

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

*Published under the
authority of
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 Garry	N.D.P.
JENNISSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	N.D.P.
KORZENIOWSKI, Bonnie	St. James	N.D.P.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
LATHLIN, Oscar, Hon.	The Pas	N.D.P.
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	La Verendrye	N.D.P.
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	N.D.P.
MAGUIRE, Larry	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
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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.
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ROWAT, Leanne	Minnedosa	P.C.
SALE, Tim, Hon.	Fort Rouge	N.D.P.
SANTOS, Conrad	Wellington	N.D.P.
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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

Wednesday, May 24, 2006

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYER

Point of Order

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

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Lamoureux: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I do rise on a point of order, what I believe is a very serious matter and a possible breach of our rules.

I would start by referencing *Beauchesne's Sixth Edition*, Citation 319, where it states, Mr. Speaker: Any member is entitled, even bound, to bring to the Speaker's immediate notice any incidence of a breach of order. The members may interrupt and lay the point in question concisely before the Speaker. This should be done as soon as an irregularity is perceived—and I emphasize the word "perceived" there—in the proceedings which are engaging the attention of the House. So that is *Beauchesne's* 319.

I would also suggest that we look at *Beauchesne's* Citation No. 27: A question of privilege ought rarely to come up in Parliament. It should be dealt with by a motion of grievance, House power—Mr. Speaker, I am quoting the wrong one there.

I will make sure I get the right one here. It is Citation No. 33. I am sorry. It states: The most fundamental privilege of the House as a whole is to establish rules of procedure for itself and then to enforce them. A few rules are laid down in the Constitution Act, but the vast majority of resolutions of the House which may be added to, amended, or repealed at the discretion of the House.

Mr. Speaker, we know, and we often make reference to *Beauchesne's*. We know the importance that our own rules, rules of order and forms of proceedings, that is something that has been adopted by this Legislature, and these rules supersede *Beauchesne's*, as you have indicated to me on numerous occasions.

Mr. Speaker, what supersedes these rules are agreements. There was an agreement amongst all three parties inside this Legislature, and the power of that agreement I believe supersedes the rules of this Chamber. What I would like to emphasize is how you, as Speaker, have acknowledged the importance of these rules that were accepted.

You will recall an item No. 4. It says all government bills introduced by April 13 must have the second reading stage completed by May 18, 2006. You will recall, on May 18, you, in essence, stopped any further debate as this rules says and you put to question on those bills in second reading that in fact qualified. Those bills that qualified were every bill that the Speaker has called for debate at least three times. I would argue, Mr. Speaker, you did correct diligence in interrupting the proceedings of the House to enforce this agreement that we had all signed off on last year.

* (13:35)

Mr. Speaker, what I would ask for you to do is take a look at item 3. Item 3 states in the second paragraph, two Fridays are to be designated at the call of the Government House Leader after consulting with the independent members as days for consideration by independent members of the concurrence motions by the Committee of Supply from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. On those Fridays, a quorum is not required and no question may be put to a vote.

Mr. Speaker, the issue there is that myself and my leader are afforded the opportunity, according to this agreement, to be able to sit on Fridays, on two Fridays, in order to have face-to-face questions and answers of the government and its ministers.

Well, I think if we take a look at the time schedule that we have left and we are talking about today, May 24—[interjection] I do think that it is important that the details of what it is that I am taking, the members should listen to because I am expecting that the Government House Leader might have to respond.

There are a limited number of days that are left inside this session because, as we know, the House will in fact be adjourning on June 13. That is when you are going to be putting the rest of the questions

that are necessary and then the House is going to be adjourning. By my calculation, it is going to be exceptionally difficult, if not impossible, under the current rules, under the current limitations that we have to ensure that both the Leader of the Liberal Party and myself are guaranteed those two Fridays which this government had agreed to.

You might ask well, why do I raise it. Well, today I was approached and a suggestion was made that we deal with Bills 31, 20, 14, 24 and 25 before the Estimates. Now I have two problems with that with respect to this agreement that was signed. If you take a look at today's Order Paper, you will see that there is report stage amendments. There is third reading on a number of bills. In fact, Mr. Speaker, we have second reading bills which the Conservatives had put aside to ensure that there is going to be further debate on those five other bills that were put to the side.

Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of issues that do in fact need to be addressed, and the bills that the government is proposing after Question Period to deal with are all bills that have not even been introduced for second reading inside this Chamber. With the scarce amount of time that is left, the government has got to recognize that it has a responsibility to live up to an agreement which they have signed.

So we are very much concerned that the government is not living up to the agreement, and we believe that that is a valid point of order. You have recognized the importance as the Speaker to this agreement that was signed, and we have lived within this agreement. What we are asking for is the government to do likewise. We recognize that the government is a little sensitive because maybe they are not able to get their full legislative agenda dealt with because they are not calling a public inquiry on the Crocus file, but, Mr. Speaker, I believe that the agreement—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable Opposition House Leader, on the same point of order?

* (13:40)

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, on the same point of order, Mr. Speaker.

While I appreciate the comments that the Member for Inkster has put on the record, I think this is an issue that would best be discussed among House leaders to resolve. I know that there was some

public negotiations that happened in the media, both the NDP and the Liberals. We do not want to see these negotiations happen within a public forum. We think that it would be more respectful if they happen in a private forum. It would be more fruitful. We would encourage the government, who now seem to be nodding their heads, to also adhere to that and discuss these things privately, along with the Liberal House Leader, and we believe we could come to a resolution.

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

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Well, Mr. Speaker, we certainly concur with the last point that was made. The convention between House leaders, historically, has been to negotiate within 45 minutes or whatever of going to the newspapers.

But, Mr. Speaker, having said that, we would urge the Member for Inkster to look at what the sessional order is all about. It actually would put an onus on the members of the House to move to third reading but that was in the context, of course, of making sure there was passage of bills by June 13. They cannot avoid their accountability to the public for slowing down the legislative agenda with trying to get the government off its agenda to bring in measures that will better protect the health, the safety and the finances of Manitobans. They are going to have to be accountable to Manitobans for their silly tactics.

When it comes to the argument about concurrence, the reason we cannot get to concurrence is because of tactics by the member opposite. Imagine that, he gets up now and says, we cannot get to concurrence. Well, that was a choice he made. I did make an offer, as was reported unfortunately, and they said no. They are not going to take up the offer that we made of more time so that they can fulfill their obligations to the people of Manitoba to scrutinize the government and move the legislative agenda.

So, Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate they would get up now, after having been a party to stymieing the public's business, and now say that, oh, they are running out of time.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable Member for Inkster, first of all, it is not a point of order. It is House management. Negotiations on House management should not take place on the

floor. It should be up to the House leaders to deal with it. We are not at the point where the issue that the member is raising, it is when concurrence is required. Concurrence is dealt with after the hours of the Estimates are completed, and we are not at that stage.

Also, if you look at *Beauchesne*, page 49, 168(3): The Speaker cannot be consulted from the floor of the House as to the consequences of the passage of a resolution.

So the honourable member does not have a point of order.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONS

Levy on Cattle

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition.

These are the reasons for this petition:

The provincial government intends to create a provincial check-off fee, levy of \$2 per head, for cattle sold in Manitoba. This decision was made without consultation with Manitoba's cattle producers and representatives from agricultural groups.

This \$2-a-head increase will affect the entire cattle industry in Manitoba, which is already struggling to recover from the BSE crisis and other hardships. It would encourage fair and equitable practices if cattle producers in Manitoba had the opportunity to share in the decision-making process.

We petition the Manitoba Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives (Ms. Wowchuk) to consider holding consultations with Manitoba's cattle producers and representatives from agricultural groups before this levy is put in place.

This petition is signed by Barry Penner, Melvin Watt, Jim Pringle, Tom Campbell 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)

Removal of Agriculture Positions from Minnedosa

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Nine positions with the Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives Crown Lands Branch are being moved out of Minnedosa.

Removal of these positions will severely impact the local economy.

Removal of these positions will be detrimental to revitalizing this rural agriculture community.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the provincial government to consider stopping the removal of these positions from our community, and to consider utilizing current technology in order to maintain these positions in their existing location.

This petition is presented by Jim Sandstrom, Harley Bold, Cam Farr and many, many others, Mr. Speaker.

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

Nine positions with the Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives Crown Lands Branch are being moved out of Minnedosa.

Removal of these positions will severely impact the local economy.

Removal of these positions will be detrimental to revitalizing the rural agriculture community.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the provincial government to consider stopping the removal of these positions from our community, and to consider utilizing current technology in order to maintain these positions in their existing location.

Submitted by Richard Gauthier, Yvonne Scott, Robert Tuttle and many, many others.

OlyWest Hog Processing Plant

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I wish to read the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

The background for this petition is as follows:

The Manitoba government, along with the OlyWest consortium, promoted the development of a mega hog factory within the city of Winnipeg without proper consideration of rural alternatives for the site.

Concerns arising from the hog factory include noxious odours, traffic and road impact, water supply, waste water treatment, decline in property values, cost to taxpayers and proximity to the city's clean drinking water aqueduct.

Many Manitobans believe this decision represents poor judgment on behalf of the provincial government.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the provincial government to immediately cancel its plans to support the construction of the OlyWest hog plant and rendering factory near any urban residential area.

Signed by Hao Wang, Ya Tang, Laurie Flockton and many, many others.

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 many 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 happened.

This is signed, Mr. Speaker, by G. Piasecki, R. Piasecki, B. Guest and many, many other fine Manitobans.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Energy, Science and Technology): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table the 2006-2007 Departmental Expenditure Estimates for the Department of Energy, Science and Technology.

Hon. Scott Smith (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Trade): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table the Annual Report for the 2005 Municipal Board.

*(13:50)

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 from the Huttarian Colony Schools in the Prairie Rose School Division 29 Grade 12 students under the direction of Mr. Trevor Boehm. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu).

Also in the public gallery we have from Miami School 31 Grades 4 to 6 students under the direction of Mrs. Angela McCullough. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Member for Carman (Mr. Rocan).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Health Care System Emergency Room Services

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Health care under this NDP government lurches from crisis to crisis. The ER crisis in Winnipeg is getting worse every single year, not better.

Today we have an ER crisis in Winnipeg that, according to the government's own health experts, is putting patients at risk. The 2004 internal review after the tragic death of Dorothy Madden failed to result in any meaningful action to resolve this crisis.

Mr. Speaker, 80 shifts today remain unfilled for this summer in the city's emergency rooms. What is it going to take to get this government to fix this crisis in health care?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Well, the member opposite references the report on ER. I believe there are 47 additional nurses working in the emergency wards today than there were in 1999, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, in the midst of an ER crisis that is putting patients at risk in Winnipeg, the government has launched a slick, sneaky propaganda campaign. With no sense of priority, we have seen our system rank dead last, even though we spend the fourth-most in Canada. Money for government propaganda, nothing for Manitobans waiting in emergency rooms.

When is the government going to get its priorities straight? Why is this NDP government putting its re-election campaign ahead of patient safety?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, the agreement dealing with wait lists' money from the previous federal government included reports to the public, reports going from eight weeks in cancer treatment down to less than one week, cardiac waits going down, hip and knee surgery going down.

I would note that this practice with the federal government continues now with the new federal government. He may remember giving advice to the Harris government, and the former Minister of Health there was Mr. Clement. He was in *The Globe and Mail* last week, part of the same campaign.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, given the emergency room crisis in Winnipeg, which is getting worse each year under this NDP government, and given that the government cannot seem to get its act together on recruitment of physicians, the Conference Board, the external experts say that patients in Manitoba must truly be patient.

Given this failure of health care policy, can the Premier assure the House that his government will not embark on a policy of alternating ER closures in Winnipeg, thereby cutting access to care for Winnipeggers when they need it?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, I recall when the member opposite worked in the Cabinet room the closure of Victoria, Seven Oaks, Concordia, Grace Hospital, and it was only the public that stood up against them and stopped those changes.

I would point out that a recent report dealing with the emergency room situation in Canada and resource strategies for Canada says: Experience has shown that decisions made today will impact the delivery of health care a decade from now, since it takes from five to 11 years or more of medical school and residency to train a doctor.

Now we have put in a plan to reverse the decisions of the past that are wrong. We have gone in a medical school that was reduced down to 70, we have gone to 85. We are now at 100 medical students in Manitoba, doctors for the future for our emergency wards. I would point out, Mr. Speaker, that we also have increased the residencies from two to five in the emergency wards. We have increased the nursing staff by 43. The numbers of doctors including sessional doctors and ER docs, when you add them up together, it has gone from 93 to 105.

There is more work to do; there is no question. There are shifts still to be filled and doctors still to be recruited. But going from the second-lowest salaries—when we came into office the salaries for doctors in Manitoba were only higher than P.E.I., and we have raised the salaries every year. We have negotiated with the doctors in a way that will allow us to recruit and retain more doctors.

More work to do, more students at the medical school, more residents, more nurses, more ER nurses, more programs to divert patients to other options. I, for example, have used Health Links. I have actually phoned a nurse for medical advice in Health Links, a program we have also quadrupled since we came into office.

* (13:55)

Health Care System Physician Resources

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, the Premier neglected to mention that our ERs are short 14 doctors and 35 nurses, and that is a critical shortage. According to the WRHA, Winnipeg is short almost 100 specialists. A recent Conference Board of Canada report points out that waits to see a specialist in Manitoba are the longest in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister of Health: Is the reason it takes so long to see a specialist in Manitoba because we are short 100 specialists here in Winnipeg?

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): Well, first, Mr. Speaker, as I would just remind my honourable friend, we have more than 200 more physicians than we had in 1999. There are shortages, for example, in pediatricians across North America. American areas are competing intensely because of specialist shortages across North America.

I am sure that the opposition is tired of hearing this, but when you cut your medical school to 70, about eight or nine years later you are going to be short of graduating residents, and about 12 years later, you are going to be short of specialists. We regret the decisions that they have made. We are doing everything in our power to correct them. We cannot create instant doctors.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health in the past has said that this is a retention problem. He chooses not to mention that right now.

In 2004, Winnipeg was short 79 specialists. In 2005, Winnipeg was short 82 specialists. Now Winnipeg is short almost 100 specialists. In this city we are short almost 100 specialists. It is a retention problem, and the Minister of Health has even acknowledged that.

I would like to ask him today: Why is he not doing something to retain these specialists?

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, we not only retain specialists, we attract outstanding international specialists like Dr. West who came here to start one of Canada's premier neurology programs. We have attracted and retained excellent specialists, for example, Dr. Bohm in Concordia Hospital, where they are able to do in a single day more than three times as many hips procedures as were done before we started to use the centres of excellence approach.

Perhaps the member does not realize that as doctors age they tend to retire, and when you do not have specialists in the pipeline getting formed, those who retire do in fact create vacancies. Yes, there are vacancies in Winnipeg. It is not a retention of specialists issue; it is a retirement and a lack of people in the pipeline to become specialists.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, it is the Minister of Health that has in the past said this is a retention problem, and I will remind him that under his watch

it has gotten worse under the last two years in terms of physician, specialist shortages.

Winnipeg is short seven anesthetists, which will slow down surgeries; six radiologists, which will slow down diagnostic testing; 14 ER doctors; seven psychiatrists; and the list goes on and on. It is happening under his watch. It is getting worse under his watch and, Mr. Speaker, this is a critical shortage when you look at Winnipeg being short 100 specialists.

Why did the Minister of Health and the Premier (Mr. Doer) not put that in their propaganda and let the public know how badly off Winnipeg is in terms of a specialist shortage?

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, I want the member to listen very carefully. Very carefully. *[interjection]*

They are not listening, Mr. Speaker.

Currently Manitoba has 44 orthopedic surgeons, nine more than the 35 that were here in 1999. Currently, and I want her to listen to this, there are 119 anesthesiologists, 30 more than in 1999. Mr. Speaker, there are 17 clinical assistants working in our operating rooms, 17 more than there were in 1999.

* (14:00)

Illegal Drug Manufacturing Protection for Children

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): We want the government to listen very, very carefully to the question, Mr. Speaker.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Goertzen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Children who are forced to live in residences that are being used as meth labs or marijuana grow ops face dangers as a result of the toxic and the criminal environment that surrounds them. An RCMP report from this year, citing a B.C. study, showed that children were present in 22 percent of all marijuana grow ops that were found.

Could the Minister of Family Services indicate how many children have been found to be living in marijuana grow ops or meth labs in Manitoba over the past 24 months?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, under The Child and Family Services Act, there is protection

for children that when they are found to be in an environment that is unsafe, whatever that environment would be, the Child and Family Services people working with the police force, the local police force, would make sure that those children are taken to a safe environment. That counts for children in any environment. We do not pick and choose environments in which we remove children from difficult situations into safer ones. We work in the best interests of the children of Manitoba.

Mr. Goertzen: We know that unfortunately those who manufacture drugs in their homes often use children as a decoy as a way to divert people's suspicions from those homes and the illegal activities that are happening within them.

An Ontario study indicates that as many as 10,000 children may have resided in grow ops between the years 2000 and 2003 in that province. This year alone, we understand from the Winnipeg police force, 27 grow operations have been found here in the city of Winnipeg.

I ask the Minister of Family Services again. She did not answer the question that I asked last time, so I will give her another chance: Can she indicate—she must know, she says there are processes in place—how many children have been found in grow ops or meth labs in the past 24 months?

Ms. Melnick: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, rather than dealing with the broader perspective of the safety of the children in Manitoba, we have the member opposite want to single out and pick and choose. We do not do that.

Under The Child and Family Services Act, when children are found to be in an environment that is deemed to be unsafe, the department will work with the local police force to remove those children from whatever environment it is and take them into a safer environment. This is what we do for the children of Manitoba. I think it is very important that the Member for Steinbach recognize that environments that are safe must be dealt with in a way that will make them safe and that children who are in unsafe situations, whatever that situation is, would be brought to a place of safety.

Mr. Goertzen: Well, Mr. Speaker, I find it strange that other jurisdictions have these statistics and they know how many children have been found, but this minister here in Manitoba does not know. I suspect she does know but she does not want to put that information on the record. I find that disconcerting.

Mr. Speaker, in March of this year, the Alberta legislature passed legislation, the first of its kind in Canada, that states: where a child is purposely exposed to drug manufacturing, that child will be brought into protection. On the Manitoba Meth Strategy Web site, it states that Manitoba is in the process of establishing a specific protocol to deal with children who are found in meth labs.

I want to ask the Minister of Family Services, she did not answer my last question but I will give her another chance. Can she indicate whether part of the protocol review will consider the Alberta legislation and their experience?

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Speaker, we are aware of that protocol, and we are always looking for the way things can be done and the safety of the children, whether it be in Alberta, whether it be from another jurisdiction, Canada, North America or anywhere else.

Our focus is the protection of children, to work in the best interests of children and when they are found to be in an environment that is deemed dangerous, whatever the criteria of that environment is, we work collectively to take them out of the danger and put them into places of safety.

Freedom of Information Act Review

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): My question is for the minister responsible for the freedom of information act. In the early spring of 2004, public hearings were held in Winnipeg, Brandon and Thompson to seek public input into the review of the freedom of information act. The report was tabled in the House on May 31, 2004. Next week it will be two years since the report was tabled.

Why has the government failed to provide the amendments to the act?

Hon. Eric Robison (Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism): Yes, Mr. Speaker, the member is quite correct that we did indeed have the public hearings in Brandon, Thompson and Winnipeg during the months of April and May of 2004. A report of those meetings was made to the Legislature at the end of May 2004.

We have made indeed some regulatory changes to update forms, the names of departments and agencies named in the regulation and so on, but none of these changes alter existing rights of access or privacy.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Speaker, as he indicated, he did the housekeeping. Changing a name does not change regulations or enforce recommendations that were made. These people took their time and effort to come forward and provide information that they felt was important in accessing government information.

Provincial Council of Women and the Canadian Taxpayers Federation are just two of the many organizations that have indicated concerns in accessing government information. There were 37 presentations, over 100 recommendations and suggestions to change the freedom of information act to make information more accessible from government.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister finally take a look at this report and bring in a bill that incorporates any of these recommendations?

Mr. Robinson: Indeed, Mr. Speaker, we appreciated hearing the views of Manitobans and their input certainly during the public hearings process and the submissions process as well. I believe that the member is making reference to the recent announcement by the Canadian Association of Journalists. However, I would like to point out to the member that in May of 2005, there is also the Canadian Newspaper Association national survey deemed that Manitoba had the second-best disclosure rate of 88 percent.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Speaker, the Ombudsman's office has received an increasing number of complaints from people who are placing complaints against this government. People should not have to file complaints with the Ombudsman to obtain information because freedom of information is a fundamental right of democracy. The people of Manitoba want transparency, and they want to know what this government is doing or not doing.

Why has the minister not brought in a bill to address the recommendations? They took the time to provide them to the government. Why are they ignoring them? This government needs to be transparent and accountable and they are failing to do that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Robinson: Let me thank the member for the question, Mr. Speaker, and also point out to her some numbers. In 2005, 85 percent of the applications were handled within a 30-day time frame, and I feel very proud of that. Compared with 2004, all access applications increased by 46 percent in 2005 from 899 to 1,316, while complaints declined by more than 50 percent.

Our access to information legislation is more comprehensive than the federal legislation. It also covers Crowns, and in April 2000, we extended FIPPA to all public bodies, specifically to more than 350 government, municipal, educational including school divisions, universities and health care bodies. I believe—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

University of Manitoba Tuition Fees for Foreign Students

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Mr. Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Advanced Education (Ms. McGifford). Last night, the University of Manitoba board of governors reluctantly approved an increase in international tuition fees of 80 percent, plus an additional \$100 flat fee for all students and ancillary fees. This was done to try to avoid cuts in programs and supports.

I want to ask the minister and the government whether they support the fee increases that were announced by the board of governors last evening.

Hon. Christine Melnick (Acting Minister of Advanced Education and Training): Well, I think when you look at the record of this government on post-secondary education as compared to members opposite, since 1999 university funding has gone up by 41 percent. That does not include capital investments of which the University of Manitoba received \$50 million of the some \$100-million investments we have made in post-secondary. This compared to members opposite, when during the nineties, when I believe the now Leader of the Opposition sat on the board of governors, where there were actually cuts to post-secondary education in the province.

So I think that when you compare our record to theirs, students and universities can clearly see we are on their side.

* (14:10)

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, I think if we have university students watching Question Period today along with university officials, they will certainly pass judgment on this government's actions.

On one hand, we try to attract international students to our universities. On the other hand, we clobber them with fee increases of 80 percent. I want to ask this government whether it has any plan to provide the much-needed stability to university funding so that students are not subjected to this kind of radical fee increase.

Ms. Melnick: Indeed, I hope that students and universities are watching today, Mr. Speaker, because for the first time ever we have a three-year funding arrangement with post-secondary and universities.

The first year alone includes 5.8 percent increase and a 1.2 percent drop in property taxes for universities. So that is 7 percent in this year alone. The remaining two years have an increase of at least 5 percent in each of the years. So I congratulate universities and students for the good work that they do for the future of Manitoba.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, there is no question that our universities and our students are doing their job. The people who are not doing their job is the government.

Universities are being forced to increase tuition fees to international students. Universities are being forced to find money from ancillary fees to run their programs, all because this government did not provide the compensatory funding it was supposed to when tuition freezes came in.

I want to ask this government whether they have any plans to ensure that our universities are competitive with other universities across the land in terms of the funding that they receive?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I remember meeting with the business community and the university community when we were first elected. They told me that they had gone to the former government and the former Cabinet and asked them to participate in a capital campaign to contribute and invest \$50 million, and they would pledge as the private sector to raise \$50 million. They said to us: The University of Manitoba engineering building is leaking, the roof is leaking.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud of the fact that we started the capital campaign. We have had operating grants that we have just announced in this budget of some 17 percent over the next three years, and we just opened the new Richardson functional food and nutraceutical centre; again, something the members opposite said no to and we said yes to the future here in Manitoba.

Flooding—Assiniboine River Valley Compensation

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, this is the Premier that was going to fix

those leaky roofs with Autopac money until Manitobans rebelled and said he could not do it.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to accountability, this NDP government is conspicuous by its absence. Yesterday, the federal Minister of Agriculture came to Manitoba to announce \$15 per acre, up to \$24 million for Manitoba farmers, in short-term relief for flooded farmers. This Minister of Agriculture did not even bother to attend the announcement, did not respond to it, was not even there. Again, the utter contempt and disregard the NDP has for this province's farmers is obvious.

Why does this minister continue to show contempt for Manitoba farmers, with neither her nor any of her members of government representing our farmers attending this critical announcement of support?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, I would stand by this government's record on their support for farmers anytime if you look at the support that we have put into farmers through the various challenges that we have had, doubling our money into CAIS, putting more money into excess moisture insurance.

I can assure the member that I certainly did have discussions with the previous federal government and with this federal government so that we would have a covering program in those areas where there was flooding. I am pleased that the federal government has delivered on that.

Mr. Maguire: Mr. Speaker, while the federal government comes to farmers in Manitoba with relief, this minister, provincially, all she can do is levy more taxes on them. This NDP government must be accountable for its actions and for its inactions. Assiniboine Valley farmers' lands are underwater because of artificial flooding along the Assiniboine River Valley right now.

When will the minister meet with the farmers of the Assiniboine Valley to hear first-hand how they have been affected and discuss compensation for this artificial flooding?

Ms. Wowchuk: Again, Mr. Speaker, I will put our record and stand beside our record anytime to the record that they had. There was a government that increased taxes on farmland. We reduced education tax on farmland by 60 percent. There was a government that would not listen to farmers when

they were asking for an excess moisture insurance program.

They may talk about it, Mr. Speaker. They did not deliver. This is a government that heard the farmers and delivered to them. This is a government that has an open-door policy. We have met with farmers and we will continue to work with farmers. We will continue to work with them because we recognize how important they are to the economy of this province.

Mr. Maguire: Well, Mr. Speaker, maybe the minister is just a little sensitive that her Premier calls Manitoba farmers "chickens."

Mr. Speaker, the NDP government's lack of accountability is preposterous. They refuse to address the concerns of artificially flooded farmers in the Assiniboine River Valley.

When will the Premier (Mr. Doer) and his ministers commit to providing flood damage assistance to producers in the valley that have been affected by artificial flooding?

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I would remind the member—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, I would remind the members opposite that many of them were at a meeting with the farmers from the Assiniboine Valley and I believe it was in Miniota. The farmers that were at that meeting said to the members opposite: This was a problem in your day, and you did nothing about it.

This is not a new problem, Mr. Speaker. The members opposite were well aware of the problem that exists in the Assiniboine Valley. The farmers told them very clearly at that meeting that they had a responsibility and they did nothing. We have met with them, and we will continue to work with them.

Child and Family Services Agencies Review—Terms of Reference

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, today, we learned that Child and Family Services is now the defendant in a lawsuit over the death of young Keyanna-Marie Snowdon, a 22-month-old child who drowned in a hot tub while in foster care. Without getting into the details of the case, this

shows once more just how urgently a proper inquiry into the operations of Child and Family Services is needed.

Over two months ago, on March 20, the minister ever so reluctantly announced two so-called reviews into Child and Family Services. For two months now, I have repeatedly asked the minister to table the terms of reference for the external review. So far all we have is a press release which the minister admitted in Estimates yesterday had some errors.

Yesterday in committee, I again asked the minister for the terms of reference. This time she said she did not have them at the moment. So now that we know the minister has these, will she table them?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Well, again we can refer to the press release which outlined what the two reviews will be doing, but I think it is also very important that the Member for River Heights, who has continually played games and attempted to undermine the child welfare system, be very careful here. There was no reluctance in announcing those reviews. I worked very closely with the authorities on that. We wanted to make sure that we were looking at areas that we thought would be very effective under the issues currently under concern.

So, again, I think it is important that the Member for River Heights respects the work that is being done in both of these reviews and does not continually attempt to undermine them.

* (14:20)

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I pointed out in Estimates that the press release said there were four Aboriginal Child and Family Services authorities. On questioning, the minister admitted that there were only three and there is one general authority. That was in a press release. The problem is that a terms of reference needs to contain a lot more than that and it should not have these kinds of errors in it. So the problem here is that we are now two months out after the calling of this review and we still do not have a terms of reference.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to give the minister another chance. Will the minister table today the terms of reference for this review? This is important, given that the interim report is due in the middle of June.

Ms. Melnick: Well, it was good to hear that the Member for River Heights actually read the press release. There was about a month there when it did not appear that he had. We have said all along that there are four authorities. There is the northern First Nations authority, the southern First Nations authority, the Métis authority and the general authority, Mr. Speaker.

Again, it is very important that the Member for River Heights starts to take the review seriously, quits playing games with candles on desks, ringing bells, et cetera, supports the work that is being done by the reviewers and also supports the work that is being done by the people on the front line.

We are dealing very seriously with the reviews, both the external and the section 4. The member is wrong. The interim report is not due the middle of June; it is due the end of June—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, these details are precisely why we need a proper terms of reference. We are two months into this review. We still do not have a terms of reference. I have read the press release many times and realized right away that there are problems with it, that it was not a terms of reference and that we need a proper terms of reference. Yesterday, in Estimates, the minister said she did not have it with her at the moment. Well, it is time that the minister produces it at this moment.

I ask the minister: Will she table today the terms of reference for the external review into Child and Family Services?

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Speaker, I believe I have tabled, probably a month and a half ago, the press release which outlines both who will be sitting on the reviews and what their terms of reference will be. I was led to believe a moment earlier that the Member for River Heights had actually read that. Perhaps he has only read one or two lines in it.

But, again, we have to recognize the work is underway according to what was laid out in that press release. It is very important that the member expresses concern for the situation of children in care in Manitoba, that he show that concern by respecting the work done in both of these reviews and for the front-line workers, and stops continually trying to

undermine these very important reviews in our province.

Alternative Energy Biofuel Mandate

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): It is an established fact that this government has made renewable green and clean energy development the central plank in Manitoba's economic development strategy. Yesterday, the Minister of Energy, Science and Technology attended a meeting in Regina with the federal and provincial ministers to discuss achieving a nationwide 5 percent mandate of ethanol and biodiesel fuel by 2010.

Can the minister inform the House and members about the benefits for Manitoba and how the mandate for biofuels fits Manitoba's clean energy strategy?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Energy, Science and Technology): I had the opportunity of sharing information with the three federal ministers and numerous provincial ministers from across the country where we were able to discuss issues like the fact that Manitoba had one of the first biofuel mandates out. There is a plant under construction that will not only provide up to 10 percent of the clean fuel for Manitoba, but will provide support and value-added to our farm producers, something that is very much in need, as well as our biodiesel initiatives, as well as our turbine initiatives and wind farm initiatives that have not only provided green energy, but have provided finances and money in the pockets of farmers and producers, one of our key components of our green strategy.

Flooding—Assiniboine River Valley Compensation

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the minister's response with regard to the Assiniboine Valley. I regret, on behalf of the people in the Assiniboine Valley, the kind of blame game and response that we are getting from the government in a very serious situation.

I want to ask the government, and whether it is the Minister of Agriculture, the Minister of Water Stewardship (Mr. Ashton) or the Premier (Mr. Doer) himself, who committed to meet with the people of the Assiniboine Valley, when that meeting will take place. Mr. Speaker, the flooding has been going on for weeks now and we have not had the presence of the Premier at the site.

It is time that somebody from the government took note of the serious situation in the Assiniboine Valley, and I ask the government today: When are they going to act?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): I regret that the member opposite took offence to the comments that I made with regard to his government's record on this particular issue, Mr. Speaker, but I want to assure the member that I have toured the Assiniboine Valley. I was in that area the day after the particular meeting that he was referring to. I have spoken to those people in the area. We have indicated to them, the individuals that I spoke to, that we would be willing to meet with them. So the member opposite is wrong to say that we have not had discussion with those producers, and we will continue to work with them on the issues that are important to their livelihoods.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, letters are coming in from the municipalities asking for the government to start acknowledging that this is a serious issue in the province of Manitoba. This is flooding that occurs because the Shellmouth Dam cannot handle the volume of water that comes in the spring from time to time. It is no different than the Red River that floods from time to time. These people are left blowing in the wind, and it is time that the Premier who made the commitment to go out there.

Now I know the Minister of Agriculture was out there during Rural Forum, but the land was dry then, Mr. Speaker. Today that land is under water. It is time that they took action now. I ask when the Premier and his minister, whether it is the Minister of Water Stewardship or the Minister of Agriculture, is going to meet with these people to ensure that they are adequately looked after.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Water Stewardship): I think it is very important to put on the record that the operational procedures at the Shellmouth Dam have essentially not changed for the nearly 40 years that it has been in place. What happened, Mr. Speaker, this year as has happened in the past, was there was a combination, in this case, of the snow melt, but a significant storm in Saskatchewan. What the Shellmouth Dam does, and I note that the former critic of Water Stewardship put this on the public record, that flooding in the Assiniboine River has been virtually halted since the construction of the Shellmouth Dam. By the way, this is the Member for Emerson (Mr. Penner) who made that comment.

What happens, Mr. Speaker, is there is a controlled release that ensures there is not, in this case, 8,300 cfs—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, the minister obviously reads from prepared notes, but he does not know the regime of the dam or understand how it operates. Those of us who live in the area understand what is happening, Mr. Speaker. Municipalities understand what is happening. It is time that this government took some action. This is a serious matter.

Yesterday, the federal government came through with money for farmers who were flooded last year. This year we have Assiniboine Valley farmers who are flooded and this government cannot get off its back end to go and visit with the farmers and ensure that they are looked after adequately. When will this happen, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Speaker, it is not a question of reading from prepared notes. It is a question of putting on the record what the Member for Emerson himself stated, and that is that without the Shellmouth Dam there would have been dramatic flooding on the Assiniboine. The levels on the Assiniboine were maintained at a natural or below through controlled release. That was done through consultation with the Shellmouth Reservoir Regulation Liaison Committee. That has been there for many years.

We acknowledge that this does lead to an extended period of time in which the water is in place. But when you look at the 8,300 cfs that would have been there around April 17 or 18, I think it is really important for the member opposite, who should be raising concerns, Mr. Speaker, about the impacts of flooding anywhere, before he talks about artificial flooding should recognize that the Shellmouth Dam prevented major flooding on the Assiniboine. The words of the Member for Emerson, in this case, one time I actually agree with him.

* (14:30)

Highway 12 Park Road Intersection

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, according to a Manitoba highways document, the intersection of Highway 12 and Park Road in the community of Steinbach is the site of the second-highest number of annual traffic accidents in the province. In fact, the highest number of traffic

accidents is just down the road at Highway 12 and 52. I know that the City of Steinbach and representatives have met with the minister of highways a number of times over the last six years. They have met with the Premier (Mr. Doer). They have gotten lots of expressions of sympathy, but over the last six years they have gotten no indication when this intersection of Highway 12 and Park Road is going to be fixed. They have come to me, finally, asking for answers from this minister.

So I say to the minister: When is he going to ensure that this collision corner is going to be fixed, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Transportation and Government Services): I am glad today the member opposite is not asking questions about kangaroos or Australia like the last time he stood up and asked questions related to transportation.

I want to just say that we are working closely, Mr. Speaker, with the community of Steinbach but also with many, many other communities in Manitoba that have transportation challenges related to all the work that was not done in the 1990s.

But the nerve of the member opposite who voted against the budget that had a \$29-million increase, voted against it. I say shame on that member. When I visit the community of Steinbach I will be reminding them that there was an opportunity here to support a document, a \$29-million increase, and he voted against it.

Mr. Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Doug Armour

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the accomplishments of a resident in my constituency who was recently inducted into the Curling Hall of Fame on May 7. Doug Armour was born and raised in Souris, Manitoba, and it was there that he learned to excel at a sport that is part of Canadian culture.

Mr. Armour learned to curl at the age of 13 and played in his first British Consols playdown in 1978. Since then he has appeared in an amazing 35 provincial championships, including 16 men's provincials, 7 senior men's, 11 mixed and 1 masters. He has represented the province on a total of five occasions in four different levels of competition.

To go along with his impressive record of appearances is an even more impressive level of success at the sport he excelled in. Not content to simply represent our province, he also has enjoyed a great level of success in doing so. In 1982, he was third on the team skipped by Mel Logan representing Manitoba at the Labatt Brier and made it all the way to the semi-final, surviving a three-way playoff along the way before eventually suffering defeat. Doug, himself, was voted the all-star third at the Brier.

Since that time, Mr. Armour won both the 2003 Manitoba Senior Men's Provincial Championship, and last year in his very first year of eligibility he won the Provincial Masters Level Championship. He carried this on to victory at the Canadian Open Masters Championship that same year in Brandon.

Mr. Speaker, I would once again like to congratulate Mr. Armour on his lengthy record of successes and the recent induction to the Curling Hall of Fame. I cannot think of a more worthy recipient of such an honour. Thank you.

Community Centre Volunteers

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): Mr. Speaker, spring and summer are busy times of the year in communities throughout the province. Community centres are a hub of much of this activity during these busy months. I rise to recognize the many volunteers of my constituency of Radisson and the province at large who volunteer countless hours of their time coaching sports teams, organizing events and developing community centres for the well-being of residents in the communities.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize specifically the volunteers at the Park City West Community Centre. Park City West is run entirely by a dedicated team of volunteers. It offers many programs to youth and adults including mini-soccer, ringette, hockey, female hockey, hardball, softball, inline hockey. For adults it offers adult sports and bingo. Park City West also hosts special events and is available for hall rental.

Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to attend many events at Park City West including the recent AGM. For their contribution to our community, I would like to recognize several members of the board of directors of this community centre: Neil Ajudhia, Leo Nelson, Scott Van Alstyne, Scott Donald, Dana Hay, Carol Donald, Jim Desjardins, Susan Desjardins, Brenda Godson, Tim Godson,

Doug Werboweski, Sylvia Streilien, Mark Hodgson, Michelle, Greg Spitula, Les Kauk, Gary Olsen, Lee Smith, Jim Donaldson, Robyne Sharp, Daryl Desjarlais, Georgette King and Jim Voth.

On behalf of the members, I thank many members and many other volunteers who give their time to the community centres in Radisson as well as the rest of the province.

Community centres are active and enjoyable places to be throughout the season. I also encourage the public to get involved in their community centres and help make our communities better. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Harvest Moon Society

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to rise in the House today to inform this Chamber about an exciting little community in my constituency, located in the beautiful Pembina Valley, Clearwater, Manitoba. Clearwater is home to the Harvest Moon Society and the Harvest Moon Festival.

The Harvest Moon Society is a non-profit, volunteer-run organization that relies on funding generated from the annual Harvest Moon Festival as well as the rental of the school facilities in which it is housed.

The Clearwater School closed in 2001 but has now been reopened as a rental facility and learning centre. The school has been host to several academic institutions including the University of Manitoba. The university has offered courses such as basic organic crop inspector and organic livestock inspector courses, along with others. Participants taking part in this tremendous opportunity come from all areas of Canada and the United States. Recent attendees were from Saskatchewan, Alberta, Arizona, British Columbia, Newfoundland, Ontario, Minnesota, Yukon and, of course, Manitoba.

The Harvest Moon Society is a learning centre that works toward strengthening and building linkages between urban and rural areas that helps empower those that are marginalized, especially youth, elders and women, and that creates strategies and working examples that generate innovative responses to problems confronting communities and their surrounding environments. This is carried out using a diversity of grass roots and participatory practices.

The Harvest Moon Festival is an annual fundraising event for the Harvest Moon Society held in September of each year. The festival features musical acts, workshops, nature walks, farm tours, a trade fair, activities for the kids and much, much more. The Harvest Moon Festival is intended to increase awareness of agriculture issues such as the role of farming in our lives and the importance of sustainable food production and the survival of rural communities as we currently know them.

The festival also aims to build relationships and create dialogue between rural and urban people. Foremost, it is people coming together and volunteering their time and energy to celebrate rural life, locally produced food and the farmers that grow it. Thank you very much.

Carl Scholl and Donald Quang

Mr. Cris Aglugub (The Maples): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to recognize two exceptional students from the Maples Collegiate. Carl Scholl and Donald Quang won silver and gold medals respectively at the recent Skills Canada competition held at Red River College.

While Carl competed in the auto service category and Donald in the autobody repair category, they both had to perform a variety of tasks in a short amount of time. Both students distinguished themselves against the other competitors. In addition, both categories' written components were mandatory.

Mr. Speaker, competitions such as these are important because they stress not only the technical and skilled nature of the trades but they give it the profile they so richly deserve. Also, in recognizing the expert work being done by the students, we can take an important step in acknowledging the importance of their education as well as the significance of the contributions made by tradespeople. It is essential that youth be aware of both the rewarding nature of trades and skilled labour as well as the possibilities that awaits them for future employment.

I would like to say that Skills Canada, a national organization that promotes the skilled trades and technologies to Canadian youth, is to be commended for organizing these types of competition. I would also like to congratulate Carl and Donald on their achievements and wish them the best of luck in the future. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

* (14:40)

OlyWest Hog Processing Plant

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to call for the establishment of an agri-industrial park outside of Winnipeg where the OlyWest hog processing and rendering plant can locate along with other similar heavy industrial agricultural operations.

Today there were many people at City Hall with concerns about the proposed location of the OlyWest hog processing and rendering plant in the St. Boniface Industrial Park. There have been many concerns raised about the proposed St. Boniface Industrial Park site. These include noxious odours coming from the hog plant and problems for adjacent businesses to such an extent that Winnipeg may lose many high tech and other jobs.

In Brandon and in Neepawa there are hog plants which are located outside the urban area. Winnipeg deserves no less than Brandon and Neepawa. There can be a win-win situation with the OlyWest plant in an agri-industrial park near Winnipeg.

I call on the government to work co-operatively with the City of Winnipeg and the rural municipalities outside of Winnipeg to establish such an agri-industrial park where OlyWest and other similar businesses can locate.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, would you please call for second readings of the following bills: 31, 20, 14, 14, 25, to be followed by Committee of Supply.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 31—The Animal Diseases Amendment Act

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Trade (Mr. Smith), that Bill 31, The Animal Diseases Amendment Act, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor has been advised of the bill and I table the message.

Motion presented.

Ms. Wowchuk: The bill does amend The Animal Diseases Act. As members of the House know, we have done some reorganization of the Department of

Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives. As a result, it is necessary to make some minor housekeeping amendments to this bill.

The first of these includes replacing the director of Veterinary Services with a general director for the purposes of the act. A new provision is added for the purposes of animal welfare slaughter. The director under the act is authorized to order healthy animals to be destroyed in certain extraordinary circumstances. These might occur if there is a border closure and there is a disruption to flow of animals to normal markets and this results in a backlog or overcrowding on farms in Manitoba. Another example, Mr. Speaker, is that, if animals are abandoned or the owner is unlikely to be able to care for them, then they may be ordered to be destroyed as well.

To help control the disease, inspectors are permitted to stop a vehicle that is transporting animals and to collect information from the driver about the animals. New regulations may prescribe where and when those drivers must report to an inspector, what information they must give and how the department may use and disclose this information. Other regulations may be made about when and to whom the department may disclose information it collects from farms and from other commercial places where animals are kept.

These provisions would also enable geographic zoning to be implemented whereby separate disease-controlled areas are created for the purpose of both controlling the disease and ascribing the zones' animal health status. This is very important because it will reduce the impacts of an animal disease outbreak in other provinces and in this province.

I can indicate to you that there have been discussions with the industry on this issue, both the livestock and the hog industry, and they are supportive of this bill. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I rise to comment on this bill, Bill 31, The Animal Diseases Amendment Act.

First of all, let me say to the minister that I have called for these sorts of changes and these sorts of provisions for some time, going back a number of years. They are clearly very important that we in Manitoba be in a position where we can, in fact, regionalize a disease like foot-and-mouth disease. At the current time, we would have severe difficulty if

there was a case of foot-and-mouth disease in Prince Edward Island, for example, with no indication whatsoever that that disease was anywhere near Manitoba. Under the current regulations, it is almost certain that we would have to essentially put a rope around all of Canada, instead of being able to put a barrier around just Prince Edward Island or at least, for our purposes, be able to make sure that Manitoba was not affected if there was a single case of foot-and-mouth disease in Prince Edward Island.

So, clearly, Mr. Speaker, there are some important provisions within this bill that we would certainly support. We think that it is about time that we moved on this because, whether we are dealing with foot-and-mouth disease or other animal diseases that are communicable, it is very important that we be able to delineate an affected area, that we be able to cordon off that area so that we ensure No. 1, that in the case of Manitoba, we do not bring infection in here; No. 2, that we can track it down very quickly if there are animals moving in; and No. 3, that anything with any possibility of being infected, of course, we do not want to move it out to be able to send it anywhere else. So these measures are clearly needed and are very badly needed for conditions like foot-and-mouth disease.

I want to comment for a moment on the potential application. As the minister knows, we have gone through a period with a lot of concern about bovine spongiform encephalitis. Indeed, could this be applied in the case of BSE? Could we regionalize a part of Canada? As we are all aware, there have been cases within Canada, but no cases of BSE in Manitoba. Now, BSE, of course, is quite a different type of disease than foot-and-mouth disease, and it is not as clear because the origin of the BSE, for the most part, appears to have been in contaminated food to the extent that we know that it was contaminated feed probably that the animals in Alberta had been exposed to. Although there is not perhaps full certainty in this matter, that is the suggestion that the reviews have made to date. That clearly in that sense would need to track down the source of the contaminated feed. BSE may be transmissible from mother to calf perhaps, but usually the source is eating something that is contaminated with the bovine spongiform encephalitis prion. The potential application of this in cases like BSE certainly needs to be explored.

I would hope that, when it comes to committee stage, the minister would ensure that there are people who present at committee stage and provide us some

advice to the extent of which BSE could be regionalized. Are the measures here adequate to be able to do that, or would we have to do other measures in addition to what is in this particular act and in these particular measures?

* (14:50)

So I would hope that the minister will try to arrange that we have somebody presenting who can talk specifically to the circumstances around BSE as a disease that we would like to be able to regionalize, but the ability to regionalize it may be quite different than it would be the regionalization of a disease like foot-and-mouth disease.

The second point that I would like to make: clearly, as I understand it, the minister is setting up this bill and looking at being able to regionalize, in the first instance, a disease in western Canada as opposed to eastern Canada. In that context, being able to set up at West Hawk Lake an inspection point which would ensure that trucks with animals in them passing that inspection point would be trackable, or there would be an inspection that would allow us to make sure that, if there were an epidemic or were an instance of foot-and-mouth disease in Canada, we would be able to have the approach, we would be able to have the tools, the ability to guarantee to other countries, which is what is critical, that we would be able to stop transmission of foot-and-mouth disease at the Ontario-Manitoba border.

This, clearly, is a positive step if we can achieve that, and in my reading of this bill, certainly the measures here should allow us to achieve that. They will take a little bit of working out so that we can demonstrate to the international community that we can actually do what we can, but that I think and would hope can be done, and that is why it is so important to set this up in advance of a case of, for instance, foot-and-mouth disease coming into Canada or, indeed, North America.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there is an issue here, and that is this: From a Manitoba perspective and indeed from a Canadian perspective, we would like to be able with something like foot-and-mouth disease to be able to drop a barrier across the Canada-U.S. border. It is not entirely clear with a condition like foot-and-mouth disease the extent that we would be able to do that, but, certainly, there are the border controls at the Manitoba-U.S. border that this is within the realm of the possible. Certainly, we would like to be in a position, where there was a case in Texas or Rhode Island or wherever, that we would

be able to separate Canada from the United States and be able to regionalize if there was a disease like foot-and-mouth disease. Now, even if you cannot do it for foot-and-mouth disease, you can certainly do it for a number of other transmissible diseases, and that is certainly a benefit in terms of this legislation.

The next question, Mr. Speaker, deals with if you are able to, even for certain diseases, to set up a barrier at the Ontario-Manitoba border, if we are able with the Canada-U.S. border to be able to set up essentially a barrier there, the next question is are there conditions, or is it possible for any diseases to set up a system at the Manitoba-Saskatchewan border? That clearly is going to be a lot more difficult. There is just no doubt about that. It is going to be a lot more difficult because there are a lot more roads and a lot more potential for people to be transporting animals back and forth between Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

It may be more possible to use the Rocky Mountains as a barrier, right? And to be able to isolate the Prairie Provinces from Victoria, Vancouver area and British Columbia right along the west coast. Certainly that would be desirable, but it is important to be able to look at whether, under certain conditions in the future, there may be a possibility of being able to segregate at the Manitoba-Saskatchewan border some diseases.

Certainly, let us look and go back and talk about BSE, for example, which was present in the cattle from Alberta. It would have been highly desirable for us in Manitoba to be able to regionalize this condition and to protect our farmers from the concerns over the BSE having an impact and the BSE closing the border to movement of any animals out of Manitoba.

This circumstance of being able to regionalize, of course, is very different for different diseases. We know this because with tuberculosis, which we have a problem in certain animals in the Riding Mountain National Park area, that the regionalization concept can work in a different kind of way.

So, being able to set up in an appropriate way a system which can protect Manitoba producers in the event of animal diseases, certainly this is something which, in general, I have indicated that we are certainly ready to support and to move forward. We look forward to this bill getting to committee stage and being able to hear from producers, to be able to hear from those who are experts in animal diseases

about the needs and whether we, in fact, have some provisions here where we need, in fact, to improve the provisions which are set out in the act.

I am going to talk particularly now about one of the areas where I think that we need to look pretty carefully. If you look at this bill, one of the clauses or one of the areas of concern is that individuals empowered under this act, directors and inspectors, can enter at any reasonable time without a warrant any place or premises where there is an animal or any vehicle which an animal could occupy and be transported in. The issue here is that these powers, from what I can see, in fact, are needed to be able to do the inspections that have to be carried out under the act. But the question is: What are the limits of the powers? Can these powers be abused under some circumstances? It is good to be able to have the powers to be able to make sure that we can regionalize an infectious disease, a foot-and-mouth disease, but it certainly is not a good idea for there to be unlimited powers on behalf of the government or people acting for the government which are not subject to any checks and balances.

In this regard, I would like to draw the minister's attention to the need, I would suggest, for the minister to look under this section at the need for there to be some appeal or review body to make sure that these powers are not used in a way that they should not be used. The concern here is, where you have very major powers given to the government and to representatives of the government, directors and inspectors, that farmers do not want people entering their property, entering their vehicles, without reasonable basis for this being justified. I think the Member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire) would agree that what this needs is some approach that will allow for review, appeal of such decisions. Certainly, that kind of appeal or review process would be quite beneficial if it were part of this act.

*(15:00)

I would hope that the minister, in looking at the circumstance here, would ensure that there is a review or appeal process under this act that would enable—we are talking 31. This is The Animal Diseases Amendment Act. This deals with regionalization, right, and there are very broad and stiff inspection powers under this act as the Member for—*[interjection]* What? No, no. That is why I talked about BSE, being quite different from foot-and-mouth disease earlier on, that when you look at animal diseases you may need slightly different

measures for regionalizing BSE than you would for other diseases, okay?

That is why I hope that the minister, when we get to committee stage will bring some individuals who are experts on BSE, so that, in fact, we can have a discussion and make sure that the measures under this act are going to be adequate for us to deal with BSE as well as foot-and-mouth disease and various other infectious diseases. *[interjection]*

I think the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings) would agree that it is important to have this kind of legislation, that it is to make sure that the powers under this legislation have the proper checks and balances, that the powers are not too great on the part of government and that there are the appropriate checks and balances on the part of government.

Now there are, I think, some issues here and some questions I would ask the minister. She did not tell us in her statement to what extent she has engaged in stakeholder consultations. Has there been strong consultation with the Manitoba cattle producers, for example, in the development of these amendments, or will the government proceed without looking carefully and consulting with the Manitoba Cattle Producers Association members with regard to these inspection powers, for example, to make sure that there are checks and balances which farmers and others are comfortable with?

It would have been helpful if the minister had laid out her expectation of the cost, and I do not remember costs being assigned in the budget. So the issue here is what will it cost, the expected implementation. Where are the costs going to be allocated and what are those costs going to be? Is the government going to propose, for example, another unfair levy on agricultural producers to pay for the administration of the act? We are not told that. There does not appear to be that in this amendment, but we want to make sure and we would like the minister's assurance that there is not going to be an unfair levy levied by Order-in-Council or in next year's budget, or wherever, because, clearly, that would be important.

There are not clauses here in terms of compensation of agricultural producers, livestock producers, if, for example, there were damages caused by directors or inspectors to their property. With all the good intents and will in the world, the last thing we want, for example, are inspectors coming into a property and actually spreading the disease because they have been in contact with it.

That would be a major, major issue, and that is an example of where you would need to have some sort of protection for producers.

I think that the broad discretionary powers that are given to the minister under this act need to be looked at to make sure that there are not adverse consequences and to make sure that adequate protections are laid out. There are pretty good standards for this, and, certainly, from what we are aware, the record of veterinarians in this respect is pretty good, but it would be helpful to have some information from the minister on these important issues.

There are issues around government inspectors and others going on property, property damage, privacy invasions. Is there a possibility of tort lawsuits and others? We are just asking the question here. People have the right to be secure from unreasonable search and seizure.

Suppose, what happens if an inspector comes on the property and finds something which then results in laying of a charge which is totally unrelated to this kind of matter? I think that we want farmers to be honest and so on, right? We know that most farmers are. We do not expect there to be problems in this regard. But, clearly, if an inspector goes in to look for a problem with infectious disease and finds some other matter, what are the powers of the inspectors? What is the duty of inspectors to report? What is the risk to a farmer? Can this clause be used for an inspector to inspect for something else than the infectious disease? Those are issues which clearly we should have some answers to. I think that is only fair so that we know up front what the situation is.

Their review process I have talked about and the general perspective on this act, as I have said, is that it is about time we had these measures here. I know the Member for Pembina has quite a number of livestock producers. Certainly, they would like to be protected from animal diseases and make sure that we can regionalize this. I was visiting, not recently but quite some time ago, a feedlot operation in the Member for Pembina's constituency for example, and we need to make sure that we can protect producers. We want to do this in a way that is not overly intrusive or creating huge problems for people, but is certainly effective.

So what I would say, Mr. Speaker, is that, when I look carefully at this bill, we are ready to support this bill. We would like it to be looked at very critically at the committee stage. But, certainly from a perspective of being able to move on to the next

step, I think it would make reasonable sense for this bill to move on at this juncture and get the critical review at committee stage.

Of course, we have a lot of other business that we are looking at. Some of the bills that are already beyond second reading, going to committee stage, certainly need attention as well and should be moved through promptly and quickly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded for the honourable Member for Ste. Rose. (Mr. Cummings), that we adjourn debate.

Motion agreed to.

Bill 20—The Family Farm Protection Amendment and Farm Lands Ownership Amendment Act

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Energy, Science and Technology): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Mackintosh), that Bill 20, The Family Farm Protection Amendment and Farm Lands Ownership Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur la protection des exploitations agricoles familiales et la Loi sur la propriété agricole, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

* (15:10)

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk), I want to indicate this proposal is to amend the two existing statutes, being The Family Farm Protection Act and The Farm Lands Ownership Act, by removing all references to an executive director or chief executive officer position and replacing these with a more standard reference to staffing appointed in accordance with The Civil Service Act. This is consistent with other statutes administered by Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, as reflective of the recent reorganizational changes in the department structure and staff responsibilities.

A further amendment replaces an outdated liability provision with one that is consistent with other provincial statutes. The amendment provides protection from liability for members of the board, employees and others acting under the authority of the act, unless the person was acting in bad faith.

The third aspect of the bill, Mr. Speaker, is to incorporate gender-neutral wording that is standard in provincial legislation.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the continuing debate of this and other related matters.

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler), that we adjourn debate.

Motion agreed to.

Bill 14—The Water Rights Amendment Act

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Water Stewardship): I move, seconded by the Minister of Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Lemieux), that Bill 14, The Water Rights Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur les droits d'utilisation de l'eau, be now read a second time and referred to a committee of the House.

His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor has been advised of the bill, and I am tabling the message.

Motion presented.

Mr. Ashton: This bill responds to a significant concern in many areas of the province, Mr. Speaker, throughout rural Manitoba in particular, and it provides the legislative tools required for the efficient and expeditious enforcement of illegal and unlicensed drainage and other infractions of The Water Rights Act. In particular, it provides for the appointment of officers to enforce The Water Rights Act. It gives officers and other authorized persons the power to conduct inspections and searches, authorities that they need to administer to determine compliance and to enforce the act. It provides them protection from liability when fulfilling their duties.

Once enacted and officers appointed, we plan to amend to the offences notice regulation under The Summary Convictions Act to provide for ticketing for certain offences under The Water Rights Act, thus allowing more efficient enforcement of the act. That allows orders issued under the act to be served by registered mail thus providing a well-accepted option for serving an order and protection from liability. It modernizes the language of several provisions in the act.

The key principle of this legislation is to use the kind of approach that we use in other areas, The Highway Traffic Act, for example, to ensure that we reinforce the need for licensed drainage. This is very much a complaint we have received from municipalities, from conservation districts and from producers. We believe this legislation will go a long way to ensuring that we do have a protection of those

Manitobans, many Manitobans, the vast majority, who do follow a licensing system, Mr. Speaker. So I do urge members of this House to support Bill 14.

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), that we adjourn debate.

Motion agreed to.

House Business

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Just before the member moves second reading, would you please canvass the House to see if there is agreement to change the Estimates sequence for 255 to move Health before Ag and Food, with the change to apply permanently?

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement to change the Estimates sequence for Room 255 to move the Estimates for Health before the Estimates of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives with the change to apply permanently? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Mackintosh: Would you also see if there is leave for Industry, Economic Development and Mines to be considered in 254 this afternoon in place of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs?

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave for the Estimates of Industry, Economic Development and Mines to be considered in Room 254 this afternoon in place of the Estimates for Aboriginal and Northern Affairs? *[Agreed]*

Okay, we are dealing with Bill 24, The Consumer Protection Amendment Act (Government Cheque Cashing Fees).

An Honourable Member: Right here.

Mr. Speaker: Good timing.

Bill 24—The Consumer Protection Amendment Act (Government Cheque Cashing Fees)

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Energy, Science and Technology (Mr. Chomiak)—and we are doing the payday lenders or the Cheque Cashing, 24, The Consumer Protection Act (Government Cheque Cashing Fees)—

Mr. Speaker: Order. You have to—

Mr. Selinger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move, seconded by the Minister of Energy, Science and Technology (Mr. Chomiak)—I was in mid-flight on

that when you corrected me—The Consumer Protection Act (Government Cheque Cashing Fees); Loi modifiant la Loi sur la protection du consommateur (frais d'encaissement des chèques du gouvernement), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor has been advised of this bill and I table the message. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Finance, seconded by the honourable Minister of Energy, Science and Technology (Mr. Chomiak), that Bill 24, The Consumer Protection Amendment Act (Government Cheque Cashing Fees), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor has been advised of this bill and the message has been tabled.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, Bill 24, The Consumer Protection Amendment Act with respect to cheque cashing fees that need to be set for the cashing of government cheques.

Mr. Speaker, these amendments in Bill 24 establish maximum fees that may be charged for cashing government cheques by the federal government, the Province of Manitoba or an agency of those governments prescribed by regulation which will protect Manitoba consumers from excessive charges when they cash these cheques.

Complaints about cheque cashing fees as high as 30 percent of the face value of the cheque have been received. It is essential that limits on fees be established so that consumers receive the maximum benefit from these cheques.

Mr. Speaker, the Legislature provides for the Public Utilities Board to set a maximum cheque cashing fee through a public process that will permit consumers, business and community stakeholders to comment on what the costs are and what is a reasonable amount to be charged for cashing government cheques. The PUB will hold a hearing and may consider information about the operating expenses and the financial risks taken by cheque cashers and other relevant matters. Following the hearing, the board will make an order setting the maximum fee that may be charged to cash a government cheque. The changes proposed will apply to all businesses that cash government cheques.

With these comments, I am pleased to recommend this bill for consideration. Thank you.

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Cullen), that debate now be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

**Bill 25—The Consumer Protection
Amendment Act (Payday Loans)**

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister responsible for Energy, Science and Technology (Mr. Chomiak), that Bill 25, The Consumer Protection Amendment Act (Payday Loans); Loi modifiant la Loi sur la protection du consommateur (prêts de dépannage), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor has been advised of this bill and I table the message.

Motion presented.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, amendments proposed here to The Consumer Protection Act that Bill 25 address payday lending which will protect Manitoba borrowers from excessive charges and questionable business practices that have been identified as problems in this industry.

* (15:20)

Currently, the Criminal Code prohibits lenders from charging more than 60 percent interest, including all the administrative charges. Administrative charges and other fees are typically added to these loans by payday lenders to cover the cost of doing business. Because payday loans are for small amounts for short terms, it is very easy for the interest charges and fees to add up to rates that could be far in excess of the Criminal Code rate. Because of the demand for these loans and the gaps left by traditional financial institutions in serving the community, it is clear there is a place for services of this nature.

This legislation provides for the setting of fees through a public process by the Public Utilities Board that will permit borrowers, businesses and community stakeholders to comment on what costs are and what is a reasonable amount to be charged for these types of loans. The PUB will hold a hearing and consider a number of matters before making a determination regarding the rates that may be

charged for a payday loan. The board may consider information about the operating expenses of lenders, the terms and conditions of loans, the circumstances and credit options available to borrowers, regulation of payday lenders elsewhere and other relevant matters.

Following the hearing, the board will make an order, setting the maximum cost of credit that may be charged for a payday loan, fees for the extension or renewal of a payday loan and the amount that may be charged if a payday loan is in default.

Mr. Speaker, the Criminal Code needs to be amended to permit us to regulate these fees. We have requested such an amendment from the federal government. This bill includes prohibitions intended to stop the practice of rollover loans which can increase the costs of these loans dramatically. As well, amendments will prohibit wage assignments, title loans and concurrent loans from the same lender. A 48-hour, cooling-off period is provided during which the loan may be cancelled without penalty. The payday lender will be required to give the borrower written information at the time the loan is made, including a statement that the loan is a high-cost loan, and notice of the borrower's right to cancel the loan within 48 hours.

The amendments will require that lenders be licensed and bonded. The Consumers' Bureau is provided with inspection powers that will be important to ensure that lenders are complying with these requirements. The bill also includes penalty provisions which will require that the total amount of all fees charged be refunded to the borrower where the lender has charged unauthorized fees.

In addition to the amendments included in this bill, Mr. Speaker, changes to The Consumer Protection Act that passed last year relating to the disclosure of the cost of credit, increases to enforcement penalties and the introduction of administrative penalties will also be applicable to payday lenders.

Mr. Speaker, with these comments, I am pleased to recommend this bill for consideration of the House.

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings), that debate now be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: We will now move on to Committee of Supply. Would the Chairs please report to the appropriate rooms. Executive Council will be in the Chamber; Room 254 will be Industry, Economic Development and Mines; and Room 255 will be Family Services and Housing.

**COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
(Concurrent Sections)**

**INDUSTRY, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
AND MINES**

Mr. Chairperson (Harry Schellenberg): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now be considering the Estimates of the Department of Industry, Economic Development and Mines.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement? The floor is yours, Mr. Minister.

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. This is my second year that I have had the privilege of making opening remarks in my capacity of Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines.

I am very pleased to report that 2005 was a very good year for the Manitoba economy and our real economic growth in 2005 was 2.9 percent. This growth is expected to continue throughout 2006, and many indications of continued good economic health reflected our performance to date and investments to date.

Just some examples of this are the average weekly earnings rose 3.5 percent compared to Canada's 3.1 percent. Manitoba's unemployment rate last year averaged 4.8 percent, which was the second lowest in the country and the lowest rate since 1976. Our youth unemployment rate averaged about 9.7 percent, the second lowest in the country.

* (15:30)

Over the last six years, from 2000 to 2005, youth employment has grown by 6,000, averaging about 1,000 more youth employed per year. This compares to 1989 to 1999 when youth employment actually fell by a total of about 13,300 or 1,200 per year. Just some stats on youth: In 1989 to 1999, youth population fell. The youth population fell by 18,000 or 1,600 per year. Over the last six years, 2000-2005, youth population has grown by 7,800 or 1,300 per year. So youth are staying here and more youth are being employed. While our youth employment

performance has been positive, we know we have to continue to work hard, make sure that we have opportunities for youth and keep people here for the long term.

Other simple, positive notes that we have heard is there are 14,600 new private-sector jobs that were created in the last 12 months. Since taking office in 1999, four out of every five jobs, 76.9 percent, created in Manitoba have been full-time jobs and nearly two out of every three jobs, 65.2 percent, have been created in the private sector.

An example of areas that we are working in is the manufacturing sector, which continues to grow following an exceptional 2004. Manufacturing shipments rose 3.5 percent above Canada's rate. We are going to continue to work with the manufacturing industry with things like the Composites Innovation Centre, the R&D tax credit, the Advanced Manufacturing Initiative and other things. Also, we have increased retail sales tax on equipment, which really has been very positive as far as businesses' investment. Exports have increased 3.7 percent and exports U.S. are up 5.3 percent, which is above the national rate.

We do have some challenges with the Canadian dollar, so we want to work with the manufacturers and with people who are investing in the province. In 2005 capital investment increased 3.9 percent, with private and public investments both going up. One of the clearest signs of positive growth for the future, though, is the StatsCan who talked about the capital investment increases in 2006. Our capital investment expectations are 14.6, the highest level among any of the provinces. By comparison, Canada's overall rate is less than half at 6.1 percent. So this is good because businesses are investing and investing for the future.

We have got lots of different projects that have happened. MTS Centre has happened. We just opened up the Credit Union Central, Polo Park, H&H Trailer sales, a number of new life sciences developments and Richardson Foods, et cetera, of which we are very, very happy. That is in addition to the airport, the floodway, new hydro construction, et cetera. So things are doing well. Over the last three years, we have done well and hope to continue to do well. Life sciences is a good area. Other areas where we have done extremely well is the film industry and others.

Over the last three years, we have continued to set records of profits as a share of GDP. In 2003,

corporate profits accounted for 9.6 percent of the GDP, surpassing the previous high set in 1981 at 9.2 percent. So that is very good. So businesses are doing okay.

In 1999, we had the second highest small business tax rate in the country. We want to continue, we have continued to cut that almost in every budget. What we now have is cut the small business tax rate, the threshold, by half so that has now gone from \$200,000 to \$400,000. We have announced the tax rate for small business will be reduced to 3 percent on January 1, 2007, the second lowest rate in the country. So we have gone from the second-highest to the second-lowest rate. That will have been a reduction in small business taxes of 63 percent since 1999. So things are moving to help people. We have also worked with the Canada/Manitoba small business centre to do a number of initiatives that I hope to profile. I think that is good for our economy because the vast majority of businesses in Manitoba are small business.

We have done more on business immigration, this Young Farmer Program, et cetera, and we hope to continue to move that forward because it has been reasonably successful so far. We also have BizCoach that was just introduced, which is trying to get young people tied to more experienced people so that they can get mentors and reach their full potential, and we are trying to see how this is working. This is something that was suggested from the Chambers of Commerce and CFIB, and we are trying to see how we can work with that. I would be pleased to provide more details on this very, very successful program called BizCoach, that has been run out of the Canada/Manitoba small business centre by the very capable staff there. We have also worked to develop a single business gateway Web site which provides business with easy access to a whole range of services, rather than going to a number of different organizations.

I know that the member opposite, when he was in Cabinet, knew a great deal about the mining and minerals sector, and, because of the prices, we have had record high exploration. It has really done well as far as our metals and mining sectors, and we are cautiously optimistic that will continue in the future along with the new oil discoveries. So, when you look at the oil discoveries around Sinclair, we have gone a huge increase in the amount of oil production, wells drilled and success in that area.

We also expect that San Gold will soon pour its first gold bar. That will be an exciting thing hopefully happening this summer. We have lots of mineral exploration by Crowflight Minerals at Wabowden, Lynn Lake Nickel Mining at Lynn Lake, Mustang Minerals, along with Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting, De Beers and Stornoway, et cetera. So we have lots of exploration for all sorts of minerals.

MEAP, the mine exploration program continues to be very, very successful and supported by industry. The other thing we have done is we have set up a prospector developers' course for Aboriginal people as well as trying to encourage employment. So we have done very, very well, and I understand that the Bissett Mine has about 60 percent local Aboriginal people employed there, and that is a very positive thing.

We are also working on the orphaned and abandoned mines where we are trying to clean up mistakes that happened far, far in the past, before I was born, and we will hopefully have some good announcements on that, and that would be very, very nice to see that. The interesting part is the Fraser Institute Survey of Mining Exploration ranked Manitoba third in the world for both our minerals policy and the quality of our geological database, and that is stuff that has happened over decades, over two successive governments, and it continues to improve off the work of other governments. We also want to continue to work and consult with different organizations, and I will continue to do that to hear what people have to say about expanding the industry.

So thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and with that I look forward to responding to questions from the opposition.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the minister for those comments. Does the official opposition critic, the honourable Member for Ste. Rose, have any opening comments?

Mr. Glen Cummings (Ste. Rose): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, my comments will be brief. First of all, some of the numbers that the minister just put on the record, we may challenge some of those as we go along. I think that given my personal experience in the things that I see happening in rural Manitoba, I am not as convinced that we are keeping our youth, particularly in that part of our province, but I would be interested in getting a better understanding of how we have achieved or should be achieving further growth and opportunity in the mining and mineral sector.

Obviously, the minister would be disappointed if I did not have some further questions related to Crocus and the responsibilities of some of which I appreciate occurred before he arrived on the scene in this department but, nevertheless, an object of attention for a lot of people in the province right now.

I do have one question about procedure that hopefully we can agree to off the hop. I would hope that the minister would agree that we can take—while I will attempt and I hope he would appreciate that as we go through the supplementary information as it is followed and as presented, I would like to reserve the opportunity to have a global discussion as we go along.

* (15:40)

Mr. Rondeau: I would fully agree with a global discussion on the provision that, if it is something on the oil and gas industry, you give me warning, because most of those people are out in Virden or in the Virden area. So, if you give me a day's warning, then that would be okay. Or, we can talk to the person via phone or something like this, because I would not want to have them on call or bring them into Winnipeg unless we are going to discuss that. So, if you agree to give me a little bit of notice, I guess it is three hours from here to Virden, if you could give me some notice, preferably the day before, and we have agreement with that so I do not abuse the staff's work, then I have no difficulty with a global discussion.

Mr. Chairperson: Is it agreed that the questions for this department will follow in a global manner with all line items to be passed once the questions have been completed?

Mr. Cummings: Correct, and I will agree with the minister that there are times when in this process we abuse the staff and sometimes that is a negative reflection on the minister more than it is on the process. So I think I will give this minister his credit that he has staff that are gainfully employed not close by and that I would hope that I can give him—we have got to spend some time on it, so perhaps let us agree that tomorrow would be the day if that works for his staff. Otherwise, I believe if we are still sitting we would be sitting Friday morning. So, depending on what happens tomorrow, I think we probably should have it tomorrow and then go from there. Or is it entirely in my hands if we will be sitting Friday morning, I guess is what I am asking

the minister? Are there agreements between the House leaders that I am unaware of?

Mr. Chairperson: Excuse me, I will just interject. I take it that the Member for Ste. Rose, the critic, has completed his—

Mr. Cummings: Well, let me clarify. Much to my chagrin, my House leader is looking over my shoulder here and I do not know if that is a sign of trust or distrust, but let us go with Friday morning for the oil and gas people. That would work for everybody's schedule, I think. This is a bit of a departure from the normal and I want to emphasize that we want to do it out of respect for the workload that the staff probably has at this time of year.

Mr. Rondeau: Yes, we will bring the former director in for tomorrow morning, or when it is necessary Friday morning.

Mr. Chairperson: I understand that we have agreed to have a global discussion on our Estimates? *[Agreed]*

Before we go ahead, under Manitoba practice, debate on the Minister's Salary is the last item considered for department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly we shall now defer consideration of line item 10.1.(a) and proceed with consideration of the remaining items referenced in Resolution 10.1.

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

Mr. Cummings: Well, I understand that we are leaving the Minister's Salary, but not of this office, so we can inquire of his staff. Basically, I have inquired of his personal staff the numbers that professional, technical, administrative support—

Mr. Chairperson: That is correct. Only the Minister's Salary will be deferred to the end.

Mr. Cummings: Can the minister, for the record, tell us how many and who are his personal staff?

Mr. Chairperson: Yes, would the minister introduce his staff, please?

Mr. Rondeau: We have Hugh Eliasson, who is the deputy minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines, and Craig Halwachs, who is director of finance and admin—I always get titles wrong. We can do the question now.

Mr. Chairperson: Member for Ste. Rose, the floor is open.

Mr. Cummings: Thank you for introducing your lead departmental staff. For the record, would the minister tell us who his personal staff are?

Mr. Rondeau: My personal staff is Chad Samain, who is special assistant; I have Esther Hiebert, who is my executive assistant; and, as far as office support, we have Marina Portz, who is my secretary; Alison DePauw, who is executive secretary; and Cindy Field, who is administrative secretary.

Mr. Cummings: Mr. Chairman, in reviewing the salaries within the department, what does Michael Balagus do within the department?

Mr. Rondeau: Mr. Michael Balagus is not within the department, sir.

Mr. Cummings: He received some reimbursement from the department within the past year, last fourteen months. It is a fairly obvious amount; \$15,000, I believe. Notwithstanding the talents of Mr. Balagus, and, certainly no reflection on him, but I wonder what his reimbursement would have been for from the department.

Mr. Rondeau: I understand that was a fee for service agreement from the CEDC Committee of Cabinet.

An Honourable Member: Community Economic Development.

Mr. Rondeau: Community Economic Development.

Mr. Cummings: Well, this is from the '03-04 record of expenditures. Is there any such expenditure in the immediate past year and the current year?

Mr. Rondeau: No. I understand that Mr. Balagus would have been employed by the Executive Council and so has not received any payments from the department.

Mr. Cummings: Would he also have been receiving a salary from Executive Council when he took on this additional work?

Mr. Rondeau: No, he would not have.

Mr. Cummings: Okay, I appreciate that. I think the minister could appreciate why I would ask that question.

The second aspect of what I see in reviewing the year past expenditures, I see that Mr. Kostyra, who—the minister is well aware I asked a number of

questions about earlier—received his reimbursement from the department in that year. Is he still receiving his reimbursement through this department in the current year?

Mr. Rondeau: Mr. Chair, Mr. Eugene Kostyra has been the secretary to the CEDC for a number of years and is employed in that job.

Mr. Cummings: So, then, it would show up in a line expenditure within the administration of the Community and Economic Development section?

Mr. Rondeau: Yes, it would.

Mr. Cummings: In the carrying out of his responsibilities, Mr. Kostyra has an obviously well-connected number of departments of government and throughout various enterprises within that occur in conjunction with government and throughout the province, in terms of economic opportunity. Would he be receiving directions and having communications with the minister, or does he report more directly to the Premier's (Mr. Doer) area?

Mr. Rondeau: I believe that, because I am part of the CEDC Committee of Cabinet, I meet with him regularly there. I also have regular meetings with him.

* (15:50)

Mr. Cummings: Well, thank you. Can the minister recall when he might have started this activity? What year would he have begun?

Mr. Rondeau: I can endeavour to get the date of his hire, or his Order-in-Council, or his appointment to you.

Mr. Cummings: Thank you. I expect that the minister will keep his word, but one of the things that concerns me is that I raised a number of questions in committee prior to Christmas with the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), and some areas were relative to the Department of Industry. It took a number of undertakings to supply answers. As of this date, I have still not had any communication. So I say that not to reflect on this minister, but something to point out to him that I hope that he will be able to do what he has indicated. Six months from now we might not be quite as interested.

Mr. Rondeau: I will endeavour to have that to the honourable member by tomorrow.

Mr. Cummings: Thank you. I appreciate that. We will move forward to the next section of Policy, Planning and Co-ordination. Does the Policy Branch

take an active role in providing advice within the department for direction and who heads up this branch, if I could ask?

Mr. Rondeau: Mr. Alan Barber heads it up. He has been around for a long time, and he has done a good job. Yes, he provides research, advice and other information to the departments of Industry and other parts of government as far as a lot of policies.

Mr. Cummings: Thank you. In fact, I recognize Mr. Barber and his capabilities. That is not why I asked the question. Frankly, I am asking the question because on Schedule 1 from the book you have a vacancy under Business Immigration and Investment Senior Manager. Now is that section inactive, or is that merely a phase? Generally, someone is named acting in these various sections if they are deemed to be important.

Mr. Rondeau: The previous director, Mr. Randy Boldt, was noted for his work and was hired away. So we are right now trying to recruit for the position and anticipate shortly filling that vacancy.

Mr. Cummings: I am sorry. I cannot write as fast as the minister can talk. Can you repeat that name, please?

Mr. Rondeau: The previous director of that area, Mr. Randy Boldt, was in the department. He has been working elsewhere. He was recruited away. Right now, we are looking for a new candidate. We are interviewing now, and I anticipate filling the vacancy in the very near future.

Mr. Cummings: I am sorry. I thought the minister might have indicated who was acting in that position right now. Is there someone acting or is Mr. Eliasson doing double time?

Mr. Rondeau: Although I have great faith in Mr. Eliasson, I believe that running this department—it is a big department, it requires lots of work, so we have David Sprange who is fulfilling double duty. I know it requires a lot of work, but Mr. Sprange has a lot of experience in different businesses and different areas. So we have left the double duty in Mr. Sprange's hands.

Mr. Cummings: Well, that is reasonable. But, on that vein, what is the vacancy rate in the department right now?

Mr. Rondeau: It is 6.6 percent as of March 31.

Mr. Cummings: Is that a mandated vacancy?

Mr. Rondeau: No.

Mr. Cummings: Is there a mandated vacancy?

Mr. Rondeau: No.

Mr. Cummings: Why would you run 6 percent vacancy in the department that would normally be one of the lead departments in operation of government and promotion of the province?

Mr. Rondeau: The vacancy rate goes up and down and we are in the process of filling a number of vacancies. But, as the member might know, this department has a great deal of people who have spent a lot of time in governments of all stripes, they have a lot of expense, and we are experiencing more retirements than have happened in the past, so it does take a little bit of time.

In the case of the Immigrant Investor Program, by the time the person resigns, you then hold the competition, you advertise it, you hire. That might be a long period of time, much longer than any of us would like, but you want to make sure that when you have an open competition you allow people to apply for the position and then it is open for the best candidate to take the job. That is what we have done in that position and so the position remains vacant for a number of months. But it allows the process and allows a good candidate to fill the vacancy.

Mr. Cummings: Well, 6.6 percent is not out of the world, but, in round figures, what would your normal amount of unexpended salary be at the end of the year? Is the 6.6 percent high at this time or would it have started at a much lower level in '05?

Mr. Rondeau: That number becomes difficult because there are retirements, severance pay, and it varies a lot per year. It depends a lot on how much mobility there is in the department, how many people are retiring in the department. We can endeavour to get that number to you in the very near future. I do not know whether Mr. Halwachs has the time and is able to get it to you in the next few days, but we will endeavour to do that.

But it does go up and down depending on the people who leave the department for other employment and the people who retire. We have a lot of skilled people in our department. We have geologists; we have other people who are in huge demand right now. Some people are also approaching the age where they may consider retiring. So that is happening more and more in government, especially in the department that is as senior and has as many senior people as us.

Mr. Cummings: Well, I am aware of other departments that had a vacancy rate in double-digit, and it appeared to be getting to the point where they were having trouble delivering service to meet their mandate. This is the opinion of senior management; they are able to meet their objectives with this much. I am assuming that this will be an ongoing vacancy rate then, if the retirement rate is as high as it is for a couple of years.

Mr. Rondeau: I have been very, very pleasantly impressed with the services that this department does every day. We have a lot of committed people and 93.4 percent of the positions are filled. Positions are being filled on a regular basis. So, like the head of the immigration business sector, it may take three or four months actually from when the person resigns to when you fill it, but that would be a normal course of business. I am very pleased with the level of service.

I hold regular meetings with many groups and I hear very, very positive things about the staff, the level of service delivery, et cetera on a regular basis. I do a great deal of outreach in the community and the feedback has been consistent where people are impressed by the employees' performances, their diligence to doing a good job and their level of skills. Again, the vast majority, 93.4 percent of the positions are filled. We are endeavouring to fill a number of other positions, and we will continue to do that.

* (16:00)

Mr. Cummings: Well, I want to put clearly on the record that the reason I am asking these questions is that I believe it is true that a lot of the people that you would hire are in demand and the department, in many cases, does not have a plethora of people with certain skill sets which could, at times, leave you short.

Is the department able to fill jobs at a competitive rate or do there have to be any additional incentives to get the staff that you require?

Mr. Rondeau: We do endeavour to recruit, an example is with geologists. We have just hired, I understand, two young new geologists in the department, both are female and one or both are Aboriginal. One is Aboriginal. So that has been a very, very positive thing, where we have in an environment where the mining and mineral sector is very, very hot, we have managed to get two female geologists, one of which is of Aboriginal descent, working in our department, and that is a very, very positive thing that happened.

Mr. Cummings: This number may not be readily available, but I suspect that Mr. Eliasson might well have it on the tip of his fingers given that its effect would be a possible clawback from his budget and that is, what is your return to Treasury at the end of the year? Is there a number that you have been averaging because of vacancies that allows you to return money to Treasury, unspent dollars?

Mr. Rondeau: I understand the lapse was about 3 percent last year, which is about \$900,000 on a \$30-million budget, but a lot of that is not caused because of staff, it is caused by a number of other factors.

Mr. Cummings: Such as?

Mr. Rondeau: It could be on what is happening with the MIOP program; it could be with what is happening on interest rates. Lots of things that happen within the department and outside the department.

Mr. Cummings: Okay, I understand the minister's answer. I guess I was under the mistaken belief that some of that money, the MIOPs, would have been under loan authority, but that is a budgetary authority within the department?

Mr. Rondeau: The interest costs and the loan loss provisions are under budgetary authority; the rest is under the loan provisions.

Mr. Cummings: Then why would the interest on the loans—is that strictly a function of the lower interest rates?

Mr. Rondeau: It is a function of interest rates and loan activity. As you might know, what we generally try to do is charge rates at or above the Crown borrowing rate, but there are other previously loaned amounts that were done years ago that might cause interest rates to fluctuate a little bit. So, as the interest rate goes up, we have to pay for those costs.

Mr. Cummings: Loan activity, can the minister elaborate on that? Is he implying that the loan activity may have been reduced?

Mr. Rondeau: What happens is, the loan provisions, it may take a little while to actually get the loan into the private sector and negotiate it, or the time between when the loan is approved or negotiated and when it flows may take a little bit of time. That might make a change. The actual level of activity has not dramatically moved around a lot in the last few years.

Mr. Cummings: Given the area I represent, I have an interest in this, not about specific regions, but in a

specific industry. Were any of the kill-capacity issues addressed through MIOP loans? And subject to that, is the make-up of the companies who—well, not the make-up of the actual list of companies that would have been engaged in getting MIOP loans, given that it is a publicly supported loan. I understand that we have not been able to get that information, is that confidential or is there anything that restricts the department from indicating what companies they have done business with relative to the MIOP program?

Mr. Rondeau: Every MIOP loan is approved by Order-in-Council and is actually published in the accounts.

Mr. Cummings: All of the MIOP loans, and I recognize that Orders-in-Council are public, but it still makes my question valid. If I were to request a list of MIOP loans, then because it is already public that should be easy to get.

Mr. Rondeau: I believe it is in the Public Accounts. I cannot remember the page, 600 and something, but we can endeavour to get you the list of MIOP. It is public information.

Mr. Cummings: That is my shortfall in not examining the Public Accounts for that information, but I have also been led to believe that there has been some difficulty on the part of some people acquiring that information. I am satisfied with the answer. It is public information. It can be acquired, so thank you.

I would like to move quickly to the next section which is a small one. The people working there probably would not like that comment. I do not mean it to downplay their importance but the Bureau of Statistics. Is it being operated as an SOA or an independent, stand-alone section?

Mr. Rondeau: It is not an SOA under the strict definition, but it does try to do some cost-recovery for some of its services.

Mr. Cummings: If the minister has the information handy, what would be the capability of cost-recovery to offset the expenditures and the cost of running the office?

Mr. Rondeau: Part of the reason why it is not an SOA is because it collects about \$60,000 for subscription services. It does some very basic information on if you want to do the spinoff benefits for an operation, things like this. But \$60,000 would not cover the cost of operation of the statistics area, Manitoba Bureau of Statistics.

Mr. Cummings: Does it charge for information at any point delivered to the public?

Mr. Rondeau: Yes, there is a charge for some of the reports and some of the information that is provided.

* (16:10)

Mr. Cummings: Would it produce certain statistical information on a specific request? Without giving an example, I know they keep a large cross section of information, but, if an individual or a company approached them about collecting information in a specific area, would they undertake to contract something like that?

Ms. Marilyn Brick, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Rondeau: The primary purpose of the Manitoba Bureau of Statistics is to make sure that government decision makers have access to statistics and the information they need to make policy and government decisions. If they were going to do a contract, they have some limited capacity to do contracts like the member suggested, Madam Acting Chair, but they would charge for that. If they were going to do some sort of cost-benefit analysis or something like that, there would be a fee attached to that.

Mr. Cummings: Do they do very much of that kind of a concern?

Mr. Rondeau: No, they do not do a great deal of it. They do a small amount, but the \$60,000 is recoveries from government and all the rest of it. It is not a great deal of money.

Mr. Cummings: Well, I appreciate it is a small department. I was under the impression that they could move more to cost recovery. Is that in their mandate, to seek further cost recovery, or is that only going to just further account for the support that they do get from within government?

Mr. Rondeau: There has been no change in their mandate in the last year or two.

Mr. Cummings: Pardon me for being suspicious, but the minister did say in the last year or two. Was there a further to that or is that just wording?

Mr. Rondeau: That was wording. There has been no change in their mandate. They have some cost recovery, but their major mandate is to provide stats and information to government for government to set policy and make decisions. So there has not been a change.

Mr. Cummings: Moving forward under Business Services, I see a fairly large number attached to this. Is this area fully staffed at the moment?

Mr. Rondeau: We are down one person in that area right now.

Mr. Cummings: Well, that is good because in my opinion this is where an awful lot of the public does view the response of government and whether or not government is in a position to be of assistance, whatever their endeavour may be.

Can the minister give me any kind of a breakdown on the range of qualifications for the people that work in this area? I am not talking about individually. I am talking about in terms of what their areas of expertise would be, and I see the areas listed here. Do they roughly follow some of the areas listed here? I would think, if I understand the department, there should be some people with some fairly significant qualifications available to the minister and to the public in these areas.

Mr. Rondeau: We have people with accounting backgrounds, banking backgrounds, chartered accountant backgrounds and business backgrounds. So it is a very skilled department.

Mr. Cummings: Would I be correct in assuming there would be a lot of overlap between this area and the policy branch?

Mr. Rondeau: The policy department gives advice to this department and other areas of government, whereas Financial Services is basically a service delivery part of the department.

Mr. Cummings: I apologize for jumping around here. But I am going to ask then, within the policy branch, it is quite a small section, are there people there in those positions who are under contract or is it mainly filled by career civil servants?

Mr. Rondeau: Career civil servants.

Mr. Cummings: Moving forward in the Business Services, Industry Development–Financial Services. I see a deployment of 12 here. This, I would assume, is where your most qualified financial people are lodged?

Mr. Rondeau: They are very qualified and very skilled, as are many and most of all the department. I am very pleased with all the staff in the department. They all give professional advice. They are very professional. They have lots of qualifications. I might add, they have served both governments, many

governments very well. So I have been very, very pleasantly impressed with the quality of service, the amount of service and the dedication shown by all the employees in this department.

Mr. Cummings: Well, I would fully expect the minister would give me an answer of that nature and I do not have any grounds to disagree with him. How many vacancies here in this area?

Mr. Rondeau: None, they love their jobs.

Mr. Cummings: Are there any additional contracts that are issued in this area?

Mr. Rondeau: No, there is not.

Mr. Cummings: Under Consulting and Marketing Support, I am not going to lead with the question about whether or not he thinks they are professional. Let me save us a little bit of time here and ask vacancies and/or contracts?

Mr. Rondeau: One vacancy, no contracts.

* (16:20)

Mr. Cummings: Well, I recognize that nitpicking through the department on vacancies may not seem significant, but, when this department and a number of others, as I understand it, within government have high rate of return to Treasury at the end of the year, I suspect that there has often been, and I would not expect the minister to necessarily indicate at this stage of the year whether he expects any kind of mandated vacancy or mandated sleeve, if you will, in terms of the finances at the end of the year. But, when a government has had growth in revenue to the extent that it has and departments are running significant vacancies, it is not just this department that has retirement issues. So I would ask that, as we go through this, perhaps if there is information around whether or not additional planned vacancies would show up, it would be something that I would be concerned about because, while this is not a large department, it gets a lot of attention, not the least of which is the attention it is getting on the Crocus file right now.

The Small Business Development is another area where there is a lot of interaction and where the public draws conclusions about whether or not government is, in fact, able, not suggesting competence or otherwise, just whether or not they are able to interact and support and just be useful in terms of development and development of their opportunity. Under the Small Business Development category we

see 15.5 employees. What is the vacancy and/or the contract rate there?

Mr. Rondeau: There is no vacancy and there are no contracts there. Just to let the honourable member know, this area specifically has done some wonderful initiatives. You notice on page 31 you have the "Single-Window Access" to the Entrepreneurial and Business community. This is a very, very positive thing where all the papers, all the documents are accessible on one Web site, so, if you want to know about Manitoba business, that is all accessible there. All the documents are on there, and so it has over 10,000 links and it has got a business planner and calendar. It is really good and we have had positive feedback from the Chamber of Commerce and lots of people on this.

We also co-located with the Canada small business centre, and we have 34 regional offices that are all throughout the province and provide lots of services, information, et cetera.

Simple things, like the name registration. You can now go to the Canada/Manitoba business centre and rather than try to post and find out whether the name has been reserved or whatever, you can actually phone them or go down there and find out if a name has been reserved and then reserve your name. So it is no longer, oops, is this name picked, or is it available, and they can do that as part of a service. They have had wonderful, wonderful support.

As an example of when I had talked positively about the department, I was at a U of M competition about businesses sponsored by the Asper School and some other organizations, and Jason Lacasse, who is an officer of the Canada/Manitoba business centre was a person—a young businessman had gone out and specifically mentioned the absolute excellent service and dedication he got from this man. It sort of reflects very, very well on the staff of the government, all the staff of the Canada/Manitoba business centre because when you have a businessman who comes to me as the minister and says, listen, I had service from this person; it was absolutely amazing; he was great, he was dedicated, he stayed after hours to help me out, it was absolutely wonderful to hear. That is the type of service that these people have been providing and are providing.

Mr. Cummings: Well, this probably is not the right place to discuss this, but is this also where the business registry is lodged, or is that lodged in the Department of Consumer Affairs?

Mr. Rondeau: It is lodged in Consumer Affairs, which is part of the Finance Department.

Mr. Cummings: I am going to ask the minister a constituency question then. As a minister responsible for economic development and opportunity in this province and small business, there is a situation where two companies operate under the name Northstar. Their logos are almost mirror images of each other, and one is NorthStar Genetics and one is Northstar Seed. I expect the people in your department are smart enough to know that genetics and seeds have a lot to do with each other. Yet those two companies are allowed to register the name and compete head to head and got no support from anybody. One company is a Manitoba company; the other one is an interloper, you could say, from the States. Do your small business advisory people provide advice to people who find themselves in those situations? Would that be part of their mandate? Could they tell them what to do or how to protect themselves or what they should do under those circumstances?

Mr. Rondeau: That is part of the reason why I am pleased with this ability to phone and get similar names and names that sound the same or might be the same. What that means is, and I will use my own example, if there is a company that is Jim Rondeau Financial Services or J. Rondeau Financial Services, they might sound the same. What you want to do is you want to make sure that when you phone and you get the information, you find out that the companies are indeed not the same. You get to find out what companies have registered names so that you are not creating confusion in the marketplace.

So, when I say the positive support that the department is doing, you now can phone the Canada/Manitoba business centre and find out if there is a Cummings Small Engine or a Cummings Repair or whatever, and you will find out whether those two names are similar or too similar and you find out if there are names that are too much the same so that you do not set up a business that all of a sudden five years later, three years later creates a lot of confusion.

Mr. Cummings: Well, I will forgive the minister for perhaps not wanting to go further into this. My point is exactly the opposite. I believe there was deliberate confusion created, and there was no protection provided for the existing name. Outside of your mandate I appreciate, but I will pursue that with another department.

In this area again, who is the manager in this section, if I may?

Mr. Rondeau: Mr. Tony Romeo.

Mr. Cummings: I have that name. All right.

The qualifications of someone who would normally be seen as professional support in this area?

Mr. Rondeau: Typically, business school grads.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Cummings: I have one other question in this area. Supplies and Services is just about \$400,000. In transportation, which I would have thought in this area might have been high, what would drive that cost? I am not suggesting there is anything improper about it. I just want to know what would drive it.

Mr. Rondeau: We have a cost-shared agreement with the federal government on the operation of the Canada/Manitoba small business centre, and that would be our share of the costs.

Mr. Cummings: With costing three quarters of a million to run the small business centre, obviously, and double that?

Mr. Rondeau: The grants and transfer payments are \$60,000. The transportation costs, some of what they do is they conduct workshops in and around the province. They do not just stay in the city anymore. They have done some in Flin Flon, Thompson, The Pas. I understand they did one or are doing one near Brandon. They are talking about doing one in Norway House. There is some money on Communications, \$70,500. They do publish a lot of pamphlets and literature and get some communication out there. Supplies and Services is \$392,800. Minor Capital is \$2,000. I do not know what that is. That might be a computer or other stuff, but I do not know. It could be just desks. Other Operating is \$159,100 for a total cost of \$709,400. They do a lot of projects outside the city and they also do a lot of work throughout the province in support of small business.

* (16:30)

Mr. Cummings: Well, in consideration of my neighbour to the north, Dauphin seems to have been disadvantaged. My original question—you almost got me off the scent here—under Supplies and Services, \$392,800. Is that just supplies and services or is there something other that would drive that? I acknowledge that there likely would have been quite

a bit of travel, but I spend more than \$25,000 on travel.

Mr. Rondeau: I can endeavour to get Supplies and Services of \$392,800 further broken down if you need it. The interesting part about this project is that it is a cost-shared program. We found that it gives us an advantage because it is a single site. We are not doing it where you have to go see federal programs and provincial programs.

One of the things that we try to do is we try to work for the Women's Enterprise Centre; we work with the different organizations so that we become seamless. We have set up a cost-shared agreement with the feds to cost share some of the costs of the delivery of services. I assume that with Supplies and Services, the vast majority is that, but I will endeavour to get it to you shortly.

Mr. Cummings: I would be interested in what the dollars are in the cost-sharing. I am assuming that they are not spread out through this whole area. There should be one area where they would be rolled into, and you are suggesting they would be in Supplies and Services. I do not dispute that, but, if you do not have it right now, I would like the breakdown on that.

Mr. Rondeau: I will get you the breakdown before Monday next week, by the next sitting—no, before Monday.

Mr. Cummings: Moving through the department on a technical basis, and as I said at the opening, I think the capability of the department is quite well respected across the province. But I touched on one item right at the beginning that the minister would be disappointed if I did not pursue it a little bit further.

The problem is that this minister has been given this portfolio in recent history rather than over a long period of time. I do recall having asked questions about the employ of Mr. Kostyra and through the Economic Development Council. Does the minister have any input into the people who sit on the Economic Development Council, or is he there at the pleasure of the Premier (Mr. Doer), the same as most of the other people?

Mr. Rondeau: It is a Cabinet committee. So certain people in Cabinet sit on that committee.

Mr. Cummings: For the record, would you indicate which portfolios are represented there, or is it by—*[interjection]* Well, no, first question first. Are the people appointed there because of the portfolio they

hold, or do they hold it even if they change portfolios?

Mr. Rondeau: It seems that it is generally the economic development portfolios that sit on the CEDC.

Mr. Cummings: Well, from time-to-time, press releases go out on these matters, but they can change. Sometimes I do not read government press releases with as much diligence as maybe the minister thinks I should.

Can the minister tell me what portfolios are represented on the council today? I mean, I could run down to the other room and ask the Premier, so I am going to ask the question one way or another.

Mr. Rondeau: I will get it to you because I do not want to make a mistake. I will endeavour to get that to you, too.

Mr. Cummings: This is a three-, four- or five-member committee?

Mr. Rondeau: It is generally less than a dozen. It depends on the issue. Generally, it is about six or seven people, but it depends on what discussions are happening.

Mr. Cummings: Well, each government has the privilege of organizing itself any way it chooses. I am going only from the history of what experience I may have had. So I am going to repeat the question. If the minister is going to get the information, that is fine, but what I am seeking is the standing committee, if you will.

I am assuming that when he says there are larger numbers that attend as well—and this is internal organization. I may not even necessarily elicit an answer from him, but I want to put it on the record so that he knows what I am asking for. I am assuming that, when it affects other portfolios that are not on that core committee, they are then invited to attend.

What I really want to know is the core group, if there is a core group. If there is not, then that is a fair answer as well.

Mr. Rondeau: I will endeavour to get the core group names to you.

Mr. Cummings: Thank you. Who acts as staff to that group?

Mr. Rondeau: There is the secretary of the CEDC, which is Eugene Kostyra, and then there is a staff that is appointed in the CEDC.

Mr. Cummings: That staff is part of the Premier's staff or Executive Council?

Mr. Rondeau: The staff is Industry staff. So it falls under the Department of Industry and there are, page 49, 13 people on staff.

On page 49, in your book, it talks about the CEDC Secretariat. It is subappropriation 10-4A, page 49. It talks about the fact that there is one Managerial, nine Professional/Technical, Administrative Support of three, and then we have 13 staff. That is what is employed right now in that department that would provide support for the CEDC Committee.

Mr. Cummings: I see 13 people listed here. Is there any additional support that the minister is aware of besides those who would be identified within this section of his department?

Mr. Rondeau: No.

Mr. Cummings: The Managerial section here appears to have a figure allocated for the coming year of \$151,000. Is that Mr. Kostyra?

* (16:40)

Mr. Rondeau: I understand it is.

Mr. Cummings: Okay. I take it that this would require some structuring within the department. Does this Secretariat do any other work other than what would appear to be directed and/or indicated by that committee? Let me elaborate a little bit. What I am getting at is, it is perfectly legitimate for the support group to be there. What I am trying to determine is if they do other work within the department or is it exclusively work that would be related to what the Economic Development Committee would be directing?

Mr. Rondeau: Part of what the CEDC does is that it co-ordinates economic development and businesses in the province. So, when you talk about a complex project, we will just talk about one, like Simplot, which has gone into Portage la Prairie, it is not a case of just one department, it might involve multiple departments. So it might involve Agriculture, Industry, Water, Environment. So there might be a number of different departments that are involved in the project. On any complex project you would have to draw expertise, specialization together and move the project along. That is what the CEDC staff does.

Mr. Cummings: So all of that expertise would not necessarily be lodged in the Secretariat. They would

be able to pull in expertise from various departments that would be relevant to the questions or needs of the committee?

Mr. Rondeau: Their job in this department is to coordinate the expertise throughout government to get the job done. So, like in Simplot, it is not just a Conservation issue; it would not be just an Ag or an Industry, et cetera. So what the job of this department is is to bring together the expertise throughout the departments to get the job done. In other words, on a major project, on any major project it would not be lodged, all the expertise, in one department, generally. So they will bring expertise from my department, from Agriculture, from Food, from Water Stewardship together, bring them to bear so that the job gets done in a timely fashion. Part of that is trying to make sure that not only are we open to business but we do it well. In other words, you are trying to attract business. You are trying to say that we can respond in an effective manner, in a timely manner. That is what this branch would do.

Mr. Cummings: Would that include financial advice and support that various endeavours might need and, again, I would point to slaughter capacity?

Mr. Rondeau: The technical analysis, the basics would be done in the departments and the policy advice would be done out of this department. So, if you are talking about slaughter capacity, the expertise would probably be in Agriculture. But there is also expertise in the water issue, so that would be housed in Conservation, the water in Water Stewardship. So the environmental licensing would be in Conservation; the water issues may be in Water Stewardship. The economic issues might be in IEDM. So what you are trying to do is bring all the specialized expertise that are found in the departments, bring them together and then try to provide the policy advice to government as a whole.

Mr. Cummings: I appreciate that the discussions themselves are privileged material, but, as an example, Ranchers Choice is structured as a co-op. It is not an individually held share company. Does this group provide advice in those regions? For example, the department responsible for co-op development, would they have brought their expertise to bear on a matter such as that?

Mr. Rondeau: If it is something like co-op development, where they are forming the co-op or building a co-op, that would be expertise that is found within the Department of Agriculture. So, if they are setting up the co-op, if they are doing

something like that there is specific expertise that the Ranchers Choice or whoever would go to and that would be within the Department of Agriculture itself.

Mr. Cummings: But, if they needed a MIOP loan, they would come to IEDM?

Mr. Rondeau: If they were interested in a MIOP loan they would come to the department who would do due diligence. They would come to the Department of Industry, Economic Development and Mines for the MIOP loan.

Mr. Cummings: What happens if a company comes to the department acknowledging that it needs risk capital? Who would provide the advice?

Mr. Rondeau: It depends a great deal on the nature of the project. If they need a very small amount of money they would go to the Manitoba/Canada business centre. If it was something like a co-op they would talk to the Department of Agriculture. If it is a large industrial organization they would talk to the Department of Industry.

Mr. Cummings: Would this committee ever direct a request to one of the private or co-operative, co-operative is the wrong term, one of the labour-sponsored funds, for example, to approach them to see if they would be prepared to provide risk capital?

Mr. Rondeau: The CEDC would not directly deal with a proponent of any program. They would deal with the government departments. So what would happen is that if, say, I wanted to set up a small operation—not me I am not allowed to—but let us say that someone wanted to set up a small operation, \$20,000, \$30,000, they would walk into the Canada/Manitoba or contact the Canada/Manitoba business centre. They would provide them with the basic parameters on how to set up businesses, how to get money, how to start up. That type of information would be provided. If someone was going to do something with agriculture they would do the same thing through Agriculture and so that is how it works.

The Community Economic Development Committee Secretariat does not deal with the proponent directly. What they would do is they would deal within the government to make sure if it is a large operation that the co-ordinator—or try to work with the different departments to make sure that the project moves.

* (16:50)

Mr. Cummings: If someone came in completely cold on what—and, frankly, as MLAs, we occasionally get asked, so where do I go to get information? I do not even know who to ask. Is the secretariat one of the places they would go?

Mr. Rondeau: An example is, the former Leader of the Opposition, whom you know as the Member for Kirkfield Park (Mr. Murray), provided me a note which said so and so needs to know about starting up a business. What I do automatically is I send it to Canada/Manitoba small business centre, who then deals with that person, tells them the services, what is around. That is what I would do in any way. You send them to the appropriate government department that would deal with them.

If you came to me and you said, I have somebody who wants to do a potato factory, that would start off with the Department of Agriculture. If you come up and you want to set up a car manufacturing plant in Manitoba, you come to the Department of Industry. Or, as H & H did. They wanted to do a bunch of trailers, they would come to the Department of Industry.

Mr. Cummings: If the inquiry comes to the minister's attention, it could also be referred to this committee. I am not trying to draw a long bow, but there is a connection I am trying to make. And that is, if this committee was indeed working on developing a thrust that it wanted to pursue in this province, and I can use examples that have occurred. Changing the hog marketing in this province meant that there was a whole change in philosophy that had to occur. Setting aside the current debate over Olymel, the question was whether large operations could locate close enough to good enough access to hogs. It cuts across all streams of government support from financing to waste to supply to marketing and certainly into financing. Would that be the nature of an initiative that would be rightfully referred to this secretariat?

Mr. Rondeau: The department does not get outside proposals to itself. What happens is that departments are the proponents. What the CEDC does is co-ordinate different departments. So, if I wanted to set up a truck factory in Manitoba, I would not go to CEDC because that is not their function. I would go to Department of Industry. The Industry Department would then do it. What the CEDC does is then give policy advice and co-ordination. It does not take a proposal from the proponent and move with it.

Mr. Cummings: What would the relationship be between this committee and the Premier's (Mr. Doer) Economic Advisory Council? Is there any overlap?

Mr. Rondeau: The Premier's Economic Advisory Council gives advice. It is a volunteer board that gives advice to the Premier on different items. The CEDC, however, is a co-ordinator role. They do not meet as far as they do not directly support each other. They do not work together. The PEAC is a committee of volunteers just like in the previous government where you have people who are from the business community. They give advice to the Premier on a wide variety of issues. It is a volunteer committee, and they provide free, open advice and good advice, and there is no direct connection between the CEDC Committee or the secretariat and PEAC.

Mr. Cummings: I can appreciate the minister's candour, but I also would think there must be some way of communicating between the two. Is the Premier the only conduit between the two, or would there be overlapping staff of any kind? For example, would Eugene Kostyra, given his position and his area of responsibility, be able to provide the connection between the two?

Mr. Rondeau: Eugene Kostyra is not a member of PEAC.

Mr. Cummings: I realize he is not a member, but I am suggesting that, as a close liaison with the Premier and nominally the head of this function, or not nominally, he is the head of this function that we are talking about, that he would be a logical conduit between the two.

Mr. Rondeau: The way the PEAC operates, to let the honourable member know, Mr. Chairperson, is that it breaks down to various subcommittees: one might be on the marketing, one might be on the Aboriginal employment, et cetera. They break down to subcommittees that report to the Premier. The Premier then involves other ministers as is appropriate and that is how policy direction is set.

I might add, Mr. Chairperson, that this was not, I understand, very much different than what happened under the former premier, Gary Filmon, of which you were a member of that government where, again, there was an advisory committee to the Premier that provided advice on a variety of policy initiatives, and what it was was advice to the Premier from community leaders. We take their advice seriously and the Premier takes the advice seriously. What

they do is they provide this advice from the subcommittee to the Premier and the Premier then decides how that will be moved forward.

Mr. Cummings: I thought they just arrived full grown. Well, this may be more impression than importance, but it strikes me as a little odd that there is a list of 15 or 20 people who are broken into committees and that those committees would never meet as a Committee of the Whole so the information would go back to that central body, I presume, to be screened somewhat before it went forward. I do not expect the minister to confirm or deny, but I am assuming that that would be the way it would function. But the makeup of that council, and I wondered for a minute what the minister was referring to, PEAC is the acronym for Premier's Economic Advisory Council. How often, in the minister's knowledge, do they meet?

Mr. Rondeau: This is a group of business leaders, Bob Silver, Ash Modha, a number of very prominent people throughout the community and they meet on their own schedule. We have a co-ordinating role, and execs are co-ordinating it, but each subcommittee sets its own schedule and its parameters and then the group meets as a whole to decide what they are working on. I have been in attendance to some of these meetings where they provide good advice, or I guess I should not qualify it, but advice to the government on a number of issues. So the branding issue becomes very, very interesting because you sit there and you say, okay, with branding, they suggest that we move forward and give a better image to Manitoba and we will try to do that.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. The hour being 5 p.m., committee rise.

FAMILY SERVICES AND HOUSING

Madam Chairperson (Bonnie Korzeniowski): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply meeting in Room 255 will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Family Services and Housing.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of this department is:

Resolution 9.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$11,601,600 for Family Services and Housing, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2007.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Family Services and Housing.

The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for the Department of Labour and Immigration.

Is it the will of the committee to recess for five minutes? *[Agreed]*

The committee recessed at 3:30 p.m.

The committee resumed at 3:36 p.m.

LABOUR AND IMMIGRATION

Madam Chairperson (Bonnie Korzeniowski): This section of the Committee of Supply will now be considering the Estimates of the Department of Labour and Immigration.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Yes, I do, Madam Chair.

I have approximately 10 minutes, and I was hoping that if I chose to take a—

An Honourable Member: Leave.

Ms. Allan: Thank you.

I am honoured to be the Minister of Labour and Immigration and the Minister responsible for the Status of Women. Labour and Immigration's mandate includes promoting immigration and retaining newcomers, preventing workplace injuries and illnesses, ensuring policies and programs respond to women's needs, ensuring fair employment standards and benefits, preserving stable labour relations climate and protecting public safety. In doing so, the department makes a major contribution to the social, economic and cultural well-being of Manitobans.

I would like to thank the departmental staff for their excellent work in this regard and also the members of the department's external advisory committees and boards for their expert advice and assistance.

The 2006-2007 total budget request for the Department of Labour and Immigration is \$35,267,800. This request represent an increase of 13.1 percent, 13.1 percent increase from last year's adjusted vote. This increase is largely attributable to

a 33 percent increase in financial assistance and grants for Immigration Settlement Services and for the integration of immigrants into the labour market.

An Honourable Member: How many came last year?

Ms. Allan: Keep track of your questions. Immigration and settlement initiatives continue to be a high priority for the government as indicated by the 27.5 percent increase to the budget of the Immigration branch and the 26.5 percent increase to the Multiculturalism Secretariat. Included in the Immigration allocation is an increase of \$2.2 million for Immigration Settlement Services and \$1.4 million for the new Labour Market Strategy for Immigrants. Included in the Multiculturalism allocation is a \$100,000 increase in the Ethnocultural Community Support Program.

These increases build on our government's growing through immigration strategy, a key component of our approach to building a diverse and vibrant province and to the development of our labour markets and our economy. The resources targeted to this area will build upon the tremendous progress we have made to date.

Last year, 8,089 international immigrants came to Manitoba, a 9 percent increase over 2004. We are well on our way to achieving our target of 10,000 arrivals annually. It is especially important to note that approximately 30 percent of provincial nominees settled in centres outside of Winnipeg, supporting growth in communities including Winkler, Steinbach, Brandon, Morden, Altona and Arborg.

*(15:40)

While our success in attracting newcomers is vital to our vision for the province, it is also important that we retain them, an important challenge in an increasing competitive national and international environment. I am pleased to note that the Provincial Nominee Program has a retention rate of 85 percent, and we are working hard to improve retention rates among all categories of immigrants. Our efforts in this regard will be assisted by additional federal immigration funding of \$2.2 million to enhance settlement, language training, Web development, Francophone initiatives and program delivery. Immigrants are a vital component of our response to the demand for skilled labour, and our government is committed to improving the

participation of skilled immigrants in all sectors of our economy.

The new labour market strategy for immigrants is a joint action plan and a formal working relationship between Labour and Immigration and Advanced Education and Training. This strategy is designed to streamline integration of immigrants into the labour market and to improve skills recognition. It builds on our continuing efforts to improve qualifications recognition for immigrants. Specific activities under this strategy include: developing new tools and methods to determine which skills and competencies newcomers have to meet labour market demands; improving labour market and qualifications recognition information for immigrants before they arrive and during their settlement; and developing and funding projects that demonstrate effective and sustainable approaches to reach the labour market strategy for immigrants' goals.

We have negotiated \$2.6 million in federal funding over three years to implement this strategy, which will require the active involvement of businesses, employers, regulators and educational institutions. As well, an additional \$100,000 has been allocated to the Ethnocultural Community Support program to provide financial support to ethnocultural communities and activities, and mechanisms for grant accountability and reporting have been improved.

Workplace Safety and Health: Another significant adjustment in this year's budget request is a 4.3 percent increase for the Workplace Safety and Health division to support prevention and outreach activities. Provided through the division's partnership with the Workers Compensation Board, this funding will support activities such as the production of communications and promotion materials and training for community outreach work to promote prevention activities.

One area of focus for future training and communication activities is the new workplace safety and health regulations currently under development. These new workplace safety and health regulations, which have been developed through extensive consultation with stakeholders, will provide clear direction for employers, workers and safety and health officers and improve protection for our workforce. They will also bring Manitoba into the Canadian mainstream of occupational safety and health law. The Workplace Safety and Health division will continue its dialogue with employers,

labour and prevention organizations as we move forward on this very, very important initiative to reduce injuries.

These activities will build upon past and ongoing initiatives to reduce the incidence of injuries and occupational disease. The efforts of our government and the Workers Compensation Board in conjunction with the co-operation of employers and workers have helped reduce Manitoba's time loss injury rate by approximately 20 percent over the past five years.

Promoting compliance is also crucial to improving health and safety outcomes. The division has strengthened its prevention efforts through focusing increased attention on high-risk workplaces while maintaining proactive inspections in other workplaces. In 2005-2006, almost 5,000 inspections were conducted by the division, an increase of almost 40 percent since our government's workplace injury prevention strategy began in 2001.

Employment Standards: In addition to safety and health, another fundamental mandate for Labour and Immigration is to ensure adequate employment standards that balance the needs of workers and employers while contributing to the province's economic prosperity. One area where we have recently taken very important steps in meeting this goal is through the changes to The Construction Industry Wages Act. That act is designed to provide fair wages and working conditions and to create a level playing field for employers. Over the years, however, the wages set out under the act have fallen out of step with the wages actually being paid in the construction industry. Furthermore, the lack of consistency among wages and classifications has made the provisions difficult to interpret, apply and enforce, and added to the difficulty in attracting and retaining skilled workers particularly in rural Manitoba.

At the request of industry stakeholders, in September 2004, I established a joint industry-labour panel to review The Construction Industry Wages Act and provide recommendations on ways to improve it. Based on the consensus recommendations of that panel, changes effective in June 2006 include streamlining the various wage schedules, updating and modifying classifications to eliminate inconsistencies and better align them with the apprenticeship system and gradually increasing wage rates to better harmonize rates across the province and to reflect the reality of the wages that are actually being paid.

I am pleased to note that these changes have the support not only of the joint panel but also a broader stakeholder group such as the Manitoba Employers Council. The success of initiatives such as improvements to The Construction Industry Wages Act rests on the ability to effectively implement them. An increase of 2.4 percent in 2006-2007 will assist the Employments Standards Division in implementing recent legislative initiatives as well as in carrying on its vital work of ensuring that standards are responsive to today's workers and employers, educating workplace parties about their rights and obligations and promoting compliance with the legislation.

Madam Chairperson: You have leave to speak beyond the 10 minutes, I believe.

Ms. Allan: I would like to thank my colleague and my critic for giving me leave, because I do have some more important comments to make about some areas of my portfolio. I appreciate the opportunity to talk about them.

Status of Women: Along with Immigration and Labour, another major component of my portfolio is the Status of Women. The integration of women's concerns into policy development and governmental decision making is a high priority for my department. As a branch of the department, the Women's Directorate continues its close working relationship with the Women's Advisory Council and other branches of the department and the government to raise awareness of women's issues and to increase consideration for these issues in policies, programs and legislation.

For example, the Women's Directorate worked with other divisions of the department to analyze the gender dimensions of pension benefits legislation as well as employment standards legislation. The Directorate also offers a number of programs to directly improve the well-being of women. Keeping Safe At Work is a province-wide initiative focussing on the safety of women working alone or travelling to and from work alone. Materials from this initiative are extensively used by the Winnipeg Police Service, the RCMP and the Winnipeg regional health authorities.

Trade Up to Your Future is an innovative 10-month pre-trades training program to encourage women, unemployed or underemployed, to consider employment in the skilled trades. Fifty Training for Tomorrow scholarships are awarded to women entering Manitoba community college diploma programs in math-, science- and technology-related

fields every year. Power Up is an introductory computer and Internet training program offered to women across Manitoba.

The Manitoba Women's Advisory Council is the independent arm's-length body providing a voice for women and women's organizations. It has developed a strong working relationship with government and the women's community to promote the full and equal participation of women in society. The Manitoba Women's Advisory Council celebrated its 25th anniversary last fall.

The Manitoba Labour Board: The most significant development at the Manitoba Labour Board last year was the appointment of a new chairperson. The Manitoba Employers Council and the Manitoba Federation of Labour both recommended the appointment of Mr. Bill Hamilton, a well-respected labour relations lawyer and arbitrator in Manitoba. We accepted that consensus recommendation, and I am pleased that Mr. Hamilton has agreed to bring his considerable expertise and experience to the Manitoba Labour Board. I am confident that under his leadership the board will continue to provide Manitoba's workers and employers with the highest level of service. The board is also moving forward on improving its services with the development of an automated case management system to further improve its services. To assist the board in maintaining its high level of service, the 2006-2007 Estimates contains a 5.2 percent increase in the board's budget.

* (15:50)

The Pension Commission: Another important function for my department is that carried out by the Pension Commission. Recent changes in the legislation provide an appropriate balance of flexibility and protection within pension plans. Effective May 25, 2005, the legislation permits a life income fund or locked-in retirement income fund owner age 55 or over to apply for a one-time transfer of up to 50 percent of the balance in one or more of his or her locked-in funds to a creditor-proved prescribed registered retirement income fund. This legislation helps preserve access to adequate pension benefits, while providing pensioners with the increased flexibility they desire. A portion of the budget request will be directed to public education regarding this legislative change.

Office of the Fire Commissioner, a special operating agency: Finally, I would like to mention the important contribution of the Office of the Fire

Commissioner through the provision of critical public safety services during times of emergency, as well as the provision of education and training to emergencies response services in Manitoba, through the Emergency Services College in Brandon. The extent and quality of services provided by the OFC are the envy of many other provinces, and I am proud to be the minister responsible for the Office of the Fire Commissioner.

I would like to reiterate that the Department of Labour and Immigration makes a vital contribution to promoting immigration and retaining newcomers, preventing workplace injuries and illnesses, achieving equality for women and ensuring policies and programs respond to women's needs, ensuring fair employment standards and benefits, preserving a stable labour relations climate and protecting public safety.

I did forget, Madam Chair, just a couple of things that I just wanted to say. I did want to say that I was very, very pleased to have the opportunity to work with the Labour critic last fall. We had a very difficult situation where we had a court ruling that came down, and we had to act very quickly because we had a situation in Manitoba where work permits were not being processed by the City of Winnipeg. I was able to work with my colleague, and we were able to resolve a very difficult and long-standing dispute in this province between the scope of practice for architects and engineers.

An Honourable Member: The Member for Springfield.

Ms. Allan: The Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler). It was an honour to work with him and it was a very, very difficult process. In fact, I think the MLA for Springfield and I were in this very room for 28 hours of committee hearings, and, you know, I think that we really accomplished a lot in this province in regard to that piece of legislation.

We did have an opportunity to go out to the University of Manitoba together, with the deputy minister and my special assistant, to meet with the architecture students at the university who were concerned about the legislation. I think that that was a very, very positive process, and I just wanted to put on the public record how pleased I was that we were able to work in co-operation with the stakeholders and come to grips with that very long-standing issue.

Madam Chairperson: We thank the minister for those comments.

Does the official opposition critic, the honourable Member for Springfield, have any opening remarks?

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Yes, thank you very much, Madam Chair. I cannot believe it is this time again. I have now been the Labour critic, I think, for seven of these, and every time it is just as exciting as the first time.

First of all, I always think it is important to thank those individuals who actually make things work, who actually make things happen, the real movers and shakers, those individuals who really do ensure that the Department of Labour and Immigration moves ahead.

So I want to first of all thank my constituency assistant, Gayle Dowler, for all the fine work that she does on behalf of myself as the MLA for Springfield and as the critic for Labour and Immigration. I would also like to thank my former legislative assistant, Matthew Pruse, who worked very hard in ensuring that everything relating to Labour and Immigration was done properly and fastidiously. He did great work on behalf of the Manitoba Legislature. He decided to move on and pursue other matters, and certainly we do wish him well in his future endeavours. He is a bright young individual and we know he is going to go far.

I do also want to welcome my newest victim, I mean employee, who gets to work in these wonderful conditions, plus 30 degrees, wait till the mosquitoes come, no air conditioning. I did not mention any of these things when I hired him. Now it is too late. I would like to welcome Kelly McCrae as my new legislative assistant. He comes from Brandon University. He is a Brandon resident and has decided to see what makes the Legislature tick. I know that in his heart, his primary goal is going to be that the Department of Labour and Immigration function to the best of its ability, and I know he will work hard to achieve that.

The minister has referenced that she had thanked her department. I just want the record to show that I thanked all of my staff by name and she refused to do that. I think that bodes very poorly, Minister. The minister should have mentioned all her staff by name. We gave leave. The committee gave leave and she chose not to, and I think that is too bad. I do feel that I should move on.

Over the last year we have had the opportunity to spend lots and lots and lots of time together. There

was the pension act which came in that time frame somewhere. We had the architects and engineers act that came forward. Both of those pieces of legislation were significant. They were fairly emotional. I would have to say the architects and engineers legislation is probably one of the most substantial, not the most, but one of the most substantial pieces of legislation that I have worked on in the time that I have served the people of Springfield in this Legislature.

It was a difficult process, and I would have to say that the Department of Labour did a very good job in working on the legislation. Not everything I necessarily agreed with and not everything I would have necessarily, as minister, have done, but they were extenuating circumstances. Something had to be done. I think the department rose to the challenge and the leadership that was shown, and I thank the minister for having given departmental individuals to our disposal. If we had questions or issues, we were given permission to deal directly with individuals in the department, which as questions were raised we had the opportunity then to go directly to those individuals. The minister did that not just for the pension act, but also for the architects and engineers act.

If I could, and I know that if the minister could, we would thank every one of those individuals personally, and I hope that if they do see these comments that they accept those as a personal thank you. I guess you could say that we, as the elected officials, are paid to sit here at committee. I am not too sure if the public servants necessarily are paid to sit here night in and night out for that, but they did, and they did a great job.

I, too, would like to just reference some of the subcommittees that the minister represents: the Manitoba Women's Advisory Council, Building Standards Board, Minimum Wage Board, Advisory Council on Workplace Safety and Health, Elevator Board, Ethnocultural Advisory and Advocacy Council, Power Engineers Advisory Board, Manitoba Labour Board, Manitoba Pension Commission, Construction Industry Wages Board, Manitoba Labour Management Review Committee and the Manitoba Immigration Council. All of these play a very important role and we recognize that. Certainly, as we go through the Estimates there will be a few that we will have some other questions on.

* (16:00)

Also, there are some very important directorships: Human Resource Services director,

Conciliation Mediation and Pay Equity Services director, Labour Management Service Division executive director, Employment Standards Division executive director, Workplace Safety and Health division assistant deputy minister, Women's Directorate, Pension Commission, Immigration and Multiculturalism, and the Office of the Fire Commissioner. To all of those individuals, again, we appreciate all the work that they put into this.

It has been an interesting year. I think that, as legislators, we have done what we were elected to do, which is as issues came up deal with them. Certainly, where I felt we did not necessarily agree with the government, we hopefully articulated that in a reasonable fashion, but we did move items forward.

The Department of Labour and Immigration, I would have to say to the minister, has become far less edgy than it once used to be. There used to be an awful lot more controversy. The department now has taken very much a managerial position, and certainly on the Immigration side has become instrumental in basically redefining what Manitoba is and will be.

I know the minister would be surprised if I did not point out it was under the former Filmon government that the pilot project was started and it was the former minister, Becky Barrett, who saw a great value in it and continued the project and grew it. This minister has continued that and I think it has been to the benefit of this province. I certainly will have some questions as we move along and move through the Estimates.

So, again, I have had the opportunity to spend some time with the minister at the University of Manitoba. I think that was very responsible. We did that very much on a bipartisan basis and I think a lot of good came out of that because we know that there was a lot of concern by young architects about what was taking place.

I just want to close by thanking a staffperson of the minister's office, her name is Sharon, and she has indicated that she is going to buy me a Starbucks latté for the rest of the month. It was the rest of the month, right? *[interjection]* Oh, week, sorry. Okay, well, for the rest of the week. Certainly, I will be sending her my order.

An Honourable Member: Which happens to be.

Mr. Schuler: Yes, which happens to be.

With that, Madam Chair, I think it is time we want to go through the Estimates. I am wondering if it would be agreeable that we would go on a more global basis and move through Estimates that way.

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

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the Minister's Salary is the last item considered for the department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 11.1.(a) and proceed with consideration of the remaining items referenced in Resolution 11.1.

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

Ms. Allan: Well, just as the staff are coming up to join me, I would just like to thank the MLA for Springfield for his comments. I would like to welcome Kelly, as new staffperson to the Legislature and thank him for immigrating from Brandon to Winnipeg. I am sure, Kelly, that I will look forward to seeing you in my office on a frequent basis, as we did Matthew, and we will torture you with endless briefings on legislation. I am sure you will enjoy it.

I would also like to mention that the MLA for Springfield asked me to mention all of the staffpeople that have contributed to the success of the Department of Labour over the last little while. I am going to be introducing four of my colleagues that I have high esteem for in a couple of minutes. But I do just want to thank the staff people that worked with us and walked through that 28 hours of committee hearings and did an incredible amount during the legislation concerning the scope of practice around the architects and the engineers.

I would like to thank Jeff Parr, the deputy minister of Labour and Immigration, and also Nancy Anderson, who did a spectacular job and then, sadly, she left us and is now with Consumer and Corporate Affairs. She has moved on, but she thoroughly enjoyed the legislative process. Also, it is always a pleasure to work with Chris Jones and Doug Popowich at the Office of the Fire Commissioner. So I just did want to put a couple of those names on the record.

I am pleased to welcome today the senior staff who have joined me. I would like to introduce Gerry Clement. Gerry Clement is the acting deputy minister today and is the assistant deputy minister of the Department of Immigration. I would like to

welcome Ken Taylor, who is the chief financial officer for the Department of Labour and Immigration. I would like to welcome Don Hurst, who is the director of the Workplace Safety and Health Division. Oh, I am sorry. He actually is the assistant deputy minister. My apologies. I would like to introduce Dr. Rick Rennie, the director of Labour Management Services Division. Did I get it right? *[interjection]* Research, Legislation and Policy branch. My apologies. I have so much esteem for them that I cannot get their titles right, but I will work on that for next year. *[interjection]* It is beneath the Labour Management Services Division on the flow chart, the bottom one.

Madam Chairperson: Standard Manitoba practice is to consider the Estimates of each department in a chronological manner. Does the committee wish to proceed through the Estimates of this department chronologically or seek leave to have a global discussion?

Mr. Schuler: If it is okay with the rest of the committee, leave to just globally discuss the department.

Madam Chairperson: Do we have leave? *[Agreed]*

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Schuler: Before I start my questions, I do wish to extend my thank you to Deputy Minister Jeff Parr for the work that he did on several pieces of legislation that we discussed. I understand that he will not be here today and look forward to seeing him again on a different occasion.

It is always great to see Gerry Clement and Ken Taylor and Don Hurst. I think Dr. Rennie is new to the table and will have to learn the rules of where you sit and where you are allowed to look and how you are allowed to speak. There are many rules and the minister and I will tell you that over the years we have broken a few of those rules and they have been pointed out to us as well, where we went wrong, especially at committee when people ask questions and have to wait for the Chair to acknowledge them. Anyway, a lot of history. So I welcome all of them to the table.

I noticed that there is an increase in the budget for the Department of Labour over last year. I was wondering if the minister could take a bit of time and just explain where that increase comes from and why that would have been the case.

Ms. Allan: Well, the bulk of the increase for our global budget this year has to do with our immigration strategy. About a year ago, we were having a meeting in our office and we were discussing our immigration strategy and how important the Provincial Nominee Program is to Manitoba because, as the member knows, the Provincial Nominee Program is an economic program that is linked to labour market demand. It is a program that is a shared jurisdiction with the federal government.

We have an incredible relationship with the federal government and we have for many years. We also have an incredible team, I have to say, that delivers our immigration program. But one of the things that concerned us in regard to some of our successes is that there is a funding cap on the amount of money that you can receive year over year from the federal government, and a lot of the money that we get for our settlement services is money that we receive from the federal government.

* (16:10)

So there had been a change of ministers in Ottawa. Minister Sgro was no longer there. I had attended a couple of meetings with Minister Sgro and had very, very good meetings with her, but there was a new minister on the scene, Minister Volpe, and he wanted to have an FPT meeting in Toronto last July. You can well imagine there were not a whole bunch of people jumping to the pump the first week of July to go to an FPT meeting because everybody was thinking they would really like to—

An Honourable Member: None of us knows what FPT stands for.

Ms. Allan: Oh, excuse me, federal-provincial-territorial. So it is all of the first ministers of all of the provinces across Canada, including the federal minister. My apologies.

So Minister Volpe phoned me, and he said that he wanted to have this federal-provincial-territorial meeting in Ottawa and would I come to the meeting. I said, well, yes, absolutely, I would come, but that I really, really wanted a private meeting with him while I was there with my senior officials from my department, because I really wanted to discuss with him the funding that we have received for our settlement services.

Minister Volpe was very supportive of that meeting. Shortly afterward the assistant deputy minister started working with his officials in Ottawa. We did get a meeting with Minister Volpe prior to

the FPT official meeting. We explained to the minister how the cap on the funding formula was hurting us in Manitoba because, in the year, I believe, 2003, we had had a 40 percent increase in the number of provincial nominees who had come to Manitoba, and the funding cap of 10 percent on that funding that we get from Ottawa was really, really hurting us in regard to making our budget really, really tight in relationship to the increased numbers that we were getting through the PNP. So we basically—

An Honourable Member: PNP?

Ms. Allan: Provincial Nominee Program is the acronym.

So we had a very, very good meeting with him. We showed him some figures that if the 10 percent cap was removed what the funding would have been in relationship to what the funding was. He signalled to us that he would, you know, take some of our concerns very seriously. After that meeting, our assistant deputy minister of Immigration kept in consultation with the deputy minister of the federal Immigration Department in Ottawa. Basically, the bottom line is we were successful in negotiating the removal of that cap.

So we have received approximately \$2.1 million more funding for settlement services for our Immigration branch, and that is, I believe, around about a 21 percent increase. Our funding has increased to \$9.2 million. It really is going to make a huge difference for us here in Manitoba in regard to continuing to build our immigration strategy. As you know, our Provincial Nominee Program is the most successful Provincial Nominee Program in Canada; 70 percent of all provincial nominees who come to Canada come to Manitoba. As I said in my opening statement, you know, we are one of the few jurisdictions in Canada that has provincial nominees who do not just settle in Winnipeg. They settle outside of Winnipeg in rural Manitoba, which is incredibly important for the Manitoba economy.

Of course, I would be delighted to have a program in Oakbank, as you mentioned. We would be interested in, you know, developing a program in partnership with the stakeholders.

So the bulk of the funding, the bulk of the increase for our budget this year, we are pleased to say is our Immigration funding, and we are very, very pleased with that. We feel this is a real accomplishment, and I can tell you that the

department, I have to give them a lot of credit. They have run this program on a shoestring for many, many, many years, and this is really going to make a huge difference for us in regard to the kinds of settlement services that we can provide because that is what is critical in regard to retention. We want to make sure that, when newcomers come to Manitoba, there are settlement services and programs there, so that they can immediately feel comfortable in their new surroundings, and that they feel that they are being supported because, if they feel that, then they are more likely to stay here in Manitoba.

We do have some statistics in regard to our retention rate, and we are very, very pleased with our retention rate. It is probably one of the best in Canada. We are also very, very pleased with the numbers. We have seen a huge increase in our numbers in our first quarter this year. Our overall program has increased 25 percent. When you look at other jurisdictions in Canada, they have seen a decrease in their numbers. I think that is really, once again, a testament to the hard work of the department staff in working with this program. It is always changing. It is always innovative. We are always working with the stakeholders.

In March, I went to Brandon to meet with a group of stakeholders to talk about our immigration program, and they said to me, what do you think the success of Manitoba's program is? I said, well, you know what? I think it is the staff that go out and meet with all of the stakeholders. They travel all across the province, and they continually are looking for opportunities with stakeholders to consult to make the program that much better.

The other very exciting initiative, and another reason the budget is increased, is that we have negotiated a labour-market funding of \$1.5 million. That is funding we have secured from HRSDC, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. It is the new acronym in Ottawa. That is funding over three years that we have secured that I mentioned in my opening statement. That also makes up quite of a bit of the funding increase that we are seeing in the Department of Labour. I wish it was my salary, but it is not. *[interjection]* It is a joke.

Mr. Schuler: That was clearly the concern of the committee that there was this big increase and it was all the minister's salary. She laid that to rest.

I do have a couple of questions that I do want to get through. Usually, the minister gives a list of how many individuals have come in and in this case it is

8,089, and then there is a percentage of what countries they come from. Is that list available again this year? If so—nothing that needs to be done today. Again, I would like to thank the minister. Last year, there was a package that was sent with all the information, and that was one of the things that I was going to ask for.

I guess, over the years that I have been the critic for Labour and Immigration, the goal has been 10,000. Is there a reason why we are not hitting the 10,000? I sort of thought 10,000 was sort of like last year's goal. Is it the amount of people applying? Is it that there is a slowdown? I have become very aware of how the process works, that we actually do not do the approvals ourselves. That is done through the federal government. Is it there that we are not quite getting the approvals? Where is it that we are being held back from achieving 10,000? The next question is, what stops us from saying we would like to move it up to 15,000? Is that something that we have to negotiate with the federal government?

Ms. Allan: Well, first of all, in regard to the levels, the question you asked about the 15,000, because our program is a shared jurisdiction with the federal government, and it is built on trust and respect with the federal government and they are very, very supportive of our program, we have the ability to negotiate our own levels, so we can move it to that.

In regard to the 10,000, there was a commitment made to move to 10,000 immigrants per year by the end of 2006. We feel that we are going to be very, very, very close to that target. We may be somewhere between 100 under or over, and I think that is a fair assessment.

* (16:20)

I think that we are seeing a lot of success in the program. I mean, the Provincial Nominee Program alone, I told you that in the first quarter of this year, we saw a 25 percent increase in our program. That was in the total program including the economic class of family sponsorship and refugees. In the PNP program alone, the increase in the first quarter is close to 40 percent. So we are really seeing a success and I have to say that the funding will be helpful.

Just in regard to the number of people approved, if you look at families in the past year, because it is a timed response, right, we approved about 3,100 families; the year before it was 2,500. So we have seen the numbers grow.

Mr. Schuler: A while back I had approached the minister and the department about clusters. I am just wondering if the minister could just reflect a little bit on that.

Certainly, with the Russian Germans, as they are referred to, because they came from a specific town, they then moved to Germany and then sort of wanted to move again as a cluster, and that seems to be the way they get their comfort zone, that is where they get together, and it tends to be very family oriented. I heard just an amazing story about Romania. In Transylvania they had about three million ethnic German citizens, and I think it was Ceausescu who sold 1.5 million of them for a certain amount of deutsche marks, this would have been obviously before the fall of the Berlin Wall, and he sold half of them to Germany. Then, when the wall fell, the 1.5 million that had settled in Germany basically sponsored all the rest of their relatives, and all three million of them are basically—I think there are 30,000 ethnic Germans left in Transylvania.

Again, it is this you go where you know somebody, whether it is because of family or the same town or whatever. That is what is happening now with Russian Germans. They are very open in saying that in Russia, they were not Russian and in Germany they do not really feel German. Here, nobody really cares. I mean, it is just the way we are in Canada. It makes no difference where you come from. It is a lot of other factors that we look at.

So they really do appreciate living in Manitoba. In fact, I spoke to an individual just on Sunday in church, and I said, so, you have settled in now. He said, yes, that is it. I said, no wanting to go back to the old country? He says, you know what, not at all. He says, I went to Edmonton, I looked around and checked out British Columbia. He says, no, he really likes southern Manitoba because it just reminds him of Siberia. That was meant as a compliment. He said it reminded him of Siberia. He said the green and the warm in the summer and the cold winters, he said he absolutely loved it. I know that he is here with a cluster of relatives and friends from his dora, his town in Russia.

I do not know if the minister would like to just reflect briefly on that.

Ms. Allan: Well, you are absolutely right. We have a lot of success stories in Manitoba to talk about, and a lot of them do relate to what the MLA for Springfield is talking about. He refers to it as clusters. Applicants are reviewed individually, but

they have links to Canada through family, and family and friends are important. Then they attract other people, and then you kind of build up steam. That really has been a lot of the success we have seen here in Manitoba.

We have also what we call a community sponsorship agreement, where certain ethnocultural communities like the Jewish Foundation have worked with Argentina, and we have worked with them as a community to assist them. Obviously, the MLA for Winkler and Morden knows—well, the MLA for Pembina, but responsible for the communities of Winkler and Morden—the incredible success that they have had there. I actually told the story at the last FPT meeting about my last visit to your community, and I was meeting with the stakeholders. That is one of the reasons why it is so successful is because all of the stakeholders are at the table helping to deliver the programs and services and make sure that the community is a welcoming community. That community is growing so quickly. They were so excited they were getting a Wal-Mart. I mean, that is a growing community, and you know what? Sometimes we feel sometimes that we are stretching the resources in the community in regard to infrastructure, but, you know, sometimes that is a good thing.

So we will continue as a department to work with the stakeholders in the different communities. We are always open to that kind of thing because we want to make sure we are innovative. I know that the department is actually in consultation with some of the stakeholders in Russell. I know there has been some activity up there and in Arborg and Altona.

So we will continue to look at rural Manitoba in regard to some of those catchment areas and some of those clusters, because that is important to Manitoba's economy in regard to growing rural Manitoba.

Mr. Schuler: In fact, that is the case because there is a cluster now in Oakbank. Oakbank Elementary was seeing a decline in student population and that has reversed itself substantially because three families moved in. I think the average family there that moved in is about 10, and it just changed the whole dynamic of the school in fact, which then brings me to the next issue.

I am glad to see that we are as a nation and as a province looking at settlement issues, because with every benefit comes a little bit of a price tag. One of the things that they have noticed in the Sunrise

School Division with Oakbank Elementary is English as a second language, and then there comes added costs. I have to tell this committee, Madam Chair, that I spend quite a bit of time in that immigrant community. It is my community and the children, one more beautiful than the next, well-behaved, just bright, just amazing children, and what a place to start building the future of the province on; I mean, just amazing families.

However, they do have a bit of a language barrier, and listening to them speak reminds me of when I grew up, because I came from definitely an immigrant family. We were all new immigrants. I was born here, but the ability or desire to stumble your way through a foreign language, so they get it wrong. You sort of correct them and they get it, and they just continue. I have seen now a lot of the kids who have been here five and six years just fluent in English. You barely can tell that they came here without any English.

But that is an area where we should be putting resources in because these are going to become the MLAs of the future. They hopefully will one day be sitting here and debating, because that is the way the cycle goes.

Ms. Allan: I could not agree more with the MLA for Springfield in regard to the additional resources that are required in the school system, in the public school system in regard to the changing demographics in the schools. Because of that, the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth (Mr. Bjornson) has been working on this file.

* (16:30)

In fact, English as a second language has actually been changed and is called English as an Additional Language, because we find that so many of the newcomers, when they come to Canada and Manitoba, English is not their second language. They maybe know two or three or four languages, so they actually are referring to English as a second language, and they have increased funding for support for settlement projects through their department to schools.

They actually have a report with recommendations that was released, I believe, about six months to a year ago. They are implementing some of those recommendations in regard to providing more supports to the immigrant population in the school system.

In our department, we increased funding to Adult English as an Additional Language programming. This is what we spent, \$5.2 million, which is significant dollars. We deliver those programs through arm's-length agencies that assist us in delivering those programs. But they are very, very important programs.

Mr. Schuler: Another area that I think successive governments have been working on, we have heard it at the federal level, and I am going to get the term wrong. It is the whole accreditation issue, whether it be a trade, whether it be an education of some kind, whether it is in the health field or whatever. Can the minister give us in brief form where the government is with that? Is it reliant on the federal government? Where is that whole issue?

Mr. Doug Martindale, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Ms. Allan: There is no question, the qualifications recognition is one of the biggest struggles that jurisdictions have all across Canada, and we have had a lot of success with our qualifications recognition strategy. It was because of some very passionate people in our branch that really wanted to advance this particular issue. It is complex because it is not something that you can just charge off and do all on your own. It is, once again, all about working with the stakeholders. It is about working with the professional licensing bodies. It is working with the educational institutions and working with employers, quite often. We have had a lot of success here in Manitoba.

We have secured funding from the federal government for our qualifications recognition strategy. I really need to talk about the one program that is probably our most recent success story is the engineering program for immigrants that was developed by a passionate man at the University of Manitoba, Dr. Ron Britton, a couple of years ago. That pilot program was launched in consultation, once again, with the University of Manitoba, the Department of Engineering and employer stakeholders and the association of professional engineers, APEGM. The first year Gerry Clement and I went to their graduation and it was fantastic. There were eight engineers from different disciplines of engineering graduating. Then we went again last year and I believe there were 14.

Well, we have increased funding to that program this year and we are very, very excited because it is funding for three years. It is going to make the

program sustainable and it is going to provide training for 40 engineers per year. The program has been so incredibly successful that the national association of APEGM got involved with HRSDC and the program is going national. It is going to be a program that was piloted right here in Manitoba because of a commitment amongst the stakeholders to really make things happen. It is now going all across every jurisdiction in Canada. So we are very, very pleased about that strategy.

That is really the way that you can make things happen. We have a credit union training program for immigrants, and that was a program that actually started because of a woman who was on our MEAAC, who was a woman from the credit union system that got excited about developing this program. That program, 17 of 21 participants are employed currently and two have received promotions. It started at the Cambrian Credit Union and is now expanding to three credit unions. The banks are starting to figure it out now, too, because, when you look at it, when you realize that by 2025 we are going to depend solely on immigration for population growth, it is incredible how diverse our society is going to be, and you really want your service representatives in your organization to represent the diversity in society. So I really have to give a lot of credit to the credit union for developing that program.

Of course, we have the foreign-trained doctor program that runs out of the Department of Health. I believe there were 14 doctors that were trained last year, and our budget this year moves that funding to provide funding for 25 doctors. We have eight internationally educated teachers that are currently involved in a pilot certification program with the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba.

Madam Chairperson in the Chair

We have a communications course for immigrants with a background in accounting that has been developed in partnership with the Certified General Accountants of Manitoba, and we have a partnership with the apprenticeship branch for a program to assist trained immigrant hairstylists to successfully complete the Red Seal hairdressers examination that is required to be certified. So we have done some other projects in pharmacy and occupational therapy, and we have had a lot of success in this area.

Once again, it is working with the stakeholders. That really seems to be what works for us, so we will continue to do that, and we are very excited with the

labour market integration strategy that I talked about earlier and the funding that we have received over three years. We have kind of done this on a shoestring, and now we are going to have some money and some staff to put to it and we are very, very excited. I think we can really make some headway, and we will maintain our leadership role in Canada.

Mr. Schuler: Again, it is an area that has been pointed out at the provincial level. Certainly, I have heard about for all the years that I have been involved in multicultural issues, from the early eighties on up. Now we are even hearing it at the federal level. So I think it is really time to put serious money into that field.

I do not know if the minister has seen this or not, I am sure her department brought it to her attention, but there were two countries that have now put themselves on a danger list. One of them is Russia. Unless their birth rate starts to increase, they will actually see the decline. I do not have the exact date when they will start declining to the point where they will start losing, like 20,000 people a year, just simply because deaths will so outstrip births. That is where we are going to need these families coming in with children. That is where we are going to need to look outside of our own borders for individuals that will come. The only thing is, we will have to compete at some point in time.

I do not think you hear it yet where individuals say, you know, I cannot wait to get out of here so I can move to China. I do not think we are there yet, and I think India still has enough population. Both countries are still pretty labour-rich, shall we say. But, in the so-called Western world, and certainly in the Northern Hemisphere, and I did not mention Japan being another one of those, we will at some point in time be competing with those countries.

You look at, for instance, Europe has some very strong resettlement programs, and they have some very strong, whether it is upgrading programs or accepting of foreign credentials. If I were to encourage or offer to task the department, I actually think it is something we have to look into in the future, because we know that we are not replacing ourselves as a country. The only way we grow is by immigration.

An Honourable Member: You are doing your part, Ron.

* (16:40)

Mr. Schuler: My colleague from Brandon East says I am doing my part. Actually, I have to say no. My wife and I have barely replaced ourselves. Three children is hardly replacing, and it is a problem that we are facing and will increasingly face. As I have said now for the third time, we will be competing with other nations for these beautiful families that come with trades and six, seven children. I know for a fact there was a group that approached me, and I will make this quick, that even some of the children coming out of Africa, we know that we have challenges with housing. They were having great difficulty in the kinds of dwellings that they were living in and the schools they were going to, the kind of violence that they were facing from other children because of how they looked. That is where, I think, we have to seriously look at how we do immigrant resettlement.

I know some countries have these beautiful centres where you go to, your house in an apartment, English as an Additional Language is offered, the children go to a special school, and they get used to how our banking system works, on and on and on. They get that for six months. In fact, they are using a lot of the old army bases, and they have developed them into beautiful retraining and resettlement communities and then they go into the general public. So I am encouraged from what I have heard from our new federal government. It is interesting to hear a party that has traditionally not been strong on new-Canadian issues, on immigrant issues, talking about cutting the head tax in half and actually talking about some serious funding for immigrant resettlement and for accepting of credentials.

So I am glad to see that Manitoba is a beneficiary of that. I think that is very important, and I know we were joking that we wanted to make sure that was not part of the minister's salary but, again, it is very important that it be spent wisely and appropriately and that it makes us—gee, I hate to use this term—but it makes us competitive in the immigrant attraction business because we as a province have to do that. We have to attract these individuals.

If you are building a house right now—certainly, I know my member of Parliament is, and she has been wanting to get in for a long time—and the trades just are not there; they are too busy. If you want to have something stuccoed right now, good luck. You just cannot get anything stuccoed and that goes for electrical and plumbing right now, too. You are lucky—in fact, I have some work I need done on the

house, and I was told never in a million years. I have some eavestrough work that got damaged because of snow sliding off the roof. I talked to somebody and they said, you are kidding. Do you think I am going to come out and fix your eavestroughing? Never in a million years. Fix it yourself. So, anyway, I think that basically speaks of where we are. So I am going to go and, hopefully, I do not break the other ankle. I will go and I will try and fix it one of these week-ends.

An Honourable Member: Do you want a hand with that?

Mr. Schuler: The Member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell) is offering a hand. I do not need him to stand there and clap for me, but thank you.

I did have one more question in the resettlement issue. I take it that the minister is working very carefully with industry in identifying the kinds of needs we have as a province, and she is nodding her head so I will let her answer that question.

Ms. Allan: Thank you. When we redesigned our program a year ago in April, about a year and a half ago, one of the streams—we redesigned it into five priority streams, and the first priority stream is the Employer Direct stream. So that is probably one of the biggest areas where our Provincial Nominee applicants go into that particular stream. So there is absolutely no question that that is critical that we are in constant dialogue with employers and one of the reasons why the program is such a success.

Mr. Schuler: I thank the minister for those comments. Seeing as we have about 15 minutes left, I just wanted to sort of ask the minister, we have identified that the major increase has come in the Department of Immigration, is there any big change in staffing coming in place in the Department of Immigration in the section of Immigration or in the Department of Labour at all? Is the department looking at any substantial increase in labour costs?

Ms. Allan: Basically it is stable. We have transferred one individual and increased by one staff person. So it is pretty stable.

Mr. Schuler: So the money is basically going for programming rather than for departmental expenses?

Ms. Allan: Yes. That is correct. Basically, what it means is it is an in and it is an out. Right? Because we have contribution agreements with the organizations that deliver the programs for us. We are not in the business of delivering programs. So that is

how we deliver our programs throughout Manitoba so that we can respond to the different needs in Manitoba, and so it is contribution agreements where the bulk of the money goes.

Mr. Schuler: Of course, one of my first loves in politics was the multicultural community. I understand there is more money going into the, is it MGAC or the replacement for that. Just sort of what is the thinking about the increase there.

Ms. Allan: Well, the thinking was the budget for the ethnocultural community support program was at about \$100,000 approximately in regard to—actually, that is not true. It is around about \$400,000. When you include direct grants to organizations there are about a hundred organizations that receive approximately an average of about \$3,000 per ethnocultural community. So what we did was we felt that it was time to increase that funding because of the simple reason that our communities are growing, and we are getting more brand new ethnocultural communities on board because our immigration program is such a success. So that is one reason why, and we, quite frankly, had been lobbied by our stakeholders, the MIC, Manitoba Immigration Council, that it would be nice if there was a little more money for the actual cash grants. So that is what we did.

Mr. Schuler: I know I am on record as being one of those who thinks that spending on multicultural communities is a positive. Probably not everybody is in agreement with that, but I happen to think it is a very minuscule amount of money that we invest, and what we get back is just amazing, not just in economic spinoff but in other ways. Last year I did not have the opportunity to attend a lot of, for instance, Folk Art Council events. I did not have the time to take all two weeks. We were not in the city for all of that. But what a wonderful, wonderful opportunity for our city to showcase itself in the province really. And our communities do need some assistance.

* (16:50)

I know some of the communities like the Japanese-Canadian community are not seeing a big influx of Japanese immigrants to Manitoba. In fact, they are probably losing more as people move. But, you know, these communities offer a lot now. I think they just bring a lot to this province, and I think the city just from its cultural base and the fact that people are willing to volunteer—it is not like we take this money and pay huge wages. I mean, it is appalling what some of these people earn, but they

just do it because they have a love for their community and love for their culture.

It is certainly something I think that is good, and I am sure they will be appreciative of any kind of an increase because, as we know, costs are going higher, whether it is natural gas or otherwise. Again, those two areas seem to be the two major areas that have benefited from the increase in funding and in labour. Is that fair to say?

Ms. Allan: That would be correct.

Mr. Schuler: I just want to sort of end off with the Office of the Fire Commissioner. If I understand correctly, that is still self-supporting, if I am correct on that.

Ms. Allan: That is correct. It is a special operating agency that is sustainable.

Mr. Schuler: With the extra roles that might be assigned to it with the new legislation coming in, that will not add extra burden on to harm its ability to fund itself? It will continue to fund itself?

Ms. Allan: Yes, that is correct.

Mr. Schuler: Of course, Doug Popowich, whom I had the opportunity to meet in the minister's office, and I do not know if he is the second or third fire commissioner that I have met, but, again, very competent, and I certainly wish him well.

Having spent a lot of time going through Department of Labour Estimates and legislation, you do come to appreciate that differentiates us from a lot of other countries. You do not appreciate standards and safety codes and fire codes until you have been involved with something with a fire.

I was in Cancun years ago when there was a grocery store and we were grocery shopping and had little children with us; basically, my kids were babies. There was an awful lot of excitement, people running in and out of the door, clearly flustered and fairly agitated. I happened to sidle over and looked and there was a restaurant next door and it was in full fire. It was burning to beat the band. I walked over to the family and I said, you know, I just do not think that this is the place where we should be staying because there was one door out. We left, and a couple of minutes later you saw that one lonely little fire truck come clanging and you could see the restaurant burning down. You know, gee, maybe there could have been one other exit, perhaps. That is when you appreciate what we actually have.

Again, I appreciate what the department does and the professionalism, and would now be prepared to pass line by line.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): I am not too sure in terms of what degree you are looking at passing the department. I do have a number of questions that I would like to pose. What I will do is I will just start asking the questions, Madam Chairperson.

The other day there was an exchange inside the Chamber in regard to the Provincial Nominee Program, and I had asked the minister then through the Provincial Nominee Program. There was a considerable amount of heckling that was going on. So I am not quite sure if I caught everything that was stated. But can the minister tell the committee, in as clear and concise language as possible, that, if you are a practising nurse with years of experience in the Philippines, what would be the actual procedure for coming to Manitoba under the Provincial Nominee Program.

Ms. Allan: Yes, the MLA for Inkster was in the House the other day speaking to a private member's resolution for the MLA for Maples, and I understand that he was trying to be provocative in his comments. I understand he turned to the House whip and said that he was going to try to get me up on a point of order.

You know what, Madam Chairperson? I think it is unfortunate sometimes when people take their privilege as an MLA and abuse it in that kind of way. So, to go to the member's question, I would be more than delighted to have a conversation with him to try to educate him about a nurse, but maybe what I would like to suggest, I have tried in the past, and he does not seem to understand that the Provincial Nominee Program is an economic program linked to labour market demand. There is an occupational requirements list and, if that occupation is not required in Manitoba—because we are training those individuals here. It is a list of individuals that is established in co-operation with the federal government and with employers. We consult in regard to this list. I have tried to explain that to him many, many times before.

So what I would like to suggest in regard to brevity for today is I would like to suggest that perhaps the MLA for Inkster would like to meet with the Assistant Deputy Minister of Immigration, and perhaps through that dialogue he could understand the program.

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Chair, the minister did not answer the question. The question was: What would she recommend for a nurse from the Philippines who has been practising nursing for a number of years in terms of being able to come to Manitoba under the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program? I am somewhat familiar with the details of the program. What I am interested in knowing is if she is familiar with what it is that an individual in that situation would have to go through in order to be able to come to Manitoba. We can both read the application kit. I do not need to be told about the application kit.

It is interesting that she has taken exception to some comments inside the Chamber. I recall just a couple of years ago when the minister from her seat indicated that I was nothing but a rookie MLA, that I did not have the experience, and if I had more experience, is what she implied, maybe I would be able to do a better job. So at times maybe I can be a little—

An Honourable Member: Show me that in Hansard.

Mr. Lamoureux: Maybe at times—

An Honourable Member: You show me that in Hansard.

Mr. Lamoureux: Well, do a Hansard search, Madam Minister.

Madam Chairperson: Order. Order, please.

An Honourable Member: Show me that in Hansard.

Mr. Lamoureux: Well, Madam Chair, I would suggest that, given that she has considerable resources, she will find that she did say that in Hansard. All she has to do is a Hansard search and she will see that.

But, Madam Chair, at times maybe I am a little too provocative, and at times maybe even the minister is a little too provocative. Sometimes we want to rise to a challenge, and maybe it was not best advised to do that.

The question is a very serious question, and I would like to get a response from the minister.

Ms. Allan: The response to your serious question is this. I would like you to discuss the details of the individual, the nurse from the Philippines, in regard to her credentials. I would like you to discuss it with an individual from my branch where there can be a

dialogue back and forth in regard to what this individual's personal situation is.

I do not get involved in individual immigration cases. Everybody who deals with me knows that. I make policy and criteria. I do not manage individual cases. I do not know the circumstances of the nurse from the Philippines. I do not know her credentials, her training. I do not know it, but we have staff in our department who would be more than delighted to meet with you and assist you in any way possible to help you in regard to this individual that you are referring to.

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Minister, actually I am not referring to an individual. I am citing a hypothetical situation. Maybe the minister can then indicate, Madam Chair, if a registered nurse from the Philippines—my understanding is that nurse is going to have to get her credentials recognized prior—

Madam Chairperson: The hour being five o'clock, committee rise.

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

* (15:30)

Mr. Chairperson (Conrad Santos): This section of the Committee of Supply has been dealing with the Estimates of the Executive Council. Would the minister's staff please enter the Chamber now. We are continuing with a global discussion of these Estimates. The table is now open for questions.

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): I had some recollection from 1998 or '99 or thereabouts that questions were asked standing and answered standing by the Leader of the Opposition and the Premier at the time. If it is okay with the Premier, I think I will just remain seated through the process this afternoon. I think it may just speed up the flow of questioning and answering and, hopefully, allow us to delve into the details of the questions and answers just a little bit more than we would have otherwise. With all of the standing, I felt like I was at an Anglican service standing and sitting all through Estimates yesterday. It is good, but I think I will remain seated.

Mr. Chairperson, if I could just come back to the issue of accountability that we were exploring yesterday, I had made comments and the Premier and I had some give and take on the issue of what is appropriate in our parliamentary system with respect to accountability on the part of ministers or

employees of ministers within the system when something goes wrong.

I made the point, I am not sure the Premier agreed with me, but I made the point that it was appropriate in order for the system to function properly that there be some consequence flowing where something has gone wrong that was either a preventable mishap or a mishap that arose from either bad policy or misjudgment within the system. I got into three cases yesterday where there was financial mismanagement that was looked into by the provincial auditor, financial mismanagement under the NDP government. The Auditor looked into those cases; findings were made. Certainly, the government engaged in damage control exercises resulting from those, but in this House, at least from the perspective of the opposition, we have yet to have any kind of an appropriate either explanation, apology, censure or any other form of consequence flowing from those cases. I think if it had been one situation, that would be one thing. When you are up to three, it starts to look like a pattern.

I just want to move on to a fourth area of concern of the opposition where we have situations, very tragic ones within Child and Family Services, cases apparently falling through the cracks. Some facts which have been brought to light which would support that concern, and an absence of accountability or responsibility being taken by ministers in the government.

But, before I go too far on that point, I just want to ask in a more general way if the Premier can update us on the status of the two reviews now under way within Child and Family Services relating to the tragic case of Phoenix Sinclair and the concerns that were raised in the aftermath of that tragedy.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Well, again, dealing with the—I need to get the exercise, you do not want to atrophy too early in one's political career—dealing with the "cases"—I do not know when the member opposite finished Robson Hall, but he seems to still be in moot court—cases, while there were three—

An Honourable Member: You can call them scandals if you like.

Mr. Doer: Well, he did not call them scandals, you did. But the member opposite talks about those—

An Honourable Member: I was being polite.

Mr. Doer: Well, that would be a first, but we will keep going. I noticed he was able to get slime and, no—today in Questions—

An Honourable Member: Sneaky and slick.

Mr. Doer: Yes, sneaky and slick. Usually, those things are almost opposite to each other in terms of advertising, but that is a different matter.

The issue of accountability is important. We did take responsibility for the Hydra House situation. I said publicly that obviously in looking at the facts and going back over the facts, we take responsibility for the fact that we were pretty slow in acting. The Cadillacs left the garage under the former government, a fact that has never been acknowledged, but it is documented in the Auditor General's report. The contribution that was made from the per diem to a private school was made prior to 1999.

Then the whole issue of accountability for the lack of any proper due diligence was identified by us. I can get the Treasury Board minutes. A decision was made by Jules Benson to cut the whole compliance branch of the department. Did it have a service purchase agreement from the government? No. So, yes, we did take and I did take responsibility for the fact that the Cadillacs did leave the Leg under the former government's watch. We took responsibility for not being able to identify that in one of 600 agencies when we came into office. There were people raising it. I think it was a former staff member that raised it. I did take responsibility for that, that obviously we were slow to act on this case. We believed the existing financial reports. We dealt with the per diems.

The feedback from some of the parents and other families was positive about the agency but, certainly, the Auditor General was able to identify these areas of, what he argued to be, misspent money. I would point out that these matters were referred to the income tax branch or the federal income tax bureau. I do not believe that there were any charges pending because funding to private profit agencies, apparently, are not considered to be breaches of the Income Tax Act, at least according to the Justice Department. So we did file for some accountability.

On the issue of Aiyawin, the Auditor General identifies when the minister ordered an operational review in 2001 or 2002—I cannot remember—that that was the proper action. He also points out in 1997 that an operational review sat on the former minister's desk, Mr. Reimer's desk, and did not have any action.

So we accept the responsibility for when we had the operational review, we did call the Auditor General in. So here you have a case of an agency that existed through two governments. One minister had an operational review ordered and did not follow it up, and another minister had an operational review ordered and did follow it up with the Auditor General. So we accept that.

I think that I mentioned yesterday that I would take as notice how many service purchase agreements there were. I am not sure whether we have that number yet, but I said it was over 90 percent and I believe that number still is pertinent. It might even be even higher than that.

An Honourable Member: 97 percent.

Mr. Doer: I am sorry; 97 percent. When we came into office, it was 15 percent. So we are not perfect, there is no question. I just want to say to the member opposite, we are not a perfect government. We are human beings that sometimes pick up things that come to our attention and most of the time we do. Every day we probably make a hundred decisions. Most of them are right; not all of them are right, and that is obviously important.

On the issue of Workers Compensation, we believe the public is receiving a good service from a corporation that operates by stakeholders at arm's length from the government, a 21 percent decrease in accident rate. Now, what could be more important about an agency dealing with the Workplace Safety and Health claims than reducing the number of claims? What could be more important?

One of the issues of accountability for me is results. I am willing to talk about accountability in terms of results and have accountability in terms of results without a double standard, because some of the cases that the member opposite raises did not start and stop with our regime, or government, or team.

We have been reluctant to get into certain numbers, because I think that there is not one person when you talk about children, there is not one vulnerable child that unfortunately dies is acceptable to anybody in this Chamber, not one individual in this Chamber.

But back to Workers Compensation. In terms of results, 21 percent reduction in Workplace Safety and Health accidents. That is what we wanted to achieve. We set out an objective; we achieved it.

Secondly, the claims costs have gone down. I can name five companies, if they gave me permission, who have said that their costs have gone down dramatically because their Workers Compensation claims have gone down. They are very happy about that, some of whom are expanding and exporting to the United States and feel this is one of the little edges they have got, relative to the change in the dollar.

The last issue is, we followed the law. We followed the law on Workers Compensation.

So, in terms of accountability, I have said that we were slow on the Hydra House. Today, those residents, the staff, the transition that was made, we did not just close the place down. We transferred the staff and the residents to a more appropriate place. That is accountability. That is results.

Mr. McFadyen: The Premier has made a comment about the fact that a government is run by human beings who are not perfect, and we accept that on this side of the House.

It is important, though, for the system to work properly that when something goes wrong as it does from time to time in government, and I made this point the first time I asked a question in the House as leader; that when things go wrong that those who are responsible for looking into those things: getting the facts, bringing them forward, making an assessment as to whether there was anything improper that was done within the system or something overlooked, not even a deliberate act, but sometimes just negligence or bad policy or bad administration, that those facts be brought to light and some consequence flow from that.

* (15:40)

One of those consequences might be corrective action, make sure it does not happen again. But there is also value in an organization, from time-to-time and, in proportion to the error or mistake, that there be some consequence that flows for the individuals responsible for the administration of a department. We have not seen that under this government. It is a hard thing to do because it requires a certain amount of toughness on the part of the head of the government.

It is easy to take credit when things go right, and things go right under every government, too, and we acknowledge that there are some things under this government that have gone right. The Premier (Mr. Doer) is all too happy to take credit for those things,

and I do not blame him, because, politically, that might appear to be a smart thing to do, but there is something that is important in terms of the functioning of our system for a premier every now and then to either apologize or to hand down some form of consequence for people in the system when things go wrong, especially when the things that go wrong involve tragic consequences.

I agree with the Premier that not one death of a child in our province is acceptable to anybody, and I also acknowledge that there is a certain danger when you get into talking about numbers. You dehumanize the people that are behind those numbers, but there is an administrative responsibility. It is an important one on the part of the government, to run that system as well as they can run it to ensure that we minimize the number of those tragic cases.

So I just want to come back to my question because the Premier responded to points in my preamble—fair game. He is very good at that. I want to come back to the question, though, that came at the end of the preamble, and the question was: Will the Premier update us on the status of the two reviews now under way in the aftermath of the tragic case of Phoenix Sinclair?

Mr. Doer: I believe the first stage has been completed. The second stage is not, in those reviews, and I can get an update to the member. I know the question was asked to the Minister of Family Services (Ms. Melnick) yesterday, so I am sure the answer the Minister of Family Services gave him yesterday in Estimates is the one that I would attempt to give today. I will take that as notice. I do not have the exact answer, except that we are basically dealing with those reviews in the most effective way possible, and we are relying on two independent officers of the Legislature to conduct those reviews.

Mr. McFadyen: If the Premier would come back with some further detail. As I recall yesterday's Question Period, I do not think the minister answered the question around the status of those reviews. It is obviously important that they happen in a timely way, and important that they properly probe all the details and provide some transparency. So the Premier has taken that as notice, and we will look forward to getting the details on that.

There are certain facts and circumstances that would lead us to be concerned that the oversight and management of the Child and Family Services' system has not been as effective and rigorous as it could have been, which may have led to this tragedy.

So I want to ask the Premier: Given Judge Conner's comments made in March of this year that he made eight recommendations following the Sophia Schmidt case, which was a tragedy that occurred in the 1990s under the previous government, but, given the report that came out, the recommendations that were made and Judge Conner's comments that he feels that none of his eight recommendations have been followed up on, I wonder if the Premier could explain why it is that Judge Conner has made this comment. He is a credible individual. Why is he indicating that none of his recommendations have been followed up on?

Mr. Doer: Yes, I think the baby Sophia case documented, as I recall, a caseload of some one per 75, one social worker per 75, between 75 and 80 children, and the numbers are quite a bit less now in terms of staff ratios. It is just one example of areas that we have followed up. I believe we have got money in the budget, including a 17 percent increase in the Child Protection Branch this year, and I believe that people responsible, the macro managers, are the ones that were in place when members opposite were in government.

There was another judge, Murray Sinclair, who also recommended we proceed with the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry. So, on staff ratios, we have implemented the ratios. We have much better ratios today than we had when baby Sophia was analyzed under the judge's report. Are they perfect? I do not want to second-guess people's comments, but, certainly, the investments we have made are significant in the Child and Family Services Department ratios and child protection. Secondly, the tracking, you see a situation where judges have commented in British Columbia, for example, on 650 missing children. I do not think we have that situation here in this province. Thirdly, we are also implementing other judges' comments.

We had a royal commission, or a commission of inquiry called the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, and it was not implemented for some seven years after we were elected. So we took a very slow, deliberate review of the inquiry's recommendations, which we think we had a responsibility and accountability for delineating the recommendations and saying to the public that either we will implement the recommendations or we will not. We have a team of people that looked at those recommendations. I find it interesting that members opposite want an inquiry, which we have not said no to on the tragedy of Phoenix Sinclair. But, when you have an inquiry that

is produced dealing with Aboriginal children and a finding from Justice Sinclair that we should proceed to more ownership of Aboriginal children by Aboriginal agencies, the government of the day, I remember the press conference, said, well, there are too many inquiries that just gather dust and this one will not gather dust. Well, it did. As soon as the majority was obtained, it gathered dust.

We think we have a responsibility to answer to every one of the inquiry recommendations and that to us is also a consideration. There are many reports from judicial individuals, and Justice Sinclair had a great deal of evidence before him about the whole system. He did predict that there would be lots of criticism in making a transition, lots of finger-pointing when a transition would be made. But at the end of the day, it will be better for children and safer for children, and that is what we are slowly implementing in government.

I would point out, and I do not want to talk about statistics, but the numbers today, whether it is one or the number the member opposite may eventually use, and I find it really, really crass that members opposite use nine baby deaths as a rationale to lower a minister's salary. I have never seen anything that low in my life, yesterday. To have that happen to any individual in this Chamber, in my view, was a new low. But I would also point out that I can go back over the numbers and they were higher. But statistics do not mean anything. If you want accountability, I got the numbers. They are not very pleasant for any administration, any minister in government.

Maybe we should be addressing ourselves as to how we can improve as a society the issues that relate to children that become vulnerable. We think, you know, we are very accountable for reducing the child poverty rate in Manitoba, and hopefully over the longer term that will help lower the kids that are vulnerable. The child poverty rate, I think, when we were elected, was 22 percent. It is now, I believe, 12 percent; 22 to 12, that is a 60 percent decrease, sorry, a 45 percent decrease in the child poverty rate.

* (15:50)

So there are lots of factors that go into issues of accountability, but I caution the member opposite to allow his critics—We try to stay away from that. I never stood up in this House and said 12 preventable deaths of babies at the Children's Hospital, right inside of the jurisdiction of the Department of Health, is the responsibility of the former premier. I mean, I know that he, as an individual, would feel

just as badly as anybody in this Chamber. Now, maybe that is where we are going to go, which I think would be unfortunate. But I have the numbers from previous years, and they are lower today than they were then. But no number is acceptable to anybody in this Chamber.

Mr. McFadyen: I think it is the Premier's double standard when it comes to talking about numbers. What is interesting, I can speculate, I think, with some amount of certainty, that if the numbers had gone down under his government, then he would be more than happy to talk about numbers, but when the numbers are going up, then talk about numbers is taboo. The reality is that behind each of those numbers is a life, is a human being, is a child, and every single one of them, even one is too many, and we all share that view. But when you see growth in numbers, then that should be a sign, I would think, for the government that there is an area that needs to be addressed and that they ought be concerned about.

I would suggest, if the number had gone from nine to five, that we would mourn those five deaths, but that we would, in a more general sense, feel as though progress was being made toward making the system work better. That would not excuse anybody or give anybody cause for celebration with respect to the fact that there were five lives lost, but I think that we might say, if they had gone from nine to five to three, that we are on the right track in terms of the way we are managing the system and that the goal of all of us would be to get it to zero. So we share that goal. You cannot have a discussion of policy in an area that is this important without talking about numbers, and, in talking about numbers, we do not do so to desensitize anybody to the lives that lie behind those numbers, but to talk about the effectiveness or not of the system that is responsible for caring for those children.

So I just want to come back and look at the sequence of events and ask the Premier (Mr. Doer) whether the sequence of events is cause for concern. Setting aside the question of the policy direction toward devolution, and that did come out of a report, that was commissioned by the government, of an inquiry. That was the policy direction pursued by the government. We are not here to oppose or debate that policy direction, but we do have questions about the way in which that policy is being implemented and administered by this government. The information we have is that there were some 3,627 cases transferred between agencies between January 2004 and June 2005; that is an 18-month period. That is a

very high number of cases to transfer in a relatively short period of time, and I dispute the Premier's claim that it was done in a slow and deliberate way. This is a lot of cases transferred in a short period of time.

We, then, have a situation where Mr. Olfert, who heads up the union that represents workers within the Child and Family Services system, says that they made a number of recommendations. The union made a number of recommendations that the Province refused to act upon. He also indicated that our members are upset and devastated at this case, and many have feared that something like this may occur. These were Mr. Olfert's comments in March of this year. So we have cases being transferred, a significant number of cases, in a short period of time. We have the head of the union, who I think politically has strong affiliation with the party in government, stating to the media that they are upset and devastated and feared that something like this may occur, and that they made recommendations that the government refused to act upon.

Following this transfer of cases, and following these warnings and recommendations coming from the union, from friends of the governing party, we have a situation of nine children being killed while in care last year, 2005, while being cared for or receiving services from CFS, the most deaths in a single year since 1990. In light of that sequence of events and the number of deaths going up with a total of 31 since 2000, does the Premier acknowledge, is he prepared to acknowledge that maybe there is something going wrong within his system?

Mr. Doer: Well, the member opposite raises a number of concerns. He would probably know that when people represent other people—and I believe it is a non-partisan union under their constitution—when they represent individual workers, they have a responsibility, a duty of representation to the livelihood of those workers.

We in the government have a duty of either implementing recommendations made by inquiries or recommendations made by implementation teams looking at inquiry recommendations. I would caution the member on numbers, the nineties versus this decade. I would caution him, and even the use of his numbers is inaccurate. I just believe that the principle here should be any individual person, irrespective of what number was higher, is a precious life that is lost, vulnerable children that are lost. We should try to find ways to lower the number, including systemic

issues, including issues of service in our agencies and including service in our communities.

We did get advice from the union. Most of the advice was do not change. I want to say to the member opposite, irrespective of children, anytime you try to change something, anytime you make a fundamental change, you get people who are in a status quo situation not wanting to change, and I understand that. I understand that change is hard for people. I understand that change is hard for systems, but the recommendation—and I would refer the member back to the recommendation made by Justice Sinclair.

He said in a number of different places—and I am not sure whether I have the report with me, in front of me—in the inquiry, and I have a lot of respect for Justice Sinclair. He made a number of recommendations about the existing Child and Family Services agencies. I think the assessment was that about 85 percent of the children were of Aboriginal descent.

This, by the way, is not dissimilar to Judge Hughes' finding in B.C. just a couple of months ago. Judge Hughes wrote a similar report, that as difficult as it is going to be in British Columbia, the majority of children that are, quote, "in care," and in this case, being lost, up to 600 who were lost, they are of Aboriginal descent and from Aboriginal families and that they must change their system in British Columbia. This is Judge Hughes just a couple of months ago.

So we looked at the recommendations. The union did raise some concerns which we obviously looked at. We had joint meetings, I understand, with the union. We had meetings on distribution of resources. I think the transition process started in 2001-2002. It was a long process. We increased the staff ratios with children. We knew the unions were opposed to this, but we also consulted with them along the way.

Again, we believe the closer one can get to a person's own community, the closer one can get to a family or extended family, the greater is the opportunity that the emotional care that may be missing directly from families, some families, very few families but some, can be provided closer to that family and closer to that community.

* (16:00)

This is the assessment of Judge Hamilton. This is the assessment of Judge Sinclair. This is now an assessment and a comparable assessment some 15

years later by Justice Hughes in British Columbia, who looked at this whole issue. I do not know whether the member opposite has had an opportunity to read that report, but we feel that the government is trying to implement change. Transition is difficult. We feel over the longer haul that this is going to be safer, to get kids closer to their own families. It is going to be safer.

Mr. McFadyen: I think what I hear the Premier saying is that, because Mr. Olfert and the union have a duty to advocate on behalf of their membership, and their membership was concerned about change, the government's position, then, when they were warned by Mr. Olfert and the union about problems in the system, was to entirely discount those warnings. Is that what the Premier is saying?

Mr. Doer: Well, I would recommend strongly you not put words in my mouth, because I know they may teach you that in law school, but that is not the way we operate here. So, every time you want to put words in my mouth, forget about it.

Mr. McFadyen: I will not put words in the Premier's mouth. Was it the government's approach, then, to entirely discount the warnings of the union by virtue of the fact that the union was simply advocating for their membership? If the government did not discount the warnings of the union, then what steps were taken as a result of those warnings?

Mr. Doer: I already pointed out there was considerable discussion with the union, but I would point out the discussions, consultation, advice from people representing workers, and these workers are very good workers that work in very tough conditions making very tough decisions, making life-and-death decisions. The union does not have a veto. There is a difference. The member opposite puts words in one's mouth about if this happens, that, therefore, can be assumed. That is not true.

You can still have consultations and disagreements, and you can still have the fact that, at the end of the day, did the unions have veto power when members opposite cut the nutrition rates for babies? Did the unions that were representing children in care have a veto when members opposite clawed back the child poverty benefit? They had lots of letters and complaints, hundreds of letters and complaints from people in the anti-poverty movement, workers that work with kids, children, pleading the former government and the former chief of staff to not claw back benefits for our most vulnerable.

I would point out to the member opposite that the child poverty rate was 22 percent when we got elected. It just came out last month that the child poverty rate in Manitoba was down to 12 percent. That is a remarkable reduction. Again, 12 percent can never be acceptable because zero percent should be the target, but the assumption that we did not discuss these issues that the union raised with the unions, we had transition teams; we had joint labour-management teams. There were two unions at the time. They went over a couple of years, over at least two years, to deal with some of the issues of intake and other matters.

I just would want people to be careful, because we have said we will be accountable to hear what happened with the tragic Phoenix Sinclair case, but even accountability there, it was alleged in some print that the child was part of a "devolved" agency when it was not. So, then, you had a whole series of "criticisms" of a system that, in fact, was not part of the management of this one case. I would await the advice we are going to receive. I am sure that with any system of vulnerable people, it is not going to be a perfect system again, and we will receive the advice with great interest, in the public interest.

I have also said that, in terms of accountability, this would be, in our view, after the Medical Examiner has reviewed the case and there will be a criminal trial of the two people alleged to have committed murder with this young innocent child which, of course, is in itself, hopefully, accountability in our justice system, that we are prepared to look at an inquiry because if there are any lessons to be learned, we are certainly willing to learn them. *[interjection]*

Well, you know, you talk issues of public importance, I think children meet the test, particularly if systems cannot adequately answer all the questions. We are prepared to answer those questions, ultimately, under oath.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Chairman, the Premier indicated that this is a process of transition within the system and we certainly recognize that it is. We recognize that there is always challenges that come with transition. But one can hardly think of a more delicate kind of transition than this one in terms of the care that would have to go into the transfer of case files. We certainly would not want to see case files being transferred in a hasty manner given the importance of the work being done by the workers involved with these children. We certainly would not

want it to be motivated in any way by political or any other considerations in terms of the speed of the transfer.

So I just want to ask the Premier, given that what I think he has said is that transfers and transitions by nature are difficult, and sometimes things will go wrong but it is all in the interests of a better system later, I think that that is not an unreasonable thing to say in and of itself. But I wonder if the Premier would just answer what he thinks should be the paramount consideration in Child and Family Services, whether it should be the movement toward culturally appropriate care or whether it should be the best interests of the children currently in the care of the system.

Mr. Doer: Well, again, I would defer to the Sinclair-Hamilton report that provided advice to all of us. This followed the Kimelman report that recommended we stop the cultural genocide. That was made to the former government back in the early eighties, as I recall. Judge Kimelman called it the wholesale movement of children out of the province, out of their communities, out of their culture, out of their situation to be cultural genocide. Those were his words. He is, again, a person who provides advice.

We had the report of Sinclair and Hamilton and I would point out to the member opposite who again does an either/or in his question, I am going to send him a copy of Judge Hughes' report. Has the member opposite read the Hughes report in British Columbia, an inquiry into the safety and well-being of children? Judge Hughes in British Columbia recommends, in a similar way to Judges Hamilton and Sinclair here in Manitoba, that there be more ownership through communities of children with the fact that 85 percent are Aboriginal, I think the number was. I will double-check that, I am not a hundred percent sure.

It is interesting because we just had a report produced less than six months ago from another learned jurist. I am sure the member opposite is aware, I know he quotes this guy Kernaghan, or whatever his name is, I do not know whether he is a jurist or not, probably a political scientist—*[interjection]* I beg your pardon? *[interjection]* Well, that is good. I cannot wait to hear them. But the learned jurist, Justice Hughes, wrote the report and also recommended to B.C. that they move to a more appropriate community, family, cultural situation.

* (16:10)

I believe the best care given to children is in one's own family. I believe the closer you can be to your family, the greater chance you are going to get the emotional care that you need, the nourishment that you need emotionally and spiritually to survive and thrive.

I believe that it is not always possible, and there are unsafe situations that people have to try to make the best judgments on. You know, I know that social workers are torn, no matter what system is in place. They are torn on decisions that they try to make in the best interest of the child, of home where the emotional strings are and where the family is or remove from home for the purpose of a more safe setting. These are very, very difficult decisions, and most of them are made intelligently, thoughtfully, and most of them end up being the right decisions. I am not one of these ones who is going to second-guess an individual social worker's decision.

I think we have a responsibility to reduce the staff ratios which we have done. Is it adequate enough? Perhaps not. I am sure that even though we are adding 15 to 17 percent a year in funding for the Child Protection branch, maybe, regrettably, we will have to—the ratios must be improved. Maybe that will come out of the two reviews. I have to say that there is nothing more important than these reviews in terms of resources for the government in terms of trying to be effective with the recommendations that come out of it.

Again, the member says, is it this or is it that? Well, it starts with one's own family, but, you know, we still have systems in place in society and in Manitoba for adoptions. We have systems in place for foster children. We have systems in place for other care, institutional care. My belief is the closer one can be to one's family—and this is my own personal belief—the better chance you have of living a meaningful life. When you see a tragic case when an individual is in their family, the tragedy of Phoenix Sinclair, and I cannot say anything more because the case is before the court, but that does not represent, in my view, the majority of parents and the love and the affection they provide to their children, to perhaps their adopted children and perhaps to their foster children.

The closer one can get to one's family, I believe, the closer you have the chance of getting love and understanding and intellectual nourishment. That is what I believe. So, when you talk about these various

reports and recommendations, you have to come back to basics, and basics are, with me, family.

Mr. McFadyen: I would agree with the Premier that in the vast majority of cases, family is where you want children to be, and certainly with a child's parents is where you would want that child to be in terms of getting the love and care that the Premier refers to. That is something I think that makes common sense and is rooted in all of our experiences.

The fault in that logic within the Child and Family Services system, of course, is that most kids who come into contact with that system are there because there are problems in the family that they have come from and that, by definition, they are at risk because of circumstances. We are not here to cast judgment about how or why those circumstances arose, but the circumstances, objectively speaking, are ones that cause children to be in a situation with their own family where they may be at risk for whatever reason.

So the system is there where we have families that have broken down or are not functioning, for one reason or another. So, all of these fine words about keeping kids close to their family, I think, tug at the heartstrings, but ignore the reality of what that system is there to do, which is to fill the gap where families have broken down, and where we do not, as a government or as a system of Legislature, have confidence that the family can provide the sort of care that children need.

So the Premier (Mr. Doer) has talked about the theory driving the current change. At this stage of the game I do not think any member of this House knows with any certainty whether that is a good theory or not. Time will tell and experience will tell as the evolution unfolds. We are not here to fight that process because we know it comes out of reports written by somebody who had much more evidence in front of them than any of us do. So we have to defer to that expertise on these sorts of issues. So we have a direction of reform.

But, within that theory of moving toward culturally appropriate care, we have a system of human beings who are there to administer that transfer, and, in the process of that administration, we have seen 3,627 cases transferred in a 18-month period which, I am not an expert on these things, but it sounds like a lot of cases to be transferred in a relatively short period of time. What the pressures were that were driving that very rapid transfer are,

we do not completely know. We can only speculate about that.

But I want to ask the Premier, in light of the warnings provided by people working within the system, in light of concerns raised by social workers whose judgment we have to trust in this House, concerns about the fact that the theory driving this change was overriding common sense on the ground in terms of individual decisions, and social workers working within that system are at the mercy of the policy direction of the government that employs them. So I accept that they make difficult decisions under challenging circumstances exercising their very best judgment. I know many people who work within that world, and I think they do work under tremendous pressure and do very good work and most of the time make the right decisions. But they are required under their employment to follow through on the policy and the administrative directions of the government of the day.

So, in light of the fact that we seem to have an increase in the number of deaths, in light of the fact that that increase follows a change, a very significant change in policy and a devolution process, in light of the fact that we have union leaders raising concerns to the government and warning the government about concerns—and I do not think those warnings can be completely discounted on the basis of the fact that unions are just there to be a mouthpiece for people who do not like change—I wonder if the Premier can indicate whether he is satisfied that his minister has done a good job in the oversight of this significant policy shift.

Mr. Doer: Well, Mr. Chairperson, the member opposite, you know, uses terms like "mouthpiece" for unions. He is extremely loose with his words and then says that one cannot assume that they are only, I quote, "mouthpiece." Nowhere in the last hour have I said that the unions representing line workers were only merely a mouthpiece to be ignored. I am going to keep back because every time this member invents words for me and puts words in my mouth, I have a responsibility to hold him accountable for words that I never used.

So "accountability" is a great word to throw around. I am going to start it right here with the member opposite in terms of his words. I never have ever said that a, quote, "union" is a, quote, "mouthpiece" that I should dismiss in terms of their advice. In fact I said that a union has a duty to fair

representation, which the member opposite may or may not know is certainly a legal responsibility.

I know of cases, you know, and I know something about this. I actually had a case when I was a president of a union where the duty of fair representation was challenged dramatically, where a worker at the Manitoba Developmental School was sexually harassing, on a number of occasions, individual vulnerable residents of the school, and I did not, when the person was fired—I felt that it was a duty and responsibility to choose not to represent that individual, and I was taken to the Manitoba Labour Board by one Sid Green on the issue of duty of fair representation. So the duty of fair representation does not extend, in my view, to a case that is so extreme that the union, in all conscience, cannot defend the work of the worker who is proven to be violating vulnerable people in a place where vulnerable people have every right to expect that every staff is competent and capable of working there. So, when the member comes back to words like the issue of—we ultimately won at the Labour Board on that. I was being sued and chastised and everything else that goes with it. Not all suits, by the way, are successful. The whole issue of representation, I respect the job of unions to represent their workers; the clients of the workers they represent; the systems under which the workers work now and what is proposed to be changed; the changing nature of the employment security of individuals, which has to be important; and the changing nature of promotional opportunities.

* (16:20)

A lot of these issues we are dealing with the unions. We are dealing with a lot of the occupational issues. We did delay for two years. The member uses 18 months, but before that, the planning of the implementation made by the department with individuals that had worked with the previous government, competent people, the planning and the consultations and the systems and the discussions with workers and unions and other entities in government, at least had two years before the, quote, "18 months." At least two years. I will double-check and maybe even longer. So the 18 months is not accurate because there were two years of management work ahead of time.

I also would caution the member opposite on his numbers. But on the issue of, quote, I dismissed the union because it was only a mouthpiece, I never dismiss unions. I never dismiss the advice I get from

employees. I never consider the duty of fair representation to be an issue of just being a mouthpiece. But I do not also believe that employee representatives, in exercising their responsibilities for due diligence or fair representation, should have a veto over Justice Sinclair's report. Justice Sinclair and Justice Hamilton had recommended to us something similar to what Justice Hughes has done. So I just want to point that out, and I just want to make it clear I do not consider somebody who represents workers to be a, quote, "mouthpiece," and I do not dismiss them just because they are.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Chairman, the Premier has responded to the preamble to the question but did not respond to the question. So let me just come back and just deal with his response to the preamble first and then the question.

I asked the Premier whether the union's words were heeded, H-E-A-D-E-D, not H-E-A-T-E-D, maybe double E-D actually. The Clerk will probably let me know whether I have the spelling right on that or not.

The Premier's response was to say that unions have a duty to represent people, and people sometimes do not like change, and to imply strongly that their credibility in raising the issues was lacking, and that because of the fact that they are there to represent workers who may not like a change. That was his response to my question about whether or not they paid any attention to the warnings that came from the union. He made several points about the union's duty to be a good advocate and a duty of fair representation and how sometimes people in a system do not like change, but let us not get sidetracked by that point.

The question that I asked which the Premier did not answer was: Is he satisfied that his minister is doing a good job of overseeing this transition?

Mr. Doer: Well, again, when people put things on the record, and if they are in a preamble or not, I have also the responsibility to correct them. The implied statement made by the member opposite, I want to be explicit that this is not the case with my definition of fair representation and the duty of representation. It does mean that, ultimately, consultations are meaningful with people that represent people. Consultation means that you discuss alternatives and strategies and realities and, obviously, with Child and Family Services, kids, with the representatives. But that does not mean that there is a veto for an organization.

So there is a difference between listening, slowing down to listen. It was at least two years before the transition started, or 18 months. I want to point out that in 1991, the problems are daunting, our proposals are far-reaching, but we believe that in the interest of justice, the process of transformation must begin immediately. This was in 1991. We came into office in 1999. We did not begin the process immediately because we felt we had to "take our time." We did take our time through the existing minister and the previous minister.

I have answered the question about the minister a number of times. I think the resolution yesterday was a disgrace to this Legislature, a disgrace for any caucus. I would not have allowed it if I was the Leader of the Opposition to have a resolution dealing with nine deaths tied to a salary. I am glad we voted against the resolution and showed our support for the minister.

Mr. McFadyen: I have twice today asked the Premier whether he thinks his minister is doing a good job and he has twice not answered the question. Today, he has said he has answered on other occasions, so we will look back at the record and see what he said.

Moving on, Mr. Chairperson, we may come back to some issues relating to Child and Family Services, but I want to move on to some other areas that are more in the realm of financial issues. I wonder if the Premier would give the House, or give us an update on the floodway expansion project and whether that project is coming in on or under budget.

Mr. Doer: Well, the first stage is on budget and within budget. The second stage has some requirements from the environmental assessment process. We are working on the second stage. We have not got a commitment from the federal government beyond the first stage yet. We are working with the federal government on the second stage, the 685 committed by the former government. We are working with the Prime Minister and the federal government on the second stage. There were some additional costs imposed, potentially, with the environmental assessment that has been put aside. It is not necessarily required. The environmental process did include work on the northeast part of the floodway, the aquifer on the northeast portion.

We are looking at an additional investment in some protection in the southeast portion, on the Seine River, based on some of the advice. So the proposal to the federal government is for the 685, to

be confirmed. The first 240 has been in budget. The second amount of money has contingencies potentially in it. But our proposal asks the federal government to proceed with the 685 commitment that the former government made to Manitoba and to determine how much the environmental assessments will be, or the environmental liability, it may be nothing, and to use that in terms of staging of some bridges in the post-685 period.

*(16:30)

Mr. McFadyen: Just to clarify, Mr. Chairperson, I think I heard the Premier say that the budget for the first stage was \$240 million. Can the Premier just indicate what is the actual amount expended on that first phase?

Mr. Doer: I would have to get the number because it is probably changing on the hour. There are a number of tenders and contracts that were let. Those all came in consistent with the budget. There were recommendations dealing with the aquifer which may or may not add costs. The Clean Environment Commission recommended that considerations be set aside. There are also recommendations dealing with the Ritchot community that may add some additional costs. Obviously, construction costs have gone up all across the country, but our request is to manage some of those increased costs, which we cannot determine yet because of the environmental issues on the aquifer, to manage that within the original commitment of the federal government, a commitment that has not been confirmed with the new administration.

But I think it is important for the citizens not just of Winnipeg, but of the capital region. You will notice that some of the bridges already are being elevated. One of the weaknesses of the existing floodway, ironically, was too many bridges were built too low after the floodway was built. We have tried to adjust that in our own construction in the last number of years. We also know that the floodway has to be—we changed some of the design because of, again, the Clean Environment Commission and concerns raised about the original floodway, and not the expanded floodway and the impact on the aquifer in the St. Clement area, and we are trying to accommodate that. That is still to be determined. Part of it will be determined by—we are looking at going wider in that area, not deeper, to protect the aquifer. There is a recommendation to protect it with some ground protection. The asked for from the government is the 240, which has been confirmed, and the

second ask is the 685, subject to some of the costs that may result in some bridge work not being depended on, one at 700 years, being delayed. But we are still working on some of these issues.

I will get how much money has been expended, and who is working. People that—most contractors were on different sides of the debate—are all working on the project. They seem to be doing okay with it.

Mr. McFadyen: Can the Premier, when gathering information on the actuals for the first stage, also advise us as to whether there are any elements and any pieces of work that were originally characterized as being first stage have been pushed back into the second-stage budget?

Mr. Doer: Well, I will check that with the national government. Our intent, in the first stage, is to get us past 1826 levels of flood protection, which is the largest flood looking at it from the public's perspective, getting us to the largest flood protection area in the history of Manitoba.

Then the second stage is to move towards the protection recommended by the IJC. I should point out that the IJC, first of all, said it would be \$800 million, then our estimates came in lower, then, of course, the Clean Environment Commission added costs, and there have been extra costs on fuel and other construction costs. But we are trying to manage the project within the authorities we have been given. I can report on there may be sequencing changes based on the environmental licence, but I will find that out.

Mr. McFadyen: I thank the Premier for that answer. I would also just ask whether the Premier can advise as to whether there have been any changes to the master labour agreement that is in place for the floodway expansion project within the past 12 months?

Mr. Doer: I will take that as notice. I am not aware of any. I think I will take that as notice.

I would point out that, in terms of staging of contracts, some of these stages—it was always our desire to have the 685 approved by the national government because we could get an economy of scale going with the 240 within a 680. So some of the tendering, for example, for dirt and bridges and other things could be done more effectively when we knew the approval level for the whole project, it was our goal.

This is not dissimilar to what happened with Duff Roblin. There was one approval and then a second approval. We preferred to have both approvals together because it was more cost-effective for tendering and engineering rather than doing one stage and then the other. So this is why we are still working with the national government, the new national government. In all fairness to them, they have concerns southeast of the floodway. They have M.P.s that represent southeast areas. They have M.P.s that represent northeast areas, so they have their own legitimate issues to raise. We are not panicked about that, but there are efficiencies by having a macro number rather than having the stage number, and that compelled the former government to go to the higher number.

I know when the new government got elected, there were some areas that had money in budgets that were announced, and there were some areas that did not have money in budgets that were announced. I notice today that Bill Graham was talking about Kelowna, which we support, of course, but I noticed that also—and I am saying this for the benefit of the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux)—that no money flowed for Aboriginal people for health care from the 2004 agreement to 2006, and then this is the cause of their life all of a sudden today. Too bad. It rang a little hollow with me when I heard it, but I digress.

It is better for us to get a bigger number because of the staging. For the member opposite, it is better to have one stage at 685 than two stages at 240 and 685. So it is better to have one stage. If there are cost issues that are similar to other jurisdictions with the environmental assessment and licensing requirements, it is manageable in the sense that there are some bridges that would not be affected unless there is one in 600 years versus one in 700 years.

So there is a way to manage it without changing the proposal, but there have been some costs added with environment and fuel costs.

Mr. McFadyen: I am advised that the Premier has said previously that that floodway expansion project would be finished on time and on budget. Is that still his position?

Mr. Doer: Well, the time depends on my new federal partner. Also, the 240 that we have committed from the national government will be on time and on budget, but it is more effective for us to have the larger amount approved for the efficiency of the operation. Just to make sure that people know, we have gone from one in 95 years protection that

we were at in '97—and partially because of bridges, by the way. Former Premier Roblin's floodway could have operated more effectively if bridges were not built to a lower degree. It was not his fault. *[interjection]* No, no, I was proud to ask former Premier Roblin to join me with the Prime Minister at the floodway gates.

Our goal now is to get the 1826 coverage, but it is better to go to Noah's Ark coverage if we can get to the one in 700 years. So we are a bit in between in terms of decisions from the federal government, and I do not for one moment blame them, because I think they should take their time, and if it means we have to go from the big project in terms of tendering to the one project, that is what we will do. So we are kind of in a state of getting ready for both which does not help in terms of planning.

I cannot help when federal elections take place. I cannot help when governments are changed, and I cannot help that different M.P.s that come with different governments have different issues that they want to raise in their own constituencies. I would expect them to raise those issues. There are, including members of the existing federal caucus, who actually opposed the floodway in the last federal election, but I will not mention their names. But I know who they are.

* (16:40)

Mr. McFadyen: I think, and I know I am not supposed to put words in the Premier's mouth, I think we have moved from a "yes" to a "yes, but" on this statement about on time and on budget, but time will tell and we will look forward to further updates as the information comes in.

I just want to move on to another significant project taking place for the city of Winnipeg, which is the upgrades to the city's waste water system. These are upgrades that were mandated, upgrades that were agreed to by the City of Winnipeg under former Mayor Murray, and continuing under the current Mayor Katz, upgrades to that system. I am wondering if the Premier has been briefed recently under the current cost estimates in relationship to those waste water system upgrades.

Mr. Doer: I was going to have a chat with the mayor sometime today, but I do not know whether I am going to be able to have that, and I do not know whether it is on his agenda.

Back to the floodway, I said that the 240 is on time and on budget, but the time would change if we

have the 685. The 685 has been somewhat changed with the Clean Environment Commission adding potentially contingencies dealing with the aquifer that was not part of the original design that they had, based on interventions made by St. Clement and others. It may get changed again with changes that might be required. There are some Seine River proposals and some other things. But, on the 240, yes. On the issue of the 1826 coverage, we believe we will be there within this stage.

The issue of the waste water, I have not got the new number. I read a number in the newspaper but sometimes you read numbers, no disrespect, in the newspapers that do not end up being accurate. We have committed ourselves to the money, to the former mayor and to the existing mayor. The federal government has re-allocated its money for waste water to be two thirds of the money, so the City could take the money for waste water in the tri-level agreement and move it from rapid transit to community clubs. Try to explain that, again, to the public, but, as you know, with the byzantine accounting systems, the federal government was able to put money into sewage treatment under their Green Plan for infrastructure, but could not put money into recreation and fitness. So, when the new mayor—*[interjection]* What is that?

An Honourable Member: I think they got a new fund.

Mr. Doer: Okay, we will see.

But we think that the amount of money, certainly the amount of money we budgeted, will provide, first of all, the nutrient removal which will produce, I think, a significant reduction in the waste that goes into the river.

I have some sympathy with the mayor because this is a problem that should have been corrected 40 years ago, 30 years ago. The present council, I have a lot of sympathy for because, again, this thing, you can pay me now or you can pay me later. These things that are delayed dramatically end up costing more and more money. All construction costs have gone up in Winnipeg and in Canada, especially in western Canada.

The new airport has gone up. I think the amount of money has gone up on this project, but I am not exactly sure of the number. We have not got a changed ask yet, although we have committed our money as part of the infrastructure money, and the feds have committed the two-thirds amount, and the

city has an account where they are accruing revenues, but I have not got the final total.

Mr. McFadyen: The Premier has alluded to the fact that construction costs and engineering costs and other things are going up in Winnipeg, as they are in other places. My understanding and the understanding that we have is that there are fairly significant increases that are expected in terms of the cost of those upgrades to the City of Winnipeg, and the reasons for that relate to economics within that industry. But, in light of the fact that there appear to be significant increases to the original budget for those upgrades, in light of the fact that the objective of those upgrades is to clean up our waterways, which has a general benefit to all people in Manitoba, not just residents in the city of Winnipeg, is the Premier prepared to enter into discussions with the mayor and City Council to look at an increase in the Province's contribution toward those upgrades, if, indeed, it is confirmed that those costs are going up as much as we have heard they may be?

Mr. Doer: I had better get back the secretary of the Community Economic Development group of Cabinet so we can go back and negotiate some of these agreements.

Obviously, we are the first government that has put money into this sewage treatment upgrade, although the three sites have had money invested in it. There have been other projects to start twinning some of the water areas. I think Munroe had some, and I cannot keep track of all of them in the past.

We are open for discussions with the mayor and all mayors in Manitoba, all the time. We try to recognize the challenges they have where there is only one taxpayer. We are trying to lower costs for businesses in Manitoba, and we think that will be helpful to the mayor's general economic strategy. We are trying to keep things more affordable in Manitoba. We think that is valuable for the mayor but, as you know, we have regular meetings with the mayor. We try to also focus in and target some of the areas that may be available for the national government. When national governments change—*[interjection]*

The southeast quadrant, the southeast duo; when we talk about sewage treatment, they run for the hills.

We have to keep an open mind with the City, subject to balanced budget legislation. It is noteworthy that the City has a revenue base for water

treatment and a water treatment plan, because they started budgeting for that years ago, and through revenues for the use of your water. But on this area, they did not budget for it, even though the warnings were there with every other major municipality for years. I will give the credit to the City for reducing the number of—I think the raw sewage has gone down from about 30 cases a year to—with the capacity investments in the sewage treatment plants, I think it has gone down about 17 on average, and it only represents between 4 and 6 percent of the nutrients in Lake Winnipeg. It is not all of it, and we would not want to say it is more than what it is or less than what it is.

I should say, by the way, when we sometimes try to deal with the Americans on Devils Lake, it is the item that is most often cited by opponents to putting in filters, even though sulphates, phosphorus and other things that are in algae that are in that lake have nothing to do with this issue of sewage treatment in Winnipeg. We have taken action. The mayor has taken action, and I give him credit for that.

Mr. McFadyen: I just, with the time we have left which is limited today, I do have some questions for the Premier on our favourite file, Crocus, which we will save for tomorrow. I do not want to interrupt the flow of questions and answers, and I will look forward to hearing from the Premier tomorrow on what Mitch Zalnasky thinks about the Crocus file and the various others who brief him on a regular basis.

I would just want to ask the Premier, with the limited time we have left, if he could just indicate to us what his priorities are, going into the Western Premiers' Conference next week.

Mr. Doer: Well, first of all, to show the beauty of Manitoba. I think that with the—*[interjection]*

An Honourable Member: Moosehead.

Mr. Doer: Well, the member opposite is focussed in on his favourite beverage, but I cannot possibly comment on that. He kind of has a moose head characteristic to him. I think the way he charges around this Chamber is very appropriate that he drinks that beverage of a similar nature.

* (16:50)

The bottom line is I think the beauty of Gimli is very valuable for Manitoba. I think we are perceived sometimes as only a prairie province, instead of the lakes we have, including the wonderful fly-fishing in

Russell and Roblin. The Western Premiers' meeting obviously has achieved a lot.

Last year's meeting in Lloydminster, we were able to achieve an agreement on crystal meth, which eventually ended up on the national meeting's agenda and became part of the federal Liberal government's announcement to increase the penalties for traffickers of crystal meth to be comparable to heroin and to start looking at some of the materials that should be monitored, if not stored, that may be available for the production of crystal meth.

So these meetings do have a tendency to find their recommendations to the premiers' meeting which is eight weeks from now in Newfoundland and Labrador. Agriculture will be important. North-south trade will be extremely important. We have representatives from the western provinces and other premiers' meetings on Wednesday with representatives from the United States, Mexico and Canada.

The issues of passport security identification will be very important for us. We have a good agreement in Manitoba with North Dakota on this file. We note that the senators in North Dakota and Minnesota are moving an amendment, perhaps as we speak, on the time frame of the President's for January 1, 2007. I think they recognize the loss of income for their tourism industry and the loss of friendship across the border as we do. The whole area of co-ordinating some of our procurement policies in health care is a very important item and the whole area of any number of issues on transportation is also important.

It is our view on transportation that we should have a more inclusive strategy on transportation. We do not believe all our eggs should be placed in the coastal basket for ports. We believe an inland port is necessary for Canadian goods. It saves money in terms of the cost at the west coast. It reduces security risk by not having all our transportation eggs in one basket and it provides for a more orderly flow of goods throughout the country. So that is another priority which has been supported by Premier Campbell as we supported the introduction of investments in Prince Rupert and in the Port of Vancouver.

So we have a number of important priorities. I do not want to pre-empt the meeting, but I remember chairing the first meeting I had, which was with Premier Klein and Premier Romanow, and they ended up having an animated debate about health care and Bill 11 out of Ontario, or Alberta rather. I do not think we have those same debates in front of

us in Gimli, but, certainly, the Johnson centre, which is a beautiful site— hopefully, we will have nice weather and we can have people see Manitoba. In a lot of ways, Canadians do not see the province as a lake province and, in a lot of ways, we are very lucky to live in a province that has such natural beauty with 110,000 lakes.

So part of what I am trying to do is get people to see the beauty of our province as well as the beauty of the people, and I am sure we will be able to achieve that in the *Islendingadagurinn* traditions of Gimli.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Chairman, one final question: If the Premier could just indicate very quickly, what is the status of the discussions with the federal government on the east-west power grid?

Mr. Doer: I raised it with the Prime Minister. He looked at the map. I would not characterize it as a yes or a no. I would characterize it as a discussion. In part there are some advantages to this but we are not proceeding on the basis with our sales to other provinces and north and south and west. We are not negotiating only on the basis of the assumption the east-west grid will be built.

We do have an agreement, by the way, for an east-west grid in western Canada with support from the western provinces, including the province of Alberta, to build an east-west grid capacity across western Canada. We think that is positive. This is a matter we discussed with the former government; nothing happened. We discussed it with Ontario. They put in on the table as part of the climate change, but nothing happened. So we have a clean slate in terms of discussing it.

I obviously support Kyoto, and you know that full well. I have supported it for a long time now, but I do believe that, as part of implementing any climate change strategy, it does not make any sense at all to buy credits from a, quote, "Third World country," or a country outside of Canada. I always believe in investing in renewable energy and climate change strategies within your own jurisdiction. On that point, I would say that there is room to move with this new government.

Mr. McFadyen: In light of the fact the Premier has raised Kyoto, does he think that Bill 11 is consistent with a commitment to Kyoto?

Mr. Doer: Yes, the majority of the amount of money that is in Bill 11 for potential investment is actually specifically on the renewable energy and

conservation side. The contingency for gas was not required last winter. I think there was only about 1.5 percent that was required in a second increase. We note that four out of the last six years, there has been a, quote, "cross-subsidy" from the time the gas company was purchased in 1999, a cross-subsidy from Hydro. Gas lost money four out of six years. Hydro made money six out of seven years. So there has been a de facto cross-subsidy from the bottom line of gas that lost money, let alone no rate of return, to the situation with hydro-electric export sales.

The majority of the money in Bill 11 was intended to be and is being invested in renewable energy. I know lots of Manitobans who are getting audits and conservation measures and everything else. I think it is important to note that Manitoba has been given by U.S. *BusinessWeek* magazine the best regional government in the world for renewable energy strategies, so something that is very consistent, and this is coming from the Climate Group which is a business group through *BusinessWeek* magazine.

We have also been given credit by David Suzuki on climate change strategies, but we have a long way to go. I do not want to project, again, that we are perfect. There are a lot of transportation challenges. That is why we are pleased about ethanol expansion. There are lots of other issues in other sectors.

But, yes, we think that the measures in Bill 11 are primarily renewable energy related. There are some contingencies on the non-renewable, but that was not necessarily this last winter.

Mr. McFadyen: I am told this has to be a short question, so I will try to pose a short question and we will look for a short answer.

Given that there is no requirement to have legislation to spend on initiatives in renewable energy—these are budget initiatives—and that the primary feature of Bill 11 is to have Hydro

ratepayers subsidize gas users, which has the effect of creating an incentive to use more gas and less electricity, how can the Premier say with a straight face that Bill 11 is consistent with his commitment to Kyoto?

Mr. Doer: Well, again in the bill, the majority of the initiatives are renewable energy and reducing demand for energy, period, is the gas portion of the bill. It was a contingency last year when we were facing massive increases in rates. Members opposite argued in Question Period that we should subsidize only the business community. I think their only complaint was the business community. When we dealt with that before the PUB, then they kind of went after the subsidies.

I would suggest that the purchase of the gas company itself and the cross-subsidies have been in place four out of the six years with no rate of return. It was not our government that bought the gas company. We looked at it but we did not do it. The members opposite bought a gas company, and I suggest also, at the time, paid way too much, and I can document that.

Mr. Chairperson: Committee rise. Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I ask leave to table the Supplementary Information for the Department of Health because of the change in Estimates rotation to bring Health on Friday, I believe.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Speaker: The time being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 24, 2006

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<http://www.gov.mb.ca/legislature/hansard/index.html>