of the librarian, Diane Arnot, and are the guests of the honourable Member for Minto (Mr. Swan). These students are also attending Agriculture Awareness Day as the guests of the honourable Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives (Ms. Wowchuk).

Also in the public gallery are 11 Junior Achievement program students attending Agriculture Awareness Day as guests of the honourable Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives.

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Agriculture Issues Government Accountability

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the purpose of Agriculture Awareness Day is to focus on the hard work that farmers do to enhance the lives of people who live in Manitoba cities. I find it somewhat ironic that this NDP government is celebrating its agriculture awareness and focussing on the hard work of farmers, yet, they have decided to punish farmers through their faulty, ill-conceived water regulations, a budget full of stale re-announcements and loan programs that will only drive farmers further into debt. If there ever was proof that this government has no awareness of agriculture, it is in these regulations and in these policies.

I ask today: Will this NDP government prove its agriculture awareness and do the right thing for Manitoba producers by abandoning the dangerous new water regulations before they regulate farmers right off the fields?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): I am very pleased that the Leader of the Opposition, after seven days here in the House, finally decided that he should ask an agriculture question, Mr. Speaker. I am very pleased he recognized that farmers do contribute an awful lot to—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Ms. Wowchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I am pleased he recognizes that agriculture and the farm producers contribute an awful lot to the economy of this province, not only to rural centres but to urban centres, and it is a very important industry. The member talks about the announcements in the budget. I wish that he would get up and finally debate the budget.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, we see with each new policy and regulation how this NDP government has chosen to both ignore and disregard the requests of Manitoba farmers. These water regulations are no exception and Manitoba farmers spoke to these regulations on eight separate public occasions. Each time they told the NDP government that these regulations, as they are currently drafted, will cause undue stress to an industry that is already under pressure from the lingering effects of BSE, poor commodity prices and the lack of slaughter capacity.

Our farmers are resilient and committed. Having faced some of these poorly crafted NDP policies and regulations over the past six years, Mr. Speaker, they have had to be, but if the NDP continues to punish them, we are facing the end of the agriculture industry in Manitoba.

Will this NDP government now listen to the requests and develop a more constructive approach to agriculture or are they going to continue to work against Manitoba agriculture producers?

Ms. Wowchuk: You know, the member opposite talks about his commitment to agriculture, but if you look at his record—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Ms. Wowchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would ask the member opposite to look at his record and how he has voted on the budget that would reduce farmers' taxes. They voted against it. When we were adding money into CAIS and improving programs for farmers, the members opposite voted against it. When we were making changes to crop insurance to improve the coverage for farmers, members opposite voted against it. Every improvement that we have made in budgets, members opposite have voted against it. They have no record to stand on.

Mr. Murray: Well, Mr. Speaker, this Minister of Agriculture, who came into the House on Agriculture Awareness Day, barely could fill a ministerial

statement on one page. I want to tell members opposite and tell this minister that this side of the House, who understands rural Manitoba, will always vote against a budget that turns its back on rural Manitobans.

All we saw from this NDP government in this last budget was re-announcements, loan programs, crippling water regulations, and, in the end, what do our farmers in Manitoba have? They have a realized net farm income in 2006 that shows Manitoba farmers will be in a worse situation than they were in the Great Depression. Mr. Speaker, we used to say that NDP stood for no definite plan, but now it clearly stands for the now depressed party.

I ask this government: How can they ignore the needs of Manitoba producers who provide not only for our cities in Manitoba, but for cities across this great nation? If this NDP government is so committed to agriculture awareness, will they provide it and prove it now, Mr. Speaker? Tell us how they plan to improve the lives of Manitoba producers through policies that work for producers, not against them.

Ms. Wowchuk: I will remind the members opposite that it was their party who created the Bennett buggy.

Mr. Speaker, how is it that we will work with farmers? We will reduce their taxes as they asked us to. We promised 20 percent, we went to 50 percent and we are now at a 60 percent reduction in taxes. We have increased the money for drainages, a budget the members opposite cut when they were in power.

I can tell the members opposite that I was also at a federal-provincial-territorial ministers' meeting with the federal government the other day to talk exactly about these kinds of things; things that can be improved and changes that can be made to improve the benefits to farmers. I would ask them to talk to their colleagues in Ottawa.

Agriculture Issues Government Accountability

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, I feel it is important on Agriculture Awareness Day to bring to light some of the issues that continue to have a negative impact on the agricultural industry. Farmers are suffering the lowest net farm income in years with an average deficit of \$37,000 per Manitoba farm as compared to the high farm incomes experienced by our neighbours to the south.

Farmers are unsure what to expect in this time of reduced crop prices and high input cost. This NDP government continues to ignore the red flags that have become apparent in the agriculture sector, and have been unaccountable to the agriculture industry.

Will this minister commit today to addressing the concerns of our farm families that they have ignored for so long?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite talks about the situation of Canadian farmers versus U.S. farmers. That is exactly what we are trying to address through the WTO.

I hope that the member opposite will get on board and state his position on the Canadian Wheat Board compared to what his federal party is doing, where they, the federal party, are planning to undercut western Canadian farmers by eliminating the single-desk selling. Those are the kinds of things that members opposite have to come on board.

As we get into issues such—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Ms. Wowchuk: As we get into the continued discussion of the WTO talks, Mr. Speaker, we need to know whether the Conservative members in this House are standing to their—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

* (14:10)

Mr. Eichler: This minister should be concerned about her own policies and her own initiatives that she should be working on, Mr. Speaker.

Despite the red flags presented by the fall of the net farm income and the rise of cattle herds by 19.2 percent over the last three years, this government has neglected its commitments on increased slaughter capacity. Manitoba farmers are suffering because this NDP government continues to delay increased slaughter capacity.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister: When will she recognize these red flags and finally become accountable on the issue of increased slaughter capacity?

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would remind the member opposite to think about some of the comments that his colleagues have said; the Member

for Emerson (Mr. Penner) saying there was no need for more slaughter capacity, the Member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff) saying members were going to pull their money out.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

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

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: On a point of order?

Mr. Penner: On a point of order. The Minister of Agriculture just made the statement that I had indicated that there need be no more slaughter capacity in this province. That is the farthest thing from the truth that the members on this side of the House have ever heard. Mr. Speaker, I would ask that the Minister of Agriculture apologize to this House for putting in place incorrect information on the record.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Minister of Agriculture and Food, on the same point of order?

Ms. Wowchuk: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I would ask the members opposite to just remember some of the quotes that were attributed to them where they indeed did say that there was enough slaughter capacity and that there was no need for any additional slaughter capacity.

Mr. Speaker: I have already—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is not going to turn into a debate. I have already heard from each member and—

An Honourable Member: I will go.

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

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Official Opposition House Leader): Well, Mr. Speaker, I would ask the minister to do the honourable thing and table the document that quotes the Member for Emerson as having said what she said in this House.

An Honourable Member: You quoted from it.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have to deal with the point of order first. You are on a new subject here.

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I can only deal with one point of order at a time.

Okay, the honourable Minister of Agriculture and Food, on the same point of order.

Ms. Wowchuk: I would like to quote from the article that I am reading and then I will table it. It says: The Tory Agriculture critic, the Member for Emerson (Mr. Penner), discouraged any notion of farmers getting involved in the packing business. This is a quote: It is one thing to kill them, but it is another thing to sell them. That is what a lot of farm industries do not understand. I think there is a time and a place to rebuild the packing and processing industry but it is not now. He says, "it is not now." If the member wants it, I can give him the copy.

Mr. Speaker: Order. On the point of order raised by the honourable Member for Emerson, he does not have a point of order. It is a dispute over the facts.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Minister of Agriculture was 15 seconds into your answer. You have 30 seconds remaining.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, I can further quote that the Member for Lakeside ((Mr. Eichler) said, on June 23, "I think you'll see an exodus of farmers who will take their money and run."

The provincial opposition has not been supportive. If I look at what we have done, I will stand behind our record of what we are putting forward in this budget; more than double the committed capital funding to drainage projects in this province, reducing school tax on farmland, a promise that we made and have far exceeded by going to 60 percent.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, this minister has continually ignored the warning signs and red flags of industry that need immediate attention. Herd size is increasing; crop prices are low; slaughter capacity increases are continually delayed and farm income has reached such low levels that many producers are on the brink of being forced to abandon their way of life. Instead of solutions, they offer more loans to push farmers deeper in debt and \$3 per head backdoor tax on our cattle producers.

When will this minister offer a vision and a plan to our producers instead of simply more taxes and increasing debt loans?

Ms. Wowchuk: I am not quite sure whether the member has read the budget, Mr. Speaker. He is talking about more taxes. We have reduced farmers' taxes.

On the area of diversification, we have eliminated the fuel and sales tax on biodiesel, an opportunity for diversification for rural farmers, Mr. Speaker. I would encourage the member opposite to read the budget. I would encourage the member opposite to go out there and talk to producers in rural Manitoba and get on with the debate on the budget.

Child Welfare System Public Inquiry

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the government announced that they would be calling for two reviews, one into the death of little Phoenix Sinclair and one into the opening, closing and transferring of Child and Family Services cases. In order to provide reassurances to the public, in order to get to the bottom of what happened to little Phoenix, we have called for the minister to be removed. We have called for immediate reviews and we have called for a public inquiry.

While we are pleased that the government listened to our calls for a review, we remain concerned about the safety, protection and care of children under the current minister. We are confident that this minister has been or, Mr. Speaker, has not been doing her job. The minister is not competent to oversee this review. Furthermore, the minister has said that if there are unanswered questions after both reviews have been conducted they will consider a public inquiry, but that is precisely the problem. If the government does not think they will get the answers to all of the questions with the two reviews then they need to call a public inquiry now, not in six months when the reports may or may not be complete.

I ask the government: Will they call a public inquiry today?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Deputy Premier): Mr. Speaker, the Premier (Mr. Doer) made it very clear that there is a possibility that an inquiry could be called. An inquiry can take a very long time. We are moving swiftly, and we are putting in place professionals who will look into the situation. The people who were named yesterday are credible people, and I would say to the members opposite let those professionals do their work. Let them do their

review. That is their role and let us see their recommendations before we start to say there is a need for an inquiry. That door is a possibility if the information can be gathered in a much quicker and professional way. Let those people do their work.

* (14:20)

Mr. Murray: Well, even the minister acknowledged that there may be questions unanswered after the two reviews, Mr. Speaker. I do not understand why this government would not do the right thing and call for an independent inquiry now. Why wait six months until after the reviews are done and then look at an independent public inquiry?

Mr. Speaker, following the tragic death of baby Amelia in 2004, we, on this side of the House, at that time, called for a public inquiry. We wanted a public inquiry into that death and into the child welfare system. Sadly, this Premier (Mr. Doer) and this government refused then and nine children in 2005 died, and now Phoenix Sinclair.

Manitobans are tired of waiting for this minister to start protecting the children she is mandated to protect. What steps were taken today? What steps were taken to ensure that children currently in care are safe today? What assurances can this Premier give us today that no other child will fall through the cracks with tragic consequences?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, we all agree it was a very tragic event and we all agree that child welfare agencies do their best to protect children. Yesterday I announced two reviews; one external to deal with cases opening, closing and transferring, and the other is a section 4 review that will look into the specifics around the case that has greatly saddened all of us.

We have to be very careful around processes and investigations already in place. To call a public inquiry at this time would jeopardize the RCMP investigation. We have to be very careful as we move through this tragic event that we do not jeopardize the ability of the RCMP to do a thorough investigation so that they can go through their criminal investigation so that justice will be done.

Mr. Murray: I would have thought the minister would be more interested in not jeopardizing the safety of Manitoba children, Mr. Speaker. That is simply the issue. Calling for reviews that take

months will not bring back little Phoenix nor will they provide the immediate protection that children currently in the system are desperately looking for.

We need a broadly mandated public inquiry with front-line workers so they can share their experiences both with the Phoenix case as well as the delivery of child welfare in Manitoba generally. We need this to be done in a public forum so that we can get to the bottom of what happened to little Phoenix Sinclair and to examine the child welfare system in Manitoba so that the public can be reassured that the children who need protection, care and safety are receiving protection, care and safety.

These two reviews, Mr. Speaker, although they are a good step, are not sufficient to put the questions to rest; questions about the days and months leading up to the death of little Phoenix, questions about the minister's lack of direction and leadership, questions about concerns raised by front-line workers, questions about why an inquiry was not called when children had tragically died in the past and questions about the competence and inactions of this minister.

Mr. Speaker, the government has not provided the necessary care for our children. These reviews will not provide the necessary care for our children. We need a public inquiry. We need to know what happened to little Phoenix. We need to move beyond the reviews that, according to the minister, in her own words, may leave some questions unanswered.

I ask again: When will the government do the right thing and call for an independent public inquiry?

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Speaker, yesterday, in announcing the external review and the section 4 review, I also announced that both would be led by the Children's Advocate. Billie Schibler is the current Children's Advocate. She has worked for a long time professionally in the area of child welfare. She has been a foster parent, she is a parent and she has professional qualifications. I believe that it is very important to ensure that this external review and the section 4 review be given the support that it should have so that we can find the answers.

I want the answers, this government wants the answers and Manitobans want the answers. We want the answers so that we can improve systems, so that we can do what we can to hopefully not have a situation like this happen again.

**Minister of Family Services
Accountability**

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, Manitobans are not fooled by this Minister of Family Services. As one caller put it about this review: This is a joke, a scam. People have been telling this government about problems for three years and no one listens. Now she wants another six months. Manitobans want assurances that children are safe today, next week and next month. We cannot and we should not wait for this committee to finish its review.

My question to the Minister of Family Services: While the committee is reviewing, what is she doing?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, we have always worked with all the stakeholders around child welfare and we will continue to do so. There are the reviews that are going on now. There are discussions that go on, on a daily basis, around the care of individual children and the care of children within the system. We will continue to work with the front-line workers, with the agencies, with the authorities through the Child Protection Branch, but I think it is very important to recognize, as we all did last week, that sometimes even under the best efforts tragedies can occur.

An Honourable Member: Nine times in one year?

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Speaker, I think we have to correct the record in that three children under care died last year; six were children who had services or been in care, but the focus here cannot be—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, Mr. Speaker, that is a very poor track record. We need action today for protecting children at risk. We need to investigate the 2,600 files and account for the children. Yes, we need to look at the processes around the summaries, the transfers, the reopening of those files, but that is not enough. It is not enough to locate the file; let us locate the child. Three to six months is a long time in the life of an abused child.

What action has this minister taken? Can she account for the 2,600 children, not files, children who have transferred in the system?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Energy, Science and Technology): Mr. Speaker, I believe when I answered this question on behalf of the Premier (Mr.

Doer) last week, I indicated to this House that any action that can be done ought to be done in the best interests of the children of Manitoba.

Inaccurate information has been put on the record by members opposite on a regular basis. It is our job and duty to rise above the politics of this issue. It is our job. The minister has launched inquiries. Let us see what the inquiries say and get on with helping the kids, not taking shots.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, last week they blamed it on devolution. This week they blamed it on devolution. Now they are saying you should have an inquiry. Our job is to protect the children every day and to look at what is happening on a daily basis. That is what the minister has done.

**Child Welfare Service
Public Inquiry**

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, we are concerned about the children in this province. Members opposite just want to stand up and grandstand on the issue. While we welcome the reviews the government has put in place, they are stalling on the real issue, and that is the public inquiry into the way we deliver child welfare in Manitoba. The public wants transparency, they want accountability and they want truth through sworn testimony.

Mr. Speaker, when children are abused and children die in our child welfare system, it begs the question: Why would this government not call a public inquiry?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Energy, Science and Technology): Mr. Speaker, last week in this House the Premier (Mr. Doer) indicated that he would be—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Chomiak: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week in the House, the Premier said that he was prepared to do a public inquiry. The minister said yesterday the issue before us today is launching the processes and inquiry into the immediate circumstances that occurred with the result of those deaths, and to find out, on an immediate basis, what went wrong and to improve them. If that does not provide the answers then the door is open for other solutions, but it is not

an issue. It is not an issue of getting inaccurate information as the member did about devolution and other related issues. It is getting to the heart of the matter, dealing with the circumstances, finding out what is wrong and improving it if we can. If there are problems after we can have a public inquiry that could take years or months, but the immediate problems must be dealt with now.

*(14:30)

Crocus Investment Fund Due Diligence

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, there are many questions and statements in this House regarding due diligence. We, on this side of the House, understand what due diligence is. Unfortunately for Manitobans, it is very clear that this NDP government does not.

I will table, Mr. Speaker, what Strategis Canada defines as due diligence to be, namely, quote, the process of systematically evaluating information to identify risks and issues relating to a proposed transaction.

What this Premier (Mr. Doer) and his government do not understand about due diligence is that when investing in a project with multiple investors, it is not only critical to evaluate the proposed investment but also the viability of your co-investors as their financial solvency is critical to the investment's success or failure.

I ask the Premier: Why did he not do his due diligence? Why did he not evaluate and identify all the risks related to the proposed transaction and check out the solvency of Crocus, his investment partner?

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines): Mr. Speaker, our government has done appropriate due diligence. We did it on Motor Coach Industries where we provided a MIOP loan that has not only saved 1,100 jobs, but has now 1,500 jobs and is doing excellently.

We did our due diligence with Monarch Industries, which is also doing very well. We did our due diligence with New Flyer which has done well, and it made money on the MIOP program on the loan payout. We did our due diligence on the money that we loaned to Canwest Global, which has brought many jobs to Winnipeg. I would put that against the Conservative record of CalWest, which is up for

fraud charges; Daycon, Isobord and Westsun. Your MIOP program cost or lost \$39 million. Ours made money.

Mr. Murray: Yesterday we were assured that due diligence was done surrounding the investment CentreStone Ventures, to quote, as they said on the other side: to ensure that the loan was appropriately secured.

It is clear, however, that due diligence was not done. I remind this House that it is not the first time that this NDP government has failed in their responsibilities. We were told the same story regarding Maple Leaf Distillers, yet, clearly, the Province was not secured fully in that loan. According to the bankruptcy documents filed in the Court of Queen's Bench, the Province is actually fourth in the line of credit, if they can collect anything at all.

We are also told that due diligence would be done in terms of, quote: Jobs and creation of growing the economy. End quote. I do not think that Maple Leaf Distillers has fulfilled its obligation to create jobs or grow the economy as it is now bankrupt.

Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Premier (Mr. Doer). How are Manitobans to believe anything he and his ministers have to say when they did not even understand the basic principles of investment or due diligence?

Mr. Rondeau: Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government lost and had write-offs, and costs of the MIOP program of \$39,296,500 under their watch. That is a cost. Those are expenses of the MIOP program under the Conservatives due diligence. Under the NDP due diligence, we have created jobs, invested in the economy, had good growth in the economy and the MIOP program made \$183,100.

I would trust our due diligence far more than I would trust the Tory due diligence when you have Isobord, Westsun, Winnport. I could go on and on. I will not even talk about the potential fraud charges.

Crocus Investment Fund Public Inquiry

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, not only do members opposite not understand due diligence, they also do not seem to understand that Manitobans are tired of being told or denied, I should say, the truth. The government has done nothing but stonewall the

opposition parties on behalf of Manitobans to uncover the truth surrounding this Crocus scandal.

I would like to quote, as the Premier (Mr. Doer) always talks about Hansard, and I would like to quote this Premier from Hansard in 1998, when he said: "We have learned a long time ago with this government that if they have something to hide, they will stonewall, and predictably and regrettably, this is what the Premier has done." This Premier then went on to say: "If the Premier had nothing to hide, if members opposite have nothing to hide, why will they not just have a judicial inquiry and clear the air? What are they afraid of in terms of this process?" The Premier then went on to say, and I quote from Hansard: "What have you got to hide?"

Mr. Speaker, the Premier said that then. Why will he not follow his own advice now and call for an independent public inquiry into the Crocus scandal? What has he got to hide?

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines): Mr. Speaker, I would urge the Leader of the Official Opposition to read Hansard yesterday. In it I explained the fact that, in fact, when the Auditor came and wanted to do an inquiry into Crocus, he was at first resisted by the Crocus executive. The Auditor then came to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) and myself, who wanted the ability to do an investigation. We made him an authorized agent of the government and gave him access to any and all files, not only within Crocus but within our departments. That is not hindering the investigation, that is aiding it. We were given a thank-you letter from the Auditor for expeditiously moving forward with the investigation.

Crocus Investment Fund Due Diligence

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Well, Mr. Speaker, I am sure there are many people out there who would love to get into business with this minister.

My question, of course, is to the government. Red flag, after red flag, after red flag, and the government continues to wilfully ignore each and every warning. In 2001, a senior manager with the Crocus Investment Fund issued a warning about liquidity. Again, in March of 2001, that same senior manager talked about discrepancy in calculating pricing request results requirements. In March of 2001, again, the minister then, Becky Barrett, received a letter from Pat Jacobsen about the

involvement of Workers Compensation Board in Crocus. In January 2002, continuous requests from the Crocus board to change the legislation were warning signs that something was wrong.

Can the minister explain whether or not all of these warning flags that were issued to him and his government were not a signal that something was wrong with Crocus?

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines): Mr. Speaker, I would urge the member opposite to please read the report. In the report it says, the Auditor is very specific when he said that all these warnings taken together would have been an issue or should have prompted. What he also said, that we were not given, the Minister of Industry was not ever given the e-mail from one department official to the other.

My deputy minister, when he went in front of Public Accounts for the first time ever, said that he did not receive the e-mail or the warning, so these were not provided up the chain to give us the appropriate warnings to take action. In hindsight, we said that there was not enough intrusive looking at the fund. We trusted the audited financial statements, we trusted the prospectus and we have made corrective action in Bill 51 and in the implementation team's report.

* (14:40)

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, blaming staff for not transmitting a message is just not good enough. It is the government that is accountable. In September 2004, the Crocus board approved the write-down in terms of investment portfolios of approximately \$15.3 million. Then in November 2004, the former COO of Crocus concluded another \$25 million was required.

The Auditor General indicated that the board was surprised by these high but unusual write-downs. Then in December 2004, the total write-down for Crocus was something in the neighbourhood of \$61.1 million.

Is this what this minister considers to be due diligence on his part and that of his government?

Mr. Rondeau: Mr. Speaker, the member does not get it. The valuation issue is not an issue of government. The Department of Industry was not responsible to value the fund. It was not responsible for making the investments. It was not responsible

for the due diligence of the fund. That was done by the executive. It is overseen by the board. The information provided is done by the Auditor and the prospectus is issued by Wellington West.

Government's job was to ensure that the public policy objectives of the legislation were fulfilled. That is the pacing and the investments here in Manitoba, and we invested in small business in Manitoba. That is what the Conservative government looked after. In fact, there was no reporting until 2001. You had no controls and you established a system. The Conservative government established a system that had flaws, and we reaped the rewards.

Crocus Investment Fund Public Inquiry

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Mr. Speaker, one thing that is evident and true is that Eugene Kostyra was the government's control of the Crocus Fund and the involvement of Workers Compensation, TRAF, MPI and Workers Compensation Board, but the red flags were all raised by people who were managing the system.

The government was the one who could not see the red flags, but, in desperation, they sent their agent, Eugene Kostyra, to ensure that Workers Compensation Board, TRAF and MPI all became involved in Crocus investments. Mr. Speaker, I think Manitobans will not be fooled by this minister or this government—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Derkach: When will he call a public inquiry, as is needed, into the Crocus fiasco and scandal, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines): Mr. Speaker, with a hypothesis like that you do not wonder why he is on the opposition's bench. He is wrong on the following things; one, the executive made the decisions on where the investments were. He said that the—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Rondeau: —issued the write-downs. He had mentioned all the different things that he hypothesized that certain members got and interfered with the system. It might have been that way when you had two political people on the board, but it was not

that way when we had an official civil servant representing the public of Manitoba.

Child and Family Services Investigations

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Family Services has announced two so-called reviews of children in the care of the Province, but the minister's announcement leaves a number of issues unanswered. Will statements made during these reviews be under oath? Will testimony be recorded and published? Will members of the public who have had their own experiences with child protection be allowed to tell their stories?

What will happen if the Ombudsman or Child Advocate has a conflict because they have already dealt with the case? Will the government protect whistle-blowers who come forward this time, or will it do what it did to whistle-blowers when things came up at the Workers Compensation Board or at the Aiyawin Corporation?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Energy, Science and Technology): Mr. Speaker, yesterday members opposite asked for an inquiry. The member announced two inquiries yesterday by outside individuals, and today the members are up on a question of why do you not have a judicial inquiry, some kind of a public inquiry.

Mr. Speaker, the issue, and the Premier (Mr. Doer) has indicated that already in his comments, that if no stone is unturned and answers are not there or if there is a problem he will call an inquiry. What the job of the government is, and the opposition, I suggest, is to as soon as possible find out every single circumstance and every single instance that we can improve the system and move on it quickly. We are talking months and weeks, not years. We have to move judiciously and quickly to ensure that any difficulties can be uncovered and dealt with as soon as possible.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, what is needed is a proper judicial investigation. The review the government is doing behind closed doors, no transcripts, no testimony under oath, no protection for those who come forward, is a witch hunt. People will not come forward to tell their stories if there is no protection from the arbitrary power of people within Child and Family Services and no protection from the arbitrary power of this government, its agencies and its minions.

What is really needed is a full judicial investigation into the death of Phoenix Sinclair and the other nine children who were murdered last year. Will the minister turn her reviews into a properly conducted judicial investigation?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, I am quite disappointed in the Member for River Heights showing such little respect for the Children's Advocate, for the Ombudsman and for others who will be involved in these reviews. Now, I said very specifically yesterday, this is not a witch hunt. This is not a finger-pointing exercise. We want people to come forward and tell their stories. We have provided a line for people to call.

We want to understand what happened. We want to make the changes necessary to reduce the odds of another tragedy ever occurring. That is my commitment to Manitobans, and we will work through the external review, the section 4 review, work with the other investigations and reviews that are going on to find out how to improve things. We are not out to point fingers and to make victims out of this very tragic incident.

Crocus Investment Fund Public Inquiry

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): My question is of the government in regard to the Crocus Fund. The provincial auditor, Mr. Speaker, stated that "we noted several problems that should have alerted the Fund's Board, as well as the government . . ." Pat Jacobsen, a well-respected civil servant, indicated in an affidavit under oath that because of, in essence, the government's neglect, millions of dollars were, in fact, lost. These are completely independent of this Legislature and very well-respected, in one case an office, in another respect, an individual, who has recognized that this government messed up in regard to the Crocus Fund. As a result of that, 33,000-plus lost over \$60 million.

We need to try and get to the bottom of this. I ask the minister: Why will you not call a public inquiry?

* (14:50)

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it is very, very important to remember that the affidavit that came in was tabled in this House on December 6, 2005. I think it is also very important to remember

that Pat Jacobsen's letter of 2001, regarding investments at WCB, there were two concerns she raised. The first concern was that the former chair refused to fire the real estate consultant and that the former chair would not transfer the responsibility for the investment fund to the CEO. Those were the concerns that were raised in the letter of March 2001. Never once in that letter did Pat Jacobsen raise the word "Crocus," not once.

Mr. Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Rusalka Ukrainian Dance Ensemble

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): For over 40 years, the Rusalka Ukrainian Dance Ensemble has enchanted audiences around the world. The Ensemble's unique and vibrant style of entertainment and dance has gained international recognition and captured the hearts of its audiences.

Last weekend, along with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, the O. Koshetz Choir and Hoosli Ukrainian Folk Ensemble, Rusalka presented its new original work, *The Legend of the Rusalka*.

Ukrainian culture is steeped with tales of spirits that live in the mountains, forests and streams of Ukraine. One such spirit is Rusalka, a beautiful, mythical and mischievous water nymph who emerges from her watery world but once a year on a quest to end a longing in her heart. For the first time in Rusalka's 43-year history, this legend has been brought to the stage.

This dynamic suite of classical and ethnic dance, music and song was conceived and choreographed by Anna and Vasyly Kanevets with music being composed by Volodymyr Gronska. The Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra and the Ensemble were especially privileged to have as their guest one of the world's most internationally acclaimed and professional recording conductors of the past decade, Maestro Theodore Kucha. This suite is truly a Canadian product, unlike any other Ukrainian Canadian show produced to date and showcases the extraordinary talent of Winnipeg's arts community to Canada and to the world and forms the basis for the Ensemble's tour this summer to Scotland and England.

My colleagues and I extend our best wishes for continued success to Rusalka for their vision and their ongoing contribution in strengthening the arts community in this province of Manitoba.

Cranberry Portage Bombardier Rally

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): Mr. Speaker, Saturday, March 11 was an important day in Cranberry Portage. On that day, my scenic hometown hosted the eighth annual Bombardier Rally. In summer the canoe is an apt symbol for Cranberry Portage, and indeed we have a replica of a canoe at the cairn on the shores of Lake Athapapuskow, but in winter a Bombardier would be an equally apt symbol.

Cranberry Portage is gradually becoming the Bombardier capital of Manitoba. There are more than 30 Bombardiers in town. Some people own more than one. Bombardiers are great for family fun. They are used for ice fishing, fishing derbies, visiting wilderness cabins or just travelling down beautiful snowy trails.

In the past, participants in the rally have visited Goose Lake for demonstration fishing or Camp Whitney for lunch or have simply gathered around to enjoy each other's company around a bonfire.

Rally participants and their families like to get together to admire and compare machines. Some machines are very modern and customized with automatic transmissions and power steering. Other machines have remained the plain 1948 version. One Cranberry Portage resident, Cameron McLean, has done incredibly beautiful work, particularly woodwork, restoring old Bombardiers.

The rally this year ended at the Cranberry Portage curling rink where a catered meal was prepared for 90 participants. The Cranberry Portage Bombardier Rally has become a colourful annual event. It shortens the winter.

The event remains friendly, flexible and informal, like northerners themselves, but still some organizing is necessary. Therefore, on behalf of the Legislature, I would like to thank all participants in the rally and particularly the organizers, Ted and Mary-Ann Playford, Don and Mabel Brewer and Cameron and Vera McLean.

Way to go, Cranberry. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Agriculture Awareness Day

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour today to rise to recognize the second Annual Agriculture Awareness Day held at the Legislature today. I think it is very important that we stop to recognize agriculture and the important role it

plays to the economy of Manitoba, and in particular, the rural economy.

I hope it is a day where the government of the day can stop and also realize the state of agriculture and the state of the rural economy. The government can no longer choose to ignore this very important issue.

Mr. Speaker, over the last few years we have certainly seen an increase in the expenses that our producers have determined, and also we are seeing a very dramatic decrease in the revenue, another red flag that has been issued to this government. I would like to quote. This is from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada and I quote: That farm income forecast for 2006 indicates Manitoba's net cash income, including program payments, will suffer a 67 percent drop in 2006, adding up to a \$194-million loss across the province. End of quote.

Mr. Speaker, we can see this year is going to have a very detrimental impact on the economy of rural Manitoba. In fact, because of this downturn in the rural economy, I am getting hundreds of letters from my constituents regarding this. I want to quote from just one of those constituents, and I quote: Of further interest, I was talking to the Snap-On Tool guy that visits our place of work. He mentioned 60 workers on his routes have left for greener pastures, 60 less customers for him.

So, between two people talking, that is over 100 trades personnel that have left that they know of.

Quote: I caution anyone who thinks this is not a significant issue to pull their head out of the sand or other places and face reality. This is going to have some serious ramifications later on, and I actually got an offer to Alberta last week. End of quote.

Mr. Speaker, quite clearly, Manitobans are recognizing the sad state of the rural economy. We have serious issues with the CAIS program, the water stewardship regulations that they are bringing forward. It is time this NDP government steps up to the plate to address the issues and provide a plan and a real vision for agriculture and rural Manitoba. Thank you.

Maples Collegiate Unity Group

Mr. Cris Aglugub (The Maples): Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize a group of committed youth from my constituency of The Maples. The Unity Group of the Maples Collegiate organized *A Rock Against Racism* on February 16, a concert meant to promote

human rights, anti-racism and social justice issues. The night combined great local music with student-led presentations on human rights and on the experiences of refugees who have come to Canada.

The Maples Unity Group, now in its 11th year, is a nationally recognized leader in the promotion of equality and the fight against racism. Composed of students and staff, the group's activities offer an unusual depth and display a level of commitment rarely seen at any level. From food drives and student-led conferences to an annual Unity Day march, the group is always finding more innovative and exciting ways to involve the students in the fight against racism.

This enterprising spirit animated their latest effort, a concert to promote discussion around racism. Supported by grants from local organizations, the group was able to keep the ticket prices affordable while guaranteeing an excellent lineup of performers. Interest in the show was infectious with students from the Winnipeg Adult Education Centre, Churchill High School, Fort Richmond Collegiate, St. Mary's Academy, St. John's-Ravenscourt School as well as parents and community members attending. With proceeds earmarked for Amnesty International, Welcome Place's work with immigrants and scholarships for Unity Group grads at Maples Collegiate, this night was devoted to creating a better community for all of Manitoba's youth.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that all members of this House join me in congratulating all the students and staff involved in the Maples Unity Group for having organized such a successful concert. Their dedication to building bridges among Manitobans has helped create an atmosphere of hope and—

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I want to remind the House that when members from their seats are saying leave, leave, the person I listen to is the person who has the mike. If that person asks for leave, then I will put it to the House. The honourable Member for The Maples.

Mr. Aglugub: I ask for leave, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Does the honourable member have leave?

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, the honourable Member for The Maples, to continue.

Mr. Aglugub: Their dedication to building bridges among Manitobans has helped create an atmosphere of hope and confidence for our collective future. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

* (15:00)

Crocus Investment Fund

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, this is a very quick spring session that is getting closer and closer, unfortunately, to an end as we only have a few more days. I am very much concerned that the government is not doing Manitobans justice by ignoring the call for a public inquiry regarding the Crocus Fund.

The degree to which this government has messed up on the Crocus file, Mr. Speaker, has had significant impacts not only on the individuals that have Crocus shares but also on other venture capital groups, not to mention the future of venture capital in our province which has provided many jobs over the years, which has provided millions of dollars of economic activity.

The public and Manitoba need to get the air cleared, Mr. Speaker. The only way we are going to do that is through a public inquiry. We have incredible organizations such as the Auditor's office, the provincial auditor's office who has nailed the government on this issue. We have a civil servant in Pat Jacobsen who is very well-respected, who has very clearly indicated that this government could have done more. There is so much that is there. What we need is for the Premier (Mr. Doer) to acknowledge what everyone else in Manitoba is calling for, whether it is former Premier Ed Schreyer to independent media outlets to the combined opposition parties and so many, many more individuals who want a public inquiry.

Unfortunately, it is the Premier that has the ability to call it, Mr. Speaker, and he seems to have a vested interest, perhaps a political interest in not calling it. What I am asking the Premier to do is to put Manitoba's interests ahead of his own personal, the NDP and the union interests and call for that public inquiry.

Mr. Speaker: Just for the clarification of the House, when I mentioned earlier that the member that has the floor should be asking for leave, the reason I said that is because if the member does not wish to continue the member's statement, that is why it is

important that the member that has the floor is the one that asks for leave. Okay? That is just for clarification.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Acting Government House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I am interrupting the budget for the second day to call for a Committee of Supply.

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

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

Interim Supply

Mr. Chairperson (Conrad Santos): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. We have before us for our consideration two resolutions respecting the Interim Supply bill.

The first resolution reads as follows—when the committee rose yesterday, a question had been posed by the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings). This committee has been considering the resolution respecting operating expenditures.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Chair, I do have a few questions that I would like to ask the Minister of Energy and it relates to Hydro. There was a time in which former Premier Ed Schreyer talked passionately about the importance of hydro-electricity and saw that this was a future for the province of Manitoba to the degree that he was promoting Manitobans to convert from gas into hydro-electricity, believing that that was in Manitobans' best interest. Not only was it in Manitoba's best interest economically, but it was also from an environmental point of view. I am wondering if the minister would agree with Ed Schreyer's comments in that regard.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Energy, Science and Technology): As the member might be aware, I am a great admirer of Ed Schreyer. I noted on election night during the last federal election that the member was not in the room with all of the other workers who helped Mr. Schreyer as he worked to unseat the Tory incumbent and to destroy in the campaign the Liberal candidate, Mr. Chairperson, of which he was very angry at the Liberals with respect to a number of their policies, particularly their lack of energy policies. So I am quite happy to endorse

Mr. Schreyer and his policies. I have done so for upwards of 30 years, and I expect that I will do so in the future. I know the member campaigned against the very man who he is talking about in his comments. All I can say is it is typical Liberal politics.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I want to, and I am going to cede the floor back to my honourable friend from Inkster, but I want to make mention that I believe there was an agreement in terms of the ministers who would be available during Interim Supply: the Minister of Justice (Mr. Mackintosh), the Minister of Family Services (Ms. Melnick), also the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger). I note that none are available at this time. I am sure that my—*[interjection]* Not yet, Dave—I am sure that my friend, the Acting Government House Leader, will want to ensure that they come in fairly short order.

Mr. Chomiak: Yes, Mr. Chairperson, I am in the capacity of Acting House Leader at this point because the House Leader had to take a call from a provincial counterpart and asked me to manage to the extent that I can manage affairs in the House during this period of time. I understand there were four ministers requested by the opposition, of whom one is here. I believe at least two of the three that the member talked about are engaged in what might be referred to as media interviews and are aware of the pending nature. The Member for Inkster asked if he could ask me several questions, so I took the floor. But, certainly, the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) is prepared to go as per agreement previously.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Chair, to the minister. The Member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) made an interesting presentation inside the Chamber when he was, in essence, encouraging Manitobans to actually buy high-energy-efficient natural gas furnaces, that it was in Manitoba's best interest that they would do that as opposed to heat their houses with electricity.

Would the minister agree with the Member for Elmwood's comments?

Mr. Chomiak: I think it is very important when it comes to issues of energy and green energy and related matters, Mr. Chair, that we not focus all the attention on one particular source or one particular issue. I find that is one of the most difficult problems that occur in the entire environmental/green/renewable energy field, where individuals put one form of renewable energy up against another form of

renewable energy, or one advantage or give another a disadvantage.

* (15:10)

The fact is we as an economy and we as a society in Manitoba and in the rest of the country and in the world have to take every measure possible to deal with greenhouse gas emissions. There are a variety of measures and a variety of options available which we have chosen to do. For example, Hydro is offering incentives, assisted by the former federal government and continued by the new federal government, to convert from low-efficiency to high-efficiency burners.

Similarly, Hydro is offering subsidies to allow for insulation, not just in natural gas, but in electrical. Now, let us use that as an example of how you can parse these issues down. You might suggest, well, why waste money in insulating a natural gas home, because natural gas is greenhouse gas, et cetera? The point is, we do not have the ability to change overnight. What we have is a window of opportunity over the next several years, and, if we are lucky, maybe over the next several decades, to go to an economy that is, if not dependent on fossil fuel, increasingly less dependent on fossil fuels, and we should use every measure possible and every measure at our disposal to deal with that.

We have an option, for example, in Manitoba to displace coal generation, and coal generation in other jurisdictions with respect to greenhouse gas. Does that overall vision of improving the greenhouse gas output in this country serve the entire country? Yes. Does it serve the world? Yes. Does it necessarily serve the specific interest of a region? Maybe not. The point is we are part of a larger project and part of a larger system to do everything we can to improve energy efficiency, to maximize renewable energy and steps will be taken in that regard.

I do not suggest that it is positive to fall into the trap of isolating only one form, or one subsidy, or one type of energy, because then you get into the argument that it is not doable and you get into the argument that some nations have made, that because Kyoto targets cannot be met, we should not do anything about Kyoto. That is a problem and that is why I speak to the issue and suggest to the member that it is very important that we look at the overall program of which Manitoba has been awarded by the Suzuki Foundation and noted by *BusinessWeek* as having the best program, Suzuki said the best

program in the country, *BusinessWeek* said the best program by a regional government in the world.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Chairperson, I think it was a fairly straightforward question that I had asked the minister. If I can put it maybe a bit simpler, I would ask the minister if he could really try to stay as concise as he can to the question. It would be appreciated.

Mr. Chairperson, if as a consumer, and you are the minister, and a consumer approaches the ministry and says, well, I am debating, do I go with a high-energy efficient natural gas furnace versus a high-energy Hydro furnace? I believe I know what Ed Schreyer would say. I know what the Member for Elmwood (Mr. Maloway) would say, and they are on opposite sides. What is important to know is what would the minister responsible say. Which one would he be promoting? It is an either/or; I do not want to hear a great philosophical statement about how everything has to be factored in. I am looking for more of a simpler answer if the minister can provide that.

Mr. Chomiak: Perhaps if I could interpret the members question. He is looking for a McDonald's type of answer. What I will tell the Member for Inkster is that I would suggest they go geothermal, which is an option the member did not mention, which is exactly the trap that I was trying to prevent the member from falling into.

Mr. Jack Reimer (Southdale): I was wondering if the Minister of Energy would not mind taking a few more questions.

An Honourable Member: While we wait for the minister responsible for Family Services.

Point of Order

Mr. Chairperson: A point of order is being raised, the honourable Government House Leader.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Chair, my understanding is that for interim today the names given were Finance, Education, Industry and Family Services—

An Honourable Member: Education.

Mr. Mackintosh: I said Education, yes. Education is here.

An Honourable Member: On the same point of order.

Mr. Chairperson: On the same point of order, the Member for Steinbach.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Chairperson, I think that the Government House Leader is correct in terms of the names, but when I look around the committee room I see only one of the ministers who was named who is actually here. I think I can do that in the context of a committee room, not the Legislature.

But the agreement, as my understanding was, as was communicated to me, was that those ministers would all be here and would be available for questions during the afternoon. Here we are about 15 minutes into this process and we still have one out of three. This government might be used to batting at about a 25 percent success rate, but I think in this context it is a disservice to the Legislature and a disservice to this process.

An Honourable Member: Strike three and you are out.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. Some clarification here: The matter of who will be here, which minister, what department is an informal arrangement that is not within the rules of the operation of this committee. The Chair encourages the House leaders to comply with their agreement, but it will not be a subject matter of debate here.

* * *

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Chairperson, I guess I respect the ruling. I suppose it is just another black mark on this government that when they make agreements between House leaders they cannot be trusted to live up to those agreements. I think that that is certainly disappointing and I think that it is disrespectful.

I know the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson), there are lots of questions for that minister. He will have his time and he will certainly have his chance. But the recognition is in the House at this point that we have a minister who has been repeatedly called for her resignation because of difficulties that have happened over the last two weeks, and not just from member of this opposition I might say. There have been a number of outside sources who have suggested this minister needs to step aside. Some might wonder if, in fact, she is trying not to be accountable and responsible to this Legislature to answer these questions. I think that is certainly regrettable.

So I would ask the Government House Leader to honour the agreement that I believe he made. If he

chooses not to—[interjection] Well, apparently he does not like to honour agreements, Mr. Chairperson. I guess his word does not count for anything in this House anymore and we will recognize that. But I would certainly ask him to bring forward the minister responsible for Family Services.

Point of Order

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

Mr. Mackintosh: Government House business is done, Mr. Chairperson, between the House leaders. If the member wants to make a point on the floor of the House, perhaps he should look at how his predecessors have dealt with this issue. If I have to put on the record our conversation with the House Leader from opposite, I will. But I understood that there were four ministers being requested. I asked him which one he wanted first. He says he did not know. I said, well, which one do you want first so we can accommodate it? We want all of them. I said, no, that is not how it works.

But in the House right now is the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson), who is available for questioning. I understand the Minister of Family Services (Ms. Melnick) is in the hallway and is coming in. The Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) had a previously scheduled meeting at three o'clock, but he knows he is wanted in the House. I know that the Minister of Industry (Mr. Rondeau) is as well.

*(15:20)

So all four of the ministers have been told that they would be questioned in the House today. I think now, in the absence of scheduling in terms of who is questioned first, the logical is to go with the minister who is in the House. So the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) is here and ready to go.

Mr. Chairperson: Issues like this are not resolved in the proceedings of this committee. That is not part of the traditions of how the committee operates, so I will put a stop on this debate and then encourage all the ministers, the House leaders involved or acting House leaders, to settle this dispute outside of the proceedings of this committee.

* * *

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Chairperson, I guess now I have an understanding then of the value of the member's word and that is fine. He can sort of live by that.

I would like to pose my question then to the Minister of Justice (Mr. Mackintosh), who was on the list for questions. I would like to ask the Minister of Justice—[interjection]

Were you not on the list?

An Honourable Member: No.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, maybe the Minister of Justice can provide clarification because my understanding was that he would be on the list of those who would be available to answer questions. So could he indicate that, Mr. Chairperson?

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, just on that, I just wanted to give you the list that was given to me by our House Leader, and that was Justice, Finance, Industry and Trade, Education, and Family Services. Those were the ones that I got. Now, if there is a misunderstanding on that, if the Justice Minister was not in that category, so be it, but as long as we have a minister here that we can ask questions of, that is the issue.

Mr. Chairperson: The Chair does not encourage the continuation of this debate on the proceedings of the House. All these issues are side issues that are settled outside of the proceeding of this committee.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Chairperson, we were just about to ask the Minister of Family Services (Ms. Melnick) a question and she is out the door.

Okay, is the Minister of Justice available for questions?

An Honourable Member: Unbelievable. Why do you even show up?

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. We have to behave in a civilized manner.

Order, please. When we adjourned last time, the honourable Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines (Mr. Rondeau) was trying to answer the question from the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings). Is there any leftover of that answer?

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines): Last day they asked how can we believe that there was no political

interference, and what I wanted to explain to the member before was the following: First—

Point of Order

Mr. Chairperson: Point of order being raised by the honourable Member for Inkster. State your point of order.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Chairperson, I do believe that the opposition is waiting for the Minister of Family Services (Ms. Melnick), and I am not too sure in terms of did someone just pose a question to the minister.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable Member for Inkster probably was not listening, but it was made clear in the record that the honourable Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines (Mr. Rondeau) was on his feet when this committee adjourned, and the Chair wanted to know if the minister had something more to say in answer to the question from the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings).

The question came from the opposition, the Member for Ste. Rose. The Chair is giving the Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines to complete the answer.

Point of Order

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable Member for Inkster wants to raise a point of order.

Mr. Lamoureux: Just a point of order, Mr. Chairperson, and I appreciate the Clerk giving a very clear indication in terms of what had taken place, but I do think that it is something in which you might want to take in as possible under advisement.

* (15:30)

I will point out what has actually taken place, and I do appreciate what the Clerk has indicated. The Member for Ste. Rose posed questions, and there were answers from the Minister of Industry yesterday. Today, once we got into committee there was permission given that would allow me to ask the Minister of Energy (Mr. Chomiak) questions. Then, as we all know, 15, 20 minutes, however much time it has been, another minister comes walking in and that minister wants to, I guess, give an answer to a question, even though it was the last question of the day and time had run out, was wanting to provide an answer to a question. I believe that is very dangerous in terms of setting a precedent. If the minister would have been here at the beginning and wanted to give a

response right at the beginning, that is quite different than 25 minutes or a half-hour into a discussion and then wanting to give an answer to a previous question, because then I would suggest to you that if in fact we allow that to be precedent-setting, then any minister of the Crown could say, well, I did not answer that question and I will continue my answer now, and put up their hand.

I think there was frustration from the opposition benches in regard to wanting to be able to ask questions of the Minister of Family Services (Ms. Melnick). I would suggest that you just take this as notice and maybe report back to the committee at some point, but right now I understand that there is a willingness to pose questions to the Minister of Family Services. So I would suggest that that is what we do, Mr. Chairperson, and then you just take the point of order as notice and then we can proceed.

Mr. Chairperson: On the same point of order, the honourable Minister of Water Stewardship.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Deputy Government House Leader): Mr. Chairperson, first of all, I think it is somewhat strange that the member would raise a point of order that essentially is predicated on him not wanting to hear a minister have the ability to answer a question for which there was not time when we dealt with Interim Supply yesterday.

I point out, it is a tradition when it comes to Interim Supply to have a fairly flexible approach. It is also a tradition in this House that, when ministers or opposition critics or any member of this House is being interviewed by the media, we often delay the starting of Estimates proceedings. We are flexible in terms of who deals with her. Today it may be a minister being interviewed; tomorrow it may be a critic.

I think if one looks at the common sense test here, it is common sense that members would want to see ministers or critics or any member of the Legislature have the opportunity to meet with the media. Mr. Chair, that is certainly part of what we do. When we had in this particular case a minister that was on the list, ready, willing and able to answer questions, certainly the government did make every effort to accommodate the request from the members of the opposition. I suspect the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings), if he was able to participate in this point of order, would be the first one to say that he wanted an answer. I assume when members of the opposition ask questions in Interim Supply, they want answers.

So I am very disappointed, Mr. Chair, that the member would use this point of order to try and prevent a minister from answering an opposition member's question. But I would point out, once again, that we are dealing here with Interim Supply. We have an agreement under the rules that ministers will be available. A minister on the list was available. We have ministers available now. Let us get on with the opportunity to get answers to opposition members' questions. That is the purpose of Interim Supply.

Mr. Chairperson: On the same point of order, the honourable Member for Steinbach.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Chairperson, I have sympathy for the point of order that has been raised by the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux). I think that he is trying to protect the customs of this House and to ensure that a bad precedent is not set by the Chair. I think part of the difficulty, obviously, is that both the Government House Leader and the Opposition House Leader are not here, maybe, to discuss some of the discussions that went on without some of us being privy to those discussions.

I might suggest, Mr. Chairperson, in the interest of time, that this either be referred back to the House leaders to be discussed further at a time outside of this committee or you just simply move on on this issue and leave it for the two House leaders to discuss so we can move on with questions.

Mr. Chairperson: The rules of procedure are designed to facilitate proceedings, not to hinder them. Therefore, out of respect for the honourable Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), I will take the matter under advisement. I will follow the suggestion of the honourable Member for Steinbach that we go on with the process.

Mr. Goertzen: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairperson. I thank you for the wisdom of your counsel on that last ruling.

I would ask the Minister of Family Services, whom I welcome to these proceedings now, regarding the cautions or warnings that we saw or heard about in the newspapers and the Manitoba Government Employees Union issuing, I believe the word is "warnings" or "caution"—I do not think it is relevant which word it was—but there were cautions raised with the minister about issues within Family Services. Can she indicate what the nature of those cautions or warnings was that she received from the

Manitoba Government Employees Union that were alluded to in the paper?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): We have been working with the union from the beginning, and we found that the union offered a lot of good advice, good recommendations, as did all of the partners. They were concerned about making sure that we were moving in a way that would focus on ensuring the quality of the devolution.

We did take a number of their recommendations on a number of issues, Mr. Chair. We set up a joint management committee that was established with labour that dealt with issues around the secondment process. On the advice of the union, we made the major concession of maintaining the stability of the after-hours unit, and we did not include the staff in the secondment process. All new intakes were redirected. There were no new intakes that flowed to the Family Services worker units of the agency. The agency re-assigned qualified staff to divert all of these new intakes. This was done, once again, to minimize additional pressure on the Family Services workers.

The agency also responded to the concern around a case summary workload that was related to the transfer process. We redeployed a pool of agency staff, and we actually hired additional staff during the rollout.

Now, another committee that was struck there was the joint consultation committee through the General Authority. There was also the department and unions joint committee and they have been working with several issues as well. The Child Protection Branch was also assisting in any issues that were raised on case transfers, in sending from one agency to another. They did receive several calls, and they worked with the agencies and the authorities to resolve these issues. So these are the types of issues that were raised. We worked with them on those and will continue to work with them.

* (15:40)

Mr. Goertzen: The minister alluded in her answer about recommendations that were brought forward by MGEU. I think, if I recollect properly, she said that some of the recommendations were acted upon. Could she provide, either here today if she has them with her, or if she wants to make an undertaking to provide in a timely manner, the full list of recommendations that would have been provided by

MGEU regarding the devolution process, including those that were accepted and those which were not accepted immediately?

Ms. Melnick: Specifically, Mr. Chairperson, the MGEU wanted an independent body to evaluate the process and to look at any concerns that were raised. There is, in fact, a quality initiative going on right now by the standing committee, which consists of the four CEOs of the four authorities and there is also the director of child welfare involved in that.

They also asked that a reassessment of distribution of resources take place and that was always part of the plan. The plan was always to prepare for the devolution, to roll the devolution out and to look at resources as they needed to be provided, after one year of the go-live date, to look at every region and oversee what resources had to be deployed or redeployed based on the number of caseloads.

They were also wanting us to look at a process to evaluate the readiness of the integrated services delivery system before introducing it to Child and Family Services. Indeed, we are looking at the readiness of the integrated service delivery system, and we are very aware of the challenges and we welcome the input of the union on that.

They also were concerned about any branch or seconded vacancies that had not been filled and we have asked them to bring forth specific examples of that, because we are not aware of any positions that can be filled and that are not being filled, so we have asked the union to come back to us on that particular issue.

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the minister. I wonder if she can expand upon or expound on the recommendation that MGEU launch an independent body of analysis, if she could provide the type of suggestions that MGEU is looking for in terms of that analysis and the time frame that they were recommending if they wanted it to be done and reported back before the go-live date. And maybe they put forward a suggestion of what the nature of that analysis would be and the composition of the review.

Ms. Melnick: I am sorry, Mr. Chairperson, I missed the beginning of the question.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable Member for Steinbach, please repeat.

Mr. Goertzen: Sure, and the minister mentioned in her previous answer that MGEU had recommended—

one of the recommendations was for an independent body of analysis regarding devolution. I wonder for clarity if she could indicate what the nature or the composition of that independent analysis was that MGEU was looking for, and the time frame, whether they wanted it to happen prior to the go-live date.

Ms. Melnick: What we wrote back to them on was that the Strategic Initiatives branch is leading an existing process to look at and address problems and that is through the Standing Committee of the Child Welfare Initiative. That is an ongoing process and that is a process that we would include input from the unions on.

Mr. Goertzen: The standing committee process, then, I am going to assume and I have to move on an assumption that that is not what MGEU was looking for. The minister indicates that she wrote them indicating that. Could she provide correspondence back and forth between herself and MGEU about this particular issue? She could also provide perhaps for the committee an indication of what exactly it was MGEU was recommending for an independent body of analysis.

Ms. Melnick: I can provide that, Mr. Chairperson.

Mr. Goertzen: I thank the minister for that undertaking. I am sure that she has some understanding, though, of what it was that MGEU was looking for in terms of an independent body of analysis. Could she provide, at least, a summary way what type of process they were looking for?

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Chairperson, I think I will table the correspondence and ask the member to have a look at that.

Mr. Goertzen: Can the minister indicate what the time frame is for her tabling that correspondence? I am assuming she has it in the context of her department, and it would not take more than a day.

Ms. Melnick: Yes. I will get that for the member as soon as I can, as soon as possible.

Mr. Goertzen: The minister also indicated then, quite apart from the substantive issue of the composition of the review, what the time frame MGEU was looking for. Were they looking for that analysis to be done prior to the go-live day? I assume that the standing committee is an ongoing issue. It is ongoing even today. Was MGEU looking for the analysis to be done before devolution came forward in its entirety?

Ms. Melnick: I believe the MGEU was looking for analysis to be done on an ongoing basis, but I will wait and I will table the documents that the member has asked for.

I also want to speak to the issue's recording guidelines which were issued in August 2005. It was a joint Aboriginal Justice Inquiry-Child Welfare Initiative committee made up of secondees from the Aboriginal agencies and non-seconded rural and northern Family Services and Housing employees. It was jointly chaired by the co-chair, the MGEU staff rep, social sciences component, as well as our Manitoba Family Services and Housing director of human resources. It was an area for discussion. It was an area for people to go to if they had issues that they wanted to be discussed. So, there has been information passed in between. There have been recommendations ongoing from all of our partners, including the union, from the beginning.

I think it is also important to recognize that our initial rollout date has been rolled back approximately two years from the time that we had originally wanted to roll this out because we were working with our partners and we were working with all the various stakeholders. We were listening to what they were saying, and we were assessing and re-assessing as we were going on based on recommendations made, based on working together.

So I think we should be very careful not to assume that there was one letter sent, there was one response sent, there was one request made, there was one response to one request. I think we have to recognize that this was a process in which there were many discussions ongoing on many different levels. There were recommendations and suggestions that were acted on. Not all of the recommendations and suggestions by every single partner were acted on, but, in general, there was the ability and the flexibility in the desire to get this right and to have a smooth rollout that we were jointly making decisions and having ongoing discussions, even sometimes after decisions had been made.

Mr. Goertzen: I appreciate that there would not be just one letter that would have gone back and forth between MGEU and other partners and the minister, that there should be a volume of letters, and I look forward to the minister providing that volume of letters, as she indicates, sometime in the next several hours.

I do want to ask the minister, regarding the issue of MGEU, what the most recent date was of any kind

of concerns that were raised by the union either about the process of devolution or the readiness of the department to undergo the devolution process. Could she indicate what the most recent warning was from MGEU, either in written form or in some other form, to her department?

Ms. Melnick: I do not have that with me, Mr. Chair. I can undertake to get it.

* (15:50)

Mr. Goertzen: I appreciate the minister committing to provide that information in a timely fashion.

I wonder if the minister could indicate, I guess for my own clarification, I would think that when concerns are raised from the union, from the organization that represents the front-line workers dealing with these issues, that they might be if not the most knowledgeable partner about issues or concerns, they would certainly be among the most knowledgeable partners.

Can the minister indicate what weight she gave the concerns that were raised by MGEU?

Ms. Melnick: Certainly, Mr. Chair. I took the concerns raised by any of our partners very seriously. There is a workforce of MGEU workers. There is a workforce of people who have been working in the Aboriginal agencies, largely not unionized. There are the other stakeholders, the other agencies and our formal partners within the four authorities. All the concerns raised were of importance. I know that the department worked through various channels with all of our partners around these issues, the result of which is we delayed the rollout for two years.

Again, I want to reiterate that in looking at the recommendations that have been made, verbally, written, et cetera, they were taken under serious consideration. Not all of them were implemented. A lot of them were. A lot of them were implemented in a way so that we did not rush the process, so that we took the time that we felt needed to be taken. The authorities agreed. Whenever there was a change in the time lines the authorities were consulted. There was a lot of discussion. There was a lot of weighing out of pros and cons. Then there was a joint agreement.

That is the way this process has worked from the start is that we were very serious about this undertaking. We were very interested in hearing what all of the stakeholders had to say. We took recommendations from every area that we got them

and we looked at them all. Then we would move forward in different aspects of the rollout which, again, was two years late from the original time frame because we wanted to make sure that we were covering the bases.

Mr. Goertzen: During the context of Question Period today, and I am not sure if it was the minister responsible for Family Services, if the question that was posed to her was answered on her behalf by the Minister of Energy, Science and Technology (Mr. Chomiak), but, certainly, it was one of the two suggested that the need for a public inquiry was muted at this point because of an ongoing RCMP, potential RCMP investigation. It would be ongoing because charges have been laid.

Could the minister indicate if she sought out a legal opinion on that regard, that it would not be possible to undertake a public inquiry, and could she table that legal opinion?

Ms. Melnick: I did not seek out a legal opinion on this, Mr. Chair. The nature of a public inquiry is such that information is made public. The nature of an RCMP investigation is such that information is not made public. I think it is very important that we recognize that there are several investigations and reviews currently underway and that we respect that process and we be very, very careful that nothing that is done by this government or by members of the opposition would in any way jeopardize that. I am sure members of the opposition do not want to inadvertently jeopardize an RCMP investigation. That is the point that I made in the House this afternoon.

Mr. Goertzen: Is the minister aware, I am assuming that she is aware, that public inquiries, at least the history of public inquiries both federally and provincially, usually are not commissioned, or do not usually have the authority, to find fault in matters? They tend to be more findings of fact, and, in fact, they do not attribute legal blame under either the civil standard or the criminal standard.

We recognize that the RCMP investigation will be conducted on a different standard, criminal standard, of beyond a reasonable doubt, while the standard in a public inquiry is something quite different. I think it is a recognition, it has been a historical recognition, that the two are something quite different and that they are not there to serve the same purpose. I think also that there has been in other instances, federally, a parallel process between

RCMP investigations and public inquiries where they could be ongoing at the same time.

Is the minister indicating that past history on the federal side and also the past history with the nature and scope of public inquiries is incorrect?

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Chairperson, what I am indicating is the importance of being very careful at this time. It has been a very tragic incident. It is a very upsetting incident. We want the answers, we all want the answers, Manitobans want the answers. And we want to make sure, and it is important that we make sure, that those answers and those quests to get the answers respect the parallel investigations and reviews that are underway.

I do not claim to be an expert on public inquiries, Mr. Chairperson. I do not claim to have all the answers to all of the questions that the Member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen) has just put forward, but what I do want to make sure that we do hear ensures that the investigations and the reviews that are currently underway are allowed to carry on and be as complete as they need to be. We all want to make sure that at the end of the day the answers are there, that the changes that need to be made will be made, and we also, I believe, want to make sure that nothing is done that would, in any way, jeopardize or concern the RCMP investigation that might in some strange way compromise that investigation.

I know that the concerns are very valid that have been raised around what has happened, and the concerns of wanting to get the answers are very acute for all Manitobans, certainly, myself included. But I am asking that the members of the opposition respect the processes and respect that we have to be very careful with the steps that are taken now.

Mr. Goertzen: I would encourage the minister, perhaps, to—I know she says she has not done a lot of research on that, but I would encourage her to do that because of the importance of the matter.

Just for clarification then, I want to make sure I have this correct for my own understanding. The Premier (Mr. Doer) has said that he is not closing the door to a public inquiry on this issue. So, is it then the minister's understanding that there is at least some belief that there might be additional information that could be garnered—I use the words "could be garnered"—from a public inquiry that is not being garnered by the RCMP investigation?

Ms. Melnick: What the Premier has said is if at the end of the day the current investigations and reviews

still leave unanswered questions, that this government would be open to considering a public inquiry.

Now, yesterday I announced two reviews; one is an external review which will be headed by the Children's Advocate. It will also have the Ombudsperson on the leadership team of that review. Michael Hardy, the executive director of the Tikinagan Child and Family Services of Sioux Lookout, will also be participating in that.

* (16:00)

They will be looking at cases; they will be looking at the opening, the closing, and the transmittal of cases. They will be looking at that, Mr. Chairperson, as part of a very important process that goes on within any child welfare agency. Transfers could move from section to section within the agency. They could move on an interagency basis. They will be reviewing that.

Now what I have asked them also to do is, if questions come up that need to be answered, I have asked them to consider those questions as well. I have also asked them, and I have made it known for any of the other reviews and investigations currently underway, that if in the course of those investigations there is an apparent need for a change in the system we will be very open to hearing that recommendation and to make that change. We are not going to be forcing people to wait until the end of the investigation or review to do that.

Now, the second review that we announced yesterday was the section 4 review. I have directed the director of child welfare to request to begin a section 4 review into the case that has concerned us so deeply over the last little while. We have asked independent folks to carry out that review, again, the Children's Advocate, the Ombudsperson, and Jim Newton, who is the director of psychology at the Manitoba Adolescent Treatment Centre. In addition to that, we have spoken of the RCMP investigation. We believe the CME will be doing an investigation. The agency is also doing an investigation.

So, if at the end of all of those reviews and investigations there are still unanswered questions that we have and that Manitobans have around what happened and how can we make changes that we believe will help to prevent a tragedy like this from ever occurring again, we will be open to looking at the possibility of a public inquiry.

Mr. Goertzen: I think that the minister got to the answer at the last part of that response, so I just want to clarify. She is acknowledging that at least the possibility exists that there will be unanswered questions that may result in a public inquiry.

Ms. Melnick: What was said is that if at the end of the investigations that I just outlined there are outstanding questions we would be open to reviewing the possibility of a public inquiry.

Mr. Goertzen: So I accept the minister's response in that there certainly could be unanswered questions after the RCMP investigation and the two other investigations that she mentions.

I would like to ask the minister responsible for Industry, then, the Premier (Mr. Doer) has stated that the reason that he will not call a Crocus inquiry is because there has been an RCMP investigation as well as other reports similar to what the minister is talking about. I guess I do not understand the duplicity. On the one hand, this Minister of Family Services and her Premier acknowledge that an RCMP investigation and other investigations might not be sufficient to get all of the answers. Yet, when it comes to Crocus, the Premier says, no, an RCMP investigation does get to the bottom of everything.

Can the Minister of Industry explain that contradiction?

Mr. Rondeau: Well, Mr. Chair, I think the member opposite should be aware of a number of things that have happened. One, there has been a 245-page report from an independent Auditor General who has gone into the Crocus Investment Fund, had full access. What the member opposite should know, if he is aware of what is going on in the House, is that at first what happened was the Auditor General had the ability to follow the money. That was provided in 2001. He should know that the Auditor General was at first resisted by the Crocus management who said that they were going to challenge the Auditor General's right to do the investigation and have access to the Crocus Investment Fund.

What happened was the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) and myself wrote a letter on behalf of the Auditor General to make sure that he had full and uninterrupted access to the Crocus Investment Fund's information, their resources, et cetera. He was made an authorized person.

So there has been an investigation. On that and on that information, the Auditor General had some issues as far as criminal investigation. What we then

did was we sent that to the Deputy Attorney General and on to the RCMP for a criminal investigation to see if there were any other things.

So that is one aspect. So there has been an Auditor General's report, 245 pages. Please read it. Number two, what has happened is there is now an RCMP investigation on all criminal allegations that is unhindered by political interference and that is occurring.

In addition, there is a Manitoba Securities Commission investigation which is looking at things like the prospectus to see that there was neither fraud nor misrepresentation, making sure that there is no breakage of the Securities' laws or inappropriate action on any of the Securities' laws. Again, Mr. Chairperson, they have the right to subpoena witnesses just like they would in the RCMP investigation or criminal investigation. They have the right to access.

In addition to that, Mr. Chairperson, the Canada customs and revenue agency was provided information, direct information to look at to see if there was any inappropriate tax returns or whether people got benefits and did not pay the appropriate taxes.

So in all these cases, there are investigations. There is also a civil suit that has gone on where the board of directors, the executives, all the different parties like Wellington West, like the auditors, are in front of a judge, in front of appropriate cross-examination to ensure that there will be appropriate recourse.

All these things are happening, Mr. Chairperson, on an organization that was not controlled by government. It was not even arm's length. It was an organization that had an independent board of directors, a totally independent board of directors. In fact, in comparison to the Conservative government, the Conservative government had two political board members.

An Honourable Member: Two?

Mr. Rondeau: Two political board members. Ours was an independent civil servant, long-term civil servants in most cases.

So these are the differences between them and us and, in fact, when we looked at it, we actually have a letter from the Auditor General to say thank you for our prompt response that we can have an appropriate, fast investigation on this issue.

I find it passing strange that the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) does not want any responses. He wants to ask questions but then pushes against the fact that we should be responding to questions, and I find it passing strange that the Member for Inkster does not want to hear appropriate responses from my deputy minister or myself on this issue. He blurts out all the time that we should be sitting here to do business but when he has a chance to do business, when he has a chance to hear responses, he refuses to give my right to respond. He wants the right to ask questions but he shuts down my right to respond, and I find that really passing strange because he does not want to hear responses. He wants to give political shots. He wants to ask the questions but he does not want to give my right to respond.

I say that what we have done is we have a Crocus implementation team that is looking at what the Auditor General suggested. We have Bill 51, which has cleaned up all the issues as far as labour-sponsored venture capital funds and has taken proper disclosure, proper representation on the board, and that is what we needed to do. We have taken action, Mr. Chairperson.

*(16:10)

Mr. Goertzen: That was a passing strange answer, Mr. Chairperson. I think that the minister actually makes the case because he indicates that under Crocus there is an RCMP investigation. The Minister of Family Services (Ms. Melnick) indicates that in this scenario there is an RCMP investigation.

The Minister of Industry (Mr. Rondeau) talks about a civil suit, and I would submit that it is entirely likely that the government could also be facing a civil suit on this particular issue if the potential litigants would look at the case after and decide there was a case to made that the government failed in its responsibility in terms of protection. So there is a parallel between those two.

The only distinction that I will say that the Minister of Industry makes is that he says in the case of Crocus, unlike the scandal we are dealing with in Family Services, in the case of Crocus there was an Auditor General's report, and, he says in his own words, the distinction there is that he granted full access to information, and that that is the only distinction. Perhaps that is what he is basing his case on in terms of why there should not be a public inquiry in Crocus, but there may be one under Family Services.

So I would then ask the Minister of Family Services: Will she be granting full access to information to the Child Advocate and the Ombudsman who are going to be looking into this? Will she be granting full access to information from her department?

Ms. Melnick: What we have done is we have asked the Ombudsperson, the Children's Advocate, and the executive director of the Tikinagan Child and Family Services at Sioux Lookout to look at case management files, to look at opening, closing and transferring. Now they will determine what information they will need, but we have to be very careful, Mr. Chairperson, that we look at systemic change. Again, we are not looking, and I know that the individuals who will be conducting the external review will not be looking at scapegoating or finger-pointing or looking, at an individual worker and blaming them. So they will be looking at the situation from a systemic perspective, and they will be letting us know what information they will be needing, and we will be complying with that in a way that respects The Child and Family Services Act and any other acts that may pertain to any of the information that they may be requesting.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I ask the Minister of Family Services and Housing whether she will table the terms of reference for the two reviews.

Ms. Melnick: Certainly, we can do that, Mr. Chairperson. It was part of the press release that was released yesterday where we talked about each of the individual reviews that were announced yesterday, and we did go into the detail in the press release about what these reviews would be covering. Each one is listed in the press release that was handed out yesterday afternoon. I am not sure if the Member for River Heights got a copy of that but certainly I would be happy to provide that to him.

Mr. Gerrard: I look forward to the minister's tabling the full terms of reference for the two inquiries.

One of the issues which is important in this context is to what extent the government, which is inviting people to come forward with issues, as I understand it, relating to Child and Family Services, to what extent will the government protect honest whistle-blowers who come forward to provide information.

Ms. Melnick: Protection currently exists in The Child and Family Services Act. I believe it is section 18.1(1), and I would again be happy to provide that to the Member for River Heights if he is unaware of that. The section of the act speaks specifically to the protection of individuals who are sharing information that they believe will lead to the aid of a child if they believe a child is in a bad situation, and the section of the act certainly would be applied to any of the individuals who would be wanting to come forward with information for the external review.

Also, I would like to mention, Mr. Chairperson, that in our press release of yesterday we provided a phone number that people can call, and they have the assurance that the information that they are providing will in fact be going to the people who are leading the external review, and they will be given that information and certainly, I know, will be very responsibly reviewing it.

Mr. Gerrard: For a Child and Family Services worker who comes forward with information, will there be any protection in terms of her job, where he or she feels threatened that a supervisor or somebody in Child and Family Services could target him or her in some fashion because he or she has come forward with information about what has been happening with Child and Family Services?

Ms. Melnick: Again, Mr. Chairperson, individuals, including people who may be working at any agency, would be protected when they are coming forward with concerns around the protection of children. I think it is a little unfortunate that the Member for River Heights is creating what might be considered a false construct here and is trying to scare people from not coming forward.

I was very clear in my comments yesterday and in my comments in the House today that this is not a finger-pointing exercise. It is not a witch hunt. It is not a blame game. We want people to come forward. We want to know what happened, and we want to know how we can do our best collectively to prevent a situation like this from happening again.

So I am a little concerned with what the Member for River Heights is putting out, because in fact it may inhibit people from coming forward with information that could prove to be very valuable and very helpful in the protection of the children in care in Manitoba.

Mr. Gerrard: The problem really is at the government's door because of the lack of protection

given to whistle-blowers who came forward on Aiyawin and the lack of protection to a whistle-blower who came forward at the Workers Compensation Board. This is not something that I am bringing forward without having heard these concerns from people who have worked in Child and Family Services.

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

Ms. Melnick: Again, Mr. Chairperson, we are not looking at a retributionist exercise here for people who may have information that may be very helpful in this tragic case. We have the protection currently under The Child and Family Services Act for all individuals who feel they have information that they would like to provide.

Again, I have to say it is unfortunate that the Member for River Heights is creating a situation which is not part of the external review. He is creating a situation that may be frightening people from bringing forward information that may prove to be very, very helpful and very, very pivotal in recognizing the positive changes that may result from recommendations for this external review.

* (16:20)

But the external review will only be successful if we recognize that we all want to get the answers to what happened and that we do not want to be from the outset, as the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) is now attempting to do, muting people or frightening people. The Child and Family Services Act, the protection in the act for people who are bringing forward information around their concerns of a child is not a new section of the act. It is a section of the act that has been there for a very long time. It is a very important section of the act, and it is one that we will be respecting.

I hope that the Member for River Heights and that all members of this House would respect and would not try to create a situation where people would be concerned about coming forward. The member is trying to create a scenario where people may become afraid to come forward. It is not a responsible way to behave and it is not a way to behave that will help us all collectively find the answers that we all expressed. Every party expressed last week in the House that we all want to find these

answers. We are all very upset about what has happened. We all want to make the changes that we believe need to be made or that we believe might have to be made to try to prevent such a tragedy from happening again.

So I ask the Member for River Heights to respect that there is protection in The Child and Family Services Act and not to come forward in the public arena in a way that may inhibit people from sharing information that may be very, very important in the protection of children in care in Manitoba.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Chairperson, the Member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) has reminded me of somebody who came forward in 2002 with concerns and, subsequently, was fired by Child and Family Services. *[interjection]* It is not me. It is people speaking out on the result of the experience that has happened in the past.

The problem is that, although the minister speaks one way, the reality, in the past at least, has often been the other way. This is not just true for people working within Child and Family Services. There are concerns that people who have children have, that their children will be taken away if they were to say something that was against or contrary to what a Child and Family Services worker had said. You know the reports of the inquests in the past have indicated that there has often been an adversarial relationship between people in Child and Family Services and parents who want to look after their children and are very scared that their children might be taken away. This has not created a very positive environment, sad to say.

But my question to the minister is: Where you have somebody who comes forward with concerns, what measures will be taken to ensure that children are not taken away and put somewhere where they should be not placed? I mean, this is a real concern. We understand that people are not perfect, but there needs to be some measure of protection for people who come forward, otherwise there will be these sorts of concerns.

Ms. Melnick: Well, either the Member for Charleswood has misinformed the Member for River Heights, or the Member for River Heights has misunderstood what the Member for Charleswood has said. But the department has not fired anyone who has come forward with information. So this is exactly the scenario that I am cautioning all members opposite. *[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please.

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Chairperson, could I ask for quiet? Mr. Chairperson, the way members opposite are carrying on about this very serious issue tells me they really are not serious about it. I am trying to present information to the House, and I am asking for their co-operation in listening?

This is exactly the scenario that I am cautioning members opposite about. Members opposite said they were glad that the external review had been announced yesterday. It is the responsibility of every member of this House to make sure that people are able to come forward with the information that they have that may lead to improvements in the system that may prevent such a tragic incident from happening again.

Again, I want to say to members opposite collectively, be very careful with what you are—you may not realize what you may be starting right now but which would be an environment where people would not feel safe in coming forward. I think that it is incumbent on all of us on the concerns that have been raised in this House and on concerns that Manitobans have, is that we are able to find the answers and if there are changes that need to be made, that we make them.

I think it is very important that we do not try to score political points on this, Mr. Chairperson, and that we do not try to create situations that do not exist that may inhibit our ability to get those answers and to make those changes.

Mr. Gerrard: It is the minister herself who needs to make it very clear that people who come forward with honest material will be protected, whether it is workers or whether it is parents or whether it is others involved. I will be looking very carefully as an MLA at the terms of reference which are tabled to make sure that it is very, very clear in those terms of reference just exactly how people will be protected, because I think that is very important.

One of the issues which has come up repeatedly is the issue of standards and the size of the caseloads. I would ask the minister: What is the current standard, and is that standard uniformly being met?

Ms. Melnick: As I assured the House yesterday, the current caseload is approximately 28. Now, that can change from worker to worker, depending on the type of case. It can change depending on the activity in each case. Part of the terms of reference, which the member, I am assuming, has not seen, is a review

of caseload. This is an area that again the external review committee will be looking into and if there are recommendations around caseload, we will look at those recommendations.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Chairperson, this morning on CJOB the Child Advocate was on, and I understand from the minister that the Child Advocate will be undertaking part of the systemic review going on in Family Services. But I heard the Child Advocate state on the radio today in response to a question from the reporter about devolution, whether or not this individual favoured devolution. She said full-heartedly that it was absolutely the right thing to do.

Now, there might in this Chamber be many who simply agree with that but there is a difference in that the person who has been appointed to review the systemic issues within Child and Family Services has publicly already spoken out about perhaps one of the issues that will be, I would suggest, a key part of the review.

Can the minister indicate if she is comfortable with one of the people that she has appointed to the review already prejudging a portion of it?

* (16:30)

Ms. Melnick: The external review committee will be looking at cases. The external review committee will be looking at the opening, closing and transmittal of cases.

Now, this is not unique to the child welfare system in Manitoba. It exists in every system. It has existed in Manitoba's system since there were child welfare agencies. It is not unusual for a case to be transferred either within an agency or on an interagency basis, so that is what the external review committee will be looking at.

I want to remind the House that the devolution of child welfare was something that was unanimously supported by every member in this House, and it was supported on the recommendations from the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry-Child Welfare Initiative.

I hope, Mr. Chairperson, that it was supported in the true spirit of care for children in care, and I think we have to all be very aware that the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry resulted from two tragic deaths of Aboriginal people. We also have to be aware and recognize that, traditionally, child welfare systems have not been kind to Aboriginal children, to Aboriginal families and Aboriginal communities.

They begin with the residential school systems and then they worked into child welfare systems, but a lot of the principles were the same.

It was taking children, sometimes very forcibly taking children, from communities and from their support networks and from their cultural bases and from their linguistic bases and from their whole environment, and placing them into, sometimes, residential schools. We have all heard, and I believe that we all feel very badly about what happened to many people in residential schools. That residential school system then developed into the child welfare agencies, and it was not until 1982 that Aboriginal child welfare agencies were agreed upon between the Government of Canada and the government of Manitoba and the leaders from the Aboriginal communities.

Now, this devolution of child welfare, as recommended by Justice Murray Sinclair in the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, was something that we brought to this House and that there was full party agreement on, Mr. Chairperson. I hope that members opposite are not suggesting that we should not have worked toward this, that we should not have all agreed upon this. I think that also we have to recognize the credentials that the Children's Advocate brings to the table, her years of professional experience, her personal experience in being a foster parent and her commitment in her current position as the Children's Advocate, to work in a way that is not in any way prejudiced, but to work in a way in which we will seek to find the answers that we all want. The external review will seek to put together recommendations that they, in the truest spirit of the care of children in care, will put forward as to how they believe. We can make changes that will lead, hopefully, to the prevention of tragic incidents such as this in the future.

Mr. Goertzen: I am disappointed that the minister always tries to put forward this red herring about the support for devolution. The reality is that she has called the review because of difficulties that she has undergone in her own ministry. So it was, I think, a decision that was supported, to have this systemic review, and I simply fail to see, Madam Minister, through you, Mr. Chair, how it is that any kind of a review can happen without looking at the overall process by which it finally happened. So I would suggest that all participants in this committee need to be cautious about the statements they make prior to

the results coming out, and I would suggest that the minister needs to take that to heart.

Finally, my final question, Mr. Chairperson. The minister has acknowledged that there is at least some concern in her mind that individuals could be fearful about coming forward and bringing information. I know she ascribed that fear to the Leader of the Liberal Party. While I might not agree with that assertion, it is evident that the minister at least does believe that it is a possibility that people will be afraid to come forward. It is her own acknowledgment.

I wonder if she does not believe that to alleviate any of those fears it would be best if she stepped aside as minister while this review is undertaken.

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Chair, I think it is also important to acknowledge that both the Children's Advocate and the Ombudsperson were hired through all-party committees. So there was agreement again by all parties in this House that we were hiring the people who we felt had the characteristics and had the integrity to carry out their jobs.

Now, on the second point, Mr. Chair, the member has misspoken what I had said only a few minutes ago, which is the pattern of the members of the opposition in giving misinformation. So let me just, again, reiterate around the people who, hopefully, will be coming forward with information, under The Child and Family Services Act, I believe it is section 18.1(1), there is protection for people who are bringing forward concerns that they have about children.

I am very concerned with what I see the opposition party and the Liberal Party joining together on is creating their attempt to wilfully create an atmosphere in which people will be made afraid to come forward. This is very, very dangerous.

Again, I spoke yesterday, and it was reported in the news outlets that I have said that this is not a witch hunt, this is not a finger pointing exercise. It is the responsibility of members opposite, whatever political party they are representing here in the House, to ensure that an environment of fear is not created around this, that we have an environment of openness, that we have an environment in which people will feel safe in coming forward because that is the way that we will find out what happened. We will understand collectively what happened, and we will understand the recommendations that come

forward, why they will come forward, what is the context, and that we will all work together to collectively create a system to improve on the current system, and that we will create even more protection for the vulnerable children who are in care in Manitoba.

So, again, I ask members opposite to not go down the road of creating an environment in which people will be fearful of coming forward based on their misinformation.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I would just like to indicate to the Minister of Family Services that the best way to accomplish that is through a public inquiry where people come forward without any fear of being able to speak, because we have seen what this government has done with whistle-blowers. Everybody out there has seen what has happened to a number of whistle-blowers that have come forward under this government.

An Honourable Member: Name one.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, they are asking me to name one: Pat Jacobsen, Tom Ulrich. There are people, very obviously, out there that did come forward with concerns and this government did can them.

So, Mr. Chair, I think people out there have a legitimate concern. That is why an inquiry into this would be the best way in order to encourage people to come forward and be protected as a whistleblower and not be fearful of losing their job.

* (16:40)

I spoke with a number of social workers and front-line workers in 2002. In fact, there were some serious ramifications when these people did come forward and expressed their concerns about babies falling through the cracks and their fears at that time. So we know what happens and so do the front-line social workers know what happens. So the minister can try to make her comments, but there is history behind all of this, and she should be careful in what she is saying.

Mr. Chairperson, I would like the Minister of Education, related to the Seven Oaks School Division getting into unlawful residential land development and using \$2 million of taxpayers' money to pay the up-front costs of residential land development, if he could tell us if this unlawful activity is still continuing.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable Minister of Education. The Member for Charleswood, please repeat the question.

Mrs. Driedger: My question was to the Minister of Education.

Mr. Chairperson: The question is directed to the Minister of Education.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): With respect to the Seven Oaks School Division, as members recall there had been a 30-day review that was brought to the House on June 2 of 2005. It was released after 30 days.

In that 30-day review, it was clear what needed to be done to address what occurred and ensure that this type of situation did not present itself once again, so there were several recommendations that were brought forward. We acted upon those recommendations that were brought forward by the deputy minister in the review process.

The Seven Oaks School Division has divested itself of all properties, and there is presently a special audit being undertaken at which point we will have final numbers on the results of the transactions. The Office of the Auditor General, as the Member for Charleswood knows, is also examining the situation and will provide another lens to look at how we can improve our practices and procedures.

Mrs. Driedger: I would like to indicate to the minister that I am fully aware because I was the one that wrote him a letter and asked him to get involved and investigate, and I understand that he is looking at it in a very broad range. He is looking at the role of the Seven Oaks School Division; he is looking at the Public Schools Finance Board; he is looking at the minister's office. Can the minister indicate who else he might be looking at into this review?

Mr. Bjornson: I believe that is up to the Auditor General to determine, and the Auditor General has provided information with respect to the parameters of the review.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate when the Auditor will be finished that review?

Mr. Bjornson: No, I cannot.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister promised to fully fund Bill 13. I wonder if he could please explain what he meant when he indicated quite some time ago that he would fully fund Bill 13.

Mr. Bjornson: There has been a lot of discussion around the impacts of Bill 13 and our commitment to funding appropriate educational programming has been very clear. In fact, the last two budget announcements with increases in categorical funding for appropriate educational programming alone amounted to \$14 million as part of our commitment. Our increase in funding to appropriate educational programming has gone up 36.5 percent in our seven years in office compared to 4.7 percent increase over the previous seven years.

As part of the Special Education Review Initiative, one of the recommendations that was brought forward was a review of how appropriate educational programming is funded, and the Member for Charleswood was at a public meeting at which that was discussed, that the terms of reference are being developed for a review of how appropriate educational programming is funded.

In addition to that, there are also challenges with respect to the infrastructure, and we have increased our funding to the capital program significantly to help school divisions address the issue of access for students with special needs.

We are partners in funding education, and there are some school divisions which do put more of their local resources into appropriate educational programming programs as well, so the funding for appropriate educational programming, again our record is quite clear that our commitment is to provide the resources to address the needs of special needs students and the 36.5 percent increase speaks volumes of that commitment.

An Honourable Member: Compared to theirs.

Mr. Bjornson: Yes.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, when the minister committed to fully funding Bill 13, we are two years past the date when that bill passed, and this minister has not even started a review of what it means to fund Bill 13. So, when he indicated that he was going to fully fund it, how can he make that commitment when he does not know how much it costs?

Mr. Bjornson: Once again, our language on education is that education is an investment, not a cost, and our investment has been very clear, that it is a 36.5 percent increase compared to a 4.7 percent increase for appropriate educational programming.

The review, the Special Education Review Initiative that was concluded in 1998, came forward

with over 40 recommendations. Funding and how we fund was part of it. The funding of appropriate educational programming has evolved. There have been some pilot projects initiated in block funding, and we are assessing the impact of that. There have been a number of different initiatives undertaken to address the funding issue, one of which includes the fact that parents with children with profound challenges do not have to apply repeatedly for funding on an annual basis. So there are things that are evolving around the funding application process and around how we fund appropriate educational programming.

But, when we came up with Bill 13, there were over 19 groups that were involved in the dialogue to develop the legislation and to develop the regulations. One of the commitments that we have made is to continue the dialogue with our stakeholders, and we will certainly do that when it comes to developing the terms of reference and determining how we can best resource the needs of our special needs students.

As I said, there were 40-plus recommendations. We have acted on or are acting on all those recommendation from the Special Education Review Initiative.

Mrs. Driedger: I would point out to the minister that in the MAST submission on Bill 13 dated December 9, 2004, they indicated that the Manitoba school boards' expenditures in the area of special needs education far exceed supporting provincial grants. They have indicated that what the government is giving to fund special education is far below what is actually needed to appropriately and fully fund special education.

So, when the minister has promised to fully fund Bill 13, it is sending a message out there. Last week, in meetings with school divisions, I found out that they were told repeatedly by the Department of Education, when there were discussions beginning about the regulations, that there was no extra money available for Bill 13.

So if the Department of Education at the beginning of the process of developing regulations was repeatedly telling school divisions there is no extra money available for Bill 13 and yet the minister promised to fully fund it, but he does not know how much it costs because, even though the bill was passed two years ago—he has not even started a review—how is everybody supposed to put this into context? He says he is starting a review, but when he

was asked the other night, he could not indicate whether it was a committee. First, he said, well, it was a committee; then he said, well, it is not a committee. *[interjection]* Oh, that is exactly what the minister said the other night because he could not answer half the questions, and his departmental staff that were with him had to answer at least half of the questions that were posed to him by the 200 people in the audience, many of whom were very, very upset with this Minister of Education's dragging his heels on looking at the funding. As one angry mom had even indicated, without proper funding what gives this bill teeth?

* (16:50)

So, you know, the minister needs to be able to explain what he meant when he said he is going to fully fund it. The school divisions are on pins and needles because they do not know what is going to happen with this now that the bill has passed. The bill has been proclaimed and the minister's department is saying there is no extra money, but the minister is saying it is fully funded.

Where is the money coming from to fully and properly fund, then, his own legislation?

Mr. Bjornson: You know, with respect to that meeting last week, there was over about an hour and a half worth of questions, and I wonder if the member sat through the entire meeting because I certainly answered more than half of the questions. It was good to have questions on the quality of education and the work that we are doing to improve the quality of education for students in Manitoba. I thought it was a very good and very productive meeting, as we do hold these meetings for more input and advice from the stakeholders, which has always been our commitment.

Now, the member talked about putting things in context with respect to the funding of appropriate educational programming, and I would like to take this opportunity to put it in context. I have already referenced the fact that our increased commitment was 36.5 percent since 1999, compared to a mere 4.7 percent under the previous administration. Under the Conservative government, \$114 million were dedicated to special needs funding, and today students in the special needs programs receive \$155.6 million in support.

Since 1999, we have increased Level I special needs funding by 13.2 percent. In the previous seven

years, Level I funding was only increased by 4.3 percent.

Under the previous administration, Level II special needs students were receiving \$21 million in funding; compared to today, Level II special needs students receive \$37.7 million in support. That is an increase of 79.5 percent since 1999.

Under the previous administration, Level III special needs students, the highest needs students in the province, were receiving \$15.8 million in funding. Today, our highest needs students are receiving \$29.5 million in support, an increase of 86.4 percent since 1999.

Throughout the nineties, funding rates for Level II and III special needs students went unchanged, and our government has increased our per-pupil support to special needs students twice since 2000, so I really do not need to be lectured about who understands what is necessary in terms of resources for support for special needs students. Our commitment has been very clear.

Our commitment for capital in 2006 alone is \$3.8 million to address access issues. Now, local school divisions also have some capacity to address access issues on smaller-scale projects with respect to the healthy surpluses that they currently enjoy, and they are partners in funding our programs. They are partners in funding some of these other initiatives, but I think it is clear that our priorities have been a reflection of our funding announcements.

Yes, there has been new money for special education funding. The total in the last two years alone is \$14 million for appropriate educational programming in our last two budgets. Now you want to compare that to the previous administration. Under the Conservative government, the net increase for the entire education system—the entire education system—was \$1.6 million. So I do not really need a lecture about what it is to understand the funding needs of our students in our schools.

Mrs. Driedger: Certainly, the other night at this public meeting there were over 200 people there, and the next day a *Free Press* reporter who had been there as well indicated, and I will read his couple of paragraphs: "And while Bill 13 makes guarantees to special needs students, [the Minister of Education] said the level of programs and services is whatever each school division can afford."

"Nor is there enough money to make all the physical changes to schools, such as elevators and accessible washrooms that are necessary," said the Minister of Education.

So here we have a Minister of Education that has put forward a bill that guarantees appropriate education, but he admitted that night that he does not know how much that is going to cost because he has not done his review of it. And that night he is saying, well, it is whatever the school divisions can afford, but the school divisions have been told repeatedly that there is no extra money for it, and the school divisions do not have the money to put in the elevators and the accessible washrooms.

So the minister has put forward a bill that guarantees appropriate education, but he is not following through on his own education. He is washing his hands of it and he is saying, well, it is whatever the school divisions can afford. If he was not going to put the teeth into this, as one mother said—in fact, this woman, this mom said she was appalled that the minister is only now beginning to study funding for Bill 13. She went on to say that money is what gives teeth to the regulations. She also went on to say: "I'm not sure how this act could be implemented without the money to do it. Inclusion does not mean you lead a child into a class and shut the door, and hope they make it out at the end of the day having done something constructive."

So his Bill 13 was a knee-jerk reaction to get in front of an election and to make some promises to people, not do his homework, and now his whole bill is a mess. In fact, everybody out there is saying that this whole bill is creating confusion and conflict amongst parents, school authorities and service agencies.

What in the world was this minister doing in putting the bill forward without giving it the teeth? Again, he is making the school trustees and the school divisions the villains in all of this. He tried to look good. He tried to buy votes before an election. He is not even following through on his own legislation. How is it possible that this minister can pass a bill and then not put the teeth in to follow through on something that is as important as this?

Mr. Bjornson: Our teeth are \$155.6-million worth of teeth. We understand the need to provide funding for appropriate educational programming and, as I said, our record speaks volumes to that. Our increased funding, I guess the member would like me to repeat the difference, a 36.5 percent increase

compared to 4.7 percent under the previous administration. That speaks volumes to our dental plan, if you want to use the analogy of having teeth, in this particular piece of legislation.

We have been committed to appropriate educational programming. The review in 1998 came up with 40 recommendations. The member suggests that we do not know how we are funding it. We know how we are funding it. We are reviewing how we fund it. There is a fundamental difference between those two ideas. *[interjection]*

Now, the member is chirping about two years passing. In those two years, this has evolved, Mr. Chairperson. We have been engaged in a number of different initiatives looking at how we fund appropriate educational programming. We also will engage the stakeholders in this process because there are a lot of people who have a lot of ideas about how we resource appropriate educational programming. We had 19 different stakeholders in the review of the legislation. We had 19 different stakeholders involved in the formulation of the regulations. We will have several stakeholders at the table to discuss how we fund appropriate educational programming.

But, again, to suggest there are no teeth when we have \$155.6 million invested is quite an accusation. To suggest that our commitment and our increase of funding, at 36.5 percent, is not a commitment compared to the Conservatives' 4.7 percent increase over the same time period, I have to take exception to that comment. Our commitment is clear. We have followed up on the 40-plus recommendations that have been brought forward by the Special Education Review Initiative, and we have acted on or are acting on all those 40 recommendations.

We have committed to a review of the funds and how they are dispersed and how they are used. That is what our commitment remains, that the review will be undertaken and that we will make sure that the resources that we are providing are going to be used most appropriately for the students they are designed to serve.

Mr. Chairperson: The hour being 5 p.m., 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, March 21, 2006

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