

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

**Official Report**  
**(Hansard)**

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**MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
**Thirty-Ninth Legislature**

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

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 1, 2008

### The House met at 1:30 p.m.

**Mr. Speaker:** I'd like to advise the House that Tuesday afternoon's *Hansard* is now available and has been distributed to members, but *Hansard* from yesterday afternoon, April 30, is not yet available.

### MATTER OF PRIVILEGE

**Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet):** Yes, Mr. Speaker, I rise on a matter of privilege.

A matter of privilege is a very serious matter because a breach of privilege infringes and limits our ability as MLAs to effectively perform as members of the opposition, as elected representatives to our constituents, those constituents who place their faith in us by voting us here into this House so that we could exercise our democratic rights by voting as their representative in the Legislature.

I want to outline a series of facts to you, Mr. Speaker, to support the matter of privilege that I bring forward today. Yesterday, there were two separate situations, incidents where a matter of privilege arose, but in the same set of circumstances that we found ourselves in.

It arose as a result of the government introducing two bills, Bills 37 and 38 yesterday. Normally, Mr. Speaker, when bills are introduced into this House for first reading, almost immediately after the bills are introduced, we get into question period. Normally during question period those bills are circulated among the MLAs. I know that for a fact because I sit in a chair that's a little further back from my desk and every time the page goes behind me, I move my chair. I can tell you that didn't happen until almost after question period expired. Yesterday those bills were given to the Clerk and kept under the desk. They weren't distributed immediately as they normally are in this House.

Bills are distributed normally, as I say, to MLAs after question period ends. Yesterday, once question period ended, on this side of the House, Mr. Speaker, we noticed that the Premier (Mr. Doer) nodded to the Clerk before he got out of question period. You nod to the Clerk. Why? The only possible reason would be to give permission at that time then to distribute the bills. Immediately afterwards the pages were summoned and signalled to distribute those bills in

the House, and it took another full 10 minutes before we received those bills.

The second set of circumstances that we found ourselves in yesterday with respect to the bills is that they're always provided directly to the media in the Chamber after they're distributed to the MLAs in the House, always before the end of question period. What we found yesterday and what we found out this morning, in fact, was that the press releases were distributed to the media during question period yesterday, but the bills were not. They were distributed to the media though, Mr. Speaker, but they were distributed into their offices so they had no opportunity to review those bills before the scrums.

There are two issues in a matter of privilege. Two conditions have to be met. Number 1, is the matter being raised at the earliest opportunity; that's the first test. Secondly, whether in fact there'd been a breach of privileges in this House, whether a prima facie case of privilege in the Legislature can be made. That's a two-part test, and, Mr. Speaker, you've indicated that to us numerous times on matters of privilege here in this House.

The earliest opportunity test, Mr. Speaker, I would submit has been met. This is the earliest opportunity for us to raise this matter, particularly when having found out this morning that the media was denied access to Bills 37 and 38 until well after question period. That was the last set of circumstances leading to this matter of privilege.

With respect to the second test, the prima facie case, I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that Bill 37 censors communication between MLAs and their constituents. It restricts mailing and printing privileges of MLAs. It really restricts our ability to act as members of the Legislative Assembly, the very purpose for which we have been elected.

Also what Bill 37 does is what this Premier (Mr. Doer) has done. Why did he restrict access to Bills 37 and 38 to MLAs? Why did he restrict access to Bills 37 and 38 to the media? Why was this all done? There's only one logical explanation for that, Mr. Speaker. Only one logical conclusion can be drawn. First of all, it was to control the opposition's response to the media with respect to the bill. Secondly, I believe it was to control the media's questions in the

scrum after question period with regard to Bills 37 and 38 and to control the message that was going out to Manitobans.

I quote for you a couple of citations, Mr. Speaker, for you to consider. *Beauchesne* citation 24 defines parliamentary privilege as the sum of rights enjoyed in the House collectively and by members of the House individually, without which they could not discharge their functions or their duties.

Clearly, Mr. Speaker, our function and our duty as MLAs, as elected representatives representing some-odd 20,000 to 25,000 Manitobans here in this Legislature, our function, as members of the opposition in particular, is to criticize legislation on a timely basis and to tell Manitobans where the government has failed them. That's our job as opposition MLAs, and we were denied that opportunity. I would submit that, in fact, you should rule in favour of this matter of privilege.

So, therefore, I move that this matter be moved to be considered by the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs and then reported back to this House.

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

**Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader):** With respect to the matter of privilege, I do not dispute the fact that the member raised the matter at the first opportunity. I do dispute the fact that the member talked about substantive matters in that particular bill and tried to weave that into a political issue, which I think is inappropriate during discussion of matters of privilege.

I do note for you, Mr. Speaker, that our rules state, and I quote, under bill 136 (2): "A bill must be printed and distributed in the House at least one day before Second Reading." The only obligation is to distribute.

Now, on the facts situation, Mr. Speaker, I can speak to the definitive facts as House leader yesterday because Bill 37 was introduced by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) and I was responsible for the introduction of bill—*[interjection]* Pardon me. Bill 38 was by the Minister of Finance and Bill 37 was by myself.

I am advised that news releases were not distributed to the media prior to the introduction of bills. That's the first factual thing.

The second factual issue, Mr. Speaker, is when the bills normally come, the Sergeant-at-Arms brings the bills to us to sign off on. The member did it on the balanced budget bill. I kept the bill on The Elections Act on my desk for awhile, and I was discussing with the Premier (Mr. Doer) because the problem was that we were supposed to do a joint conference, and I, unfortunately, was in a position that I couldn't guarantee my presence at that conference. The members will know that I was consulting my e-mail and left the Chamber at one point to talk on the phone. I then called the Clerk over, who then put the bill on the Clerk's desk for distribution when we were in question period.

\* (13:40)

So, I'm indicating, Mr. Speaker, that (a) there was no breach of the rules because we followed the rules; (b) if there was a breach of what's been regular protocol, I'll take responsibility for it because of the fact that I did hold on to it and was trying to determine whether or not I should put special instructions on that bill as it sat on my desk. *[interjection]* Well, the Member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) seems to know, as she often does, the facts situation. And the bill was then taken from my desk to the Clerk's desk and sat there for distribution.

I thought the bills were distributed before we left. If they weren't, then—normally we do. If they weren't, that's not our normal practice. It's not against the rules, Mr. Speaker, but in this particular instance, under the particular circumstances, I do indicate to the House that the one bill sat on my desk for a period of time during QP while I resolved whether or not I would be able to participate, and I was unable to in the subsequent news conference that took place insofar as I was sponsoring the bill.

So I suggest not only is there not a matter of privilege because our rules don't state so, but if, in fact, there is a matter of privilege and it's an error that I have made as House leader, I apologize to every member of this House for the error that I have made.

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster):** I stand in support of the matter of privilege. It's one of those issues, The Elections Act, and the type of legislation that we're talking about should be done in a political

fashion as you yourself would recognize, Mr. Speaker.

The first we heard anything in terms of any content whatsoever was when the government yesterday, just prior to question period, announced that they were bringing in this legislation.

The practice of this Chamber—and I've had bills read for the first time, as most of us have—is we will get a document; we sign the document and the bill is circulated. Then it provides members to be able to read.

Mr. Speaker, I fell victim to what happened yesterday. I went from inside the Chamber upon hearing that this legislation—that the Premier (Mr. Doer) was providing fixed dates, for example, fixed election dates. I immediately went downstairs and issued a press release saying that the government supports fixed dates. It's something that the Liberals and opposition have been calling for for years. I congratulated the government on it.

It was the details, Mr. Speaker. There is the Premier exemption that's in the legislation. Had the bill been circulated when it should have been circulated, as per the practice of this Chamber, I would have been afforded the opportunity to have read the bill during question period.

I confess, maybe I was a little premature in issuing out the press release. I gave the government credit for doing something that I thought was important. Mr. Speaker, I even talked to some members of the media initially right after QP giving credit. But it wasn't until 4:30, 5 o'clock where we really started to find out in terms of what the bill was about.

What we need to be aware of as individual members is that this isn't just any type of legislation; this is legislation that should be taken into the apolitical realm. Mr. Speaker, members of this Chamber should be aware of the legislation because it affects each and every one of us in the form of democracy and how campaigns—how caucuses will function, the types of rights and privileges individual MLAs would be given. That's why we should ensure that the process that's being adhered to here is responsibly followed.

Is it a coincidence? You know, I have a deep amount of respect for the Member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak), Mr. Speaker, but all other bills I have received, circulated, and have had the opportunity to read. The impact was significant. The government

got its headline: "Fixed dates on elections." Even though it's not true, they got the headline.

The bill has been manipulation from its introduction, Mr. Speaker, and I believe as the Speaker that if you could look into it and report back to the House, follow the motion that the Member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik) has put forward, I think it would do well in terms of providing clarity on this very critically important issue on an office, on areas that are supposed to be apolitical. Thank you.

**Mr. Speaker:** The honourable Minister of Family Services and Housing, on the same issue?

**Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Housing):** Very briefly, just because I have some first-hand knowledge of the process in terms of first readings. My understanding is that there's a complaint that the bills weren't distributed in perhaps as timely a manner as some members would like.

I understand the bills were distributed yesterday on a timely basis, and, indeed, I understand there were press conferences for both bills for full question and answer. What happened, Mr. Speaker, historically was, particularly that we recall under the former government, and no reflection, it's just a practice, but first readings were done and then the bills were distributed at the whim of the government. It may not be even on the same day. In fact it usually wasn't. The first reading was simply a notice of an intention, and it was only the title that was available. We changed our processes in about 2000, I think, to move together the introduction of the bill and the distribution.

So, it's just a practice, Mr. Speaker, that's up to the government of the day. I think in terms of compliance with that practice even that was, I understand, followed yesterday with some minor delay.

**Mr. Speaker:** I'll hear one more and then we'll move on. The honourable Member for Steinbach. Just to be fair, I'll hear the honourable Member for Steinbach.

**Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach):** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and certainly members of this side appreciate the fairness that you always exercise in your Chair.

Certainly, I was present in the House yesterday and saw some of the things that happened that the Member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik) has

alluded to already, the fact that there was a signal that seemed to go from the Premier (Mr. Doer) to others here in this House who shouldn't be being used in that particular way, Mr. Speaker. We know that here in the Legislature, we talk about what are matters of privilege and we have to show that it impacts the job that we do as legislators.

I would say to you, Mr. Speaker, that it's clear that as members, whether you're in opposition or whether you're in government, one of the key abilities that you need to have is to be able to scrutinize legislation on a relatively reasonable period of time so we can comment to those who are in the media and those who are in our own constituencies to tell them what we believe this legislation, at least on its face of it, is intended to do.

It seems, Mr. Speaker, from the practice that happened yesterday in the Legislature that that was an intention of a government to prevent that from happening, to bring forward a bill in a way that it would have only a certain sort of spin on it for the media so that we as legislators, so that we as members of this Assembly representing our constituents wouldn't be able to have the full facts and full knowledge to be able to go to our constituents and say, this is how it's going to impact you. Not just impact us as an opposition. Not just impact me as an individual member, but to impact all of us because all of us in this Legislature have a responsibility to our constituents.

None of us are guaranteed to be on one side of the House or the other forever. We will all serve in different positions and in different roles at some point in a political career, and it's important that we stand up for the democratic principles for each of us as MLAs in the Legislature knowing that we will have different positions at different times and that it's universal, that the rule that happened in the Legislature should be to stand up for those democratic principles.

That is not, in my opinion, in my estimation, Mr. Speaker, what happened here yesterday. It's an affront to the democratic process. We look forward to your ruling on this. We look forward to this government apologizing for what happened, and we can have a full debate on this legislation and other pieces of legislation to ever come before this House no matter who is in government or which side you're on.

**Mr. Speaker:** On the matter of privilege raised by the honourable Member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr.

Hawranik), I must make a brief statement before I conclude.

Regrettably, the comments I heard pertaining to the Clerks and the table officers, I'm very surprised at that because I have worked with the Clerks and the table officers for nine years. In my opinion, they have an impeccable record, and they have been utmost in following the rules of the House. They, along with myself as the Speaker, we've never, never followed directions from any individual member or from the First Minister (Mr. Doer) or Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) or any other member unless it's a direction that is given to us by the collective House as a whole, because we are servants of the House.

We are not servants of individual members that will give us direction, but the House can direct us in order to follow the function of the House. I regrettably heard the comments and putting the Clerks and the table officers' commitment to this Chamber, in my opinion, in jeopardy, which I totally, totally disagree with because I've had many years working with them.

\* (13:50)

For the information of the House, if, once bills are introduced, the Clerks at the table cannot distribute them until they receive the letter of distribution which is signed—it has to be signed by the minister—and if there was a delay, or whatever the holdup was, of the minister signing that letter, I will investigate it, and I will check all the procedures that we have followed and find out what happened there.

I assure you, I assure you utmostly, that the Clerks and myself, we would not be following direction if it's from the Premier (Mr. Doer) or Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) or any members as an individual. I know for sure that would never happen. I feel very confident in saying that. I will investigate and see where the delay was and I will report that back to the House.

## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

### INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

#### Bill 39—The Court of Appeal Amendment Act

**Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), that Bill 39, The Court of Appeal Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur la Cour d'appel, be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Mr. Chomiak:** At the request of the Chief Justice of the Court of Appeal, we are asking that the Court of Appeal be increased by one member.

**Mr. Speaker:** Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? *[Agreed]*

**Bill 40—The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment, Highway Traffic Amendment and Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Amendment Act**

**Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Act):** Mr. Speaker, I move seconded by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), that Bill 40, The Drivers and Vehicles Amendment, Highway Traffic Amendment and Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur les conducteurs et les véhicules, le Code de la route et la Loi sur la Société d'assurance publique du Manitoba, be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Mr. Chomiak:** This bill will allow for an enhanced multifaceted-use driver's licence and identification for all Manitobans, and also deal with matters of ensuring increased fairness with respect to the provision of merit and demerit system.

**Mr. Speaker:** Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? *[Agreed]*

**Bill 226—The Social Inclusion and Anti-Poverty Act**

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the MLA for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), that Bill 226, The Social Inclusion and Anti-Poverty Act; Loi sur l'inclusion sociale et la lutte contre la pauvreté, be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Mr. Gerrard:** Mr. Speaker, this bill requires the government to establish and implement a provincial strategy to combat poverty and social exclusion with a specific target of reducing poverty by 50 percent by the year 2012.

The strategy has to be oriented to preventing poverty and social exclusion, strengthening the social and economic safety net, promoting access to employment, increasing the attractiveness of work and promoting the involvement of society as a whole in combating poverty and social exclusion.

**Mr. Speaker:** Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? *[Agreed]*

**Bill 32—The Personal Health Information Act**

**Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health):** I move, seconded by the Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross), that Bill 32, The Personal Health Information Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur les renseignements médicaux personnels, be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Ms. Oswald:** As we know, Manitoba was the first jurisdiction in Canada to introduce legislation to provide individuals with the statutory right to see and obtain copies of their own personal health information and to put in place strong measures to protect that information. This bill will implement recommendations coming out of a comprehensive public review of PHIA and will update it for the era of electronic health records.

**Mr. Speaker:** Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? *[Agreed]*

**Bill 31—The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act**

**Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister of Culture, Heritage, Tourism and Sport):** Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross), that Bill 31, The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'accès à l'information et la protection de la vie privée, be now read a first time.

*Motion presented.*

**Mr. Robinson:** Mr. Speaker, this bill makes important amendments to our legislation on access and privacy and, probably most significantly, it introduces a new information and privacy adjudicator with order of making power to assist the Ombudsman's office in its work under this act and also under PHIA, The Personal Health Information Act. Its other provisions reflect input from our review process to enhance access and generally update the act.

**Mr. Speaker:** Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? *[Agreed]*

**Bill 36—The Municipal Assessment Amendment Act**

**Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Conservation):** On behalf of the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs (Mr. Ashton), I move, seconded by the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald), that Bill 36, The

Municipal Assessment Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'évaluation municipale, be now read a first time.

***Motion presented.***

**Mr. Struthers:** This bill introduces improvements to the property assessment system, including providing for the re-assessment cycle frequency to be reduced from four years to two.

**Mr. Speaker:** Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? [*Agreed*]

**PETITIONS**

**Lake Dauphin Fishery**

**Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Fishing is an important industry on Lake Dauphin.

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

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

Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by Evelyn Thacker, Emily Recknell, Marlene Cochrane 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.

\* (14:00)

**Dividing of Trans-Canada Highway**

**Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

The seven-kilometre stretch of the Trans-Canada Highway passing through Headingley is an extremely busy stretch of road, averaging 18,000 vehicles daily.

This section of the Trans-Canada Highway is one of the few remaining stretches of undivided highway in Manitoba, and it has seen more than 100 accidents in the last two years, some of them fatal.

Manitoba's Assistant Deputy Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation told a Winnipeg radio station on October 16, 2007, that when it comes to highways projects the provincial government has a flexible response program, and we have a couple of opportunities to advance these projects in our five-year plan.

In the interests of protecting motorist safety, it is critical that the dividing of the Trans-Canada Highway in Headingley is completed as soon as possible.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) to consider making the completion of the dividing of the Trans-Canada Highway in Headingley in 2008 an urgent provincial government priority.

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to consider evaluating whether any other steps can be taken to improve motorist safety while the dividing of the Trans-Canada Highway in Headingley is being completed.

This is signed by Wayne Mattson, Cindy Bushell, Liz Scouler and many other Manitobans, Mr. Speaker.

**Bill 200--The Waste Reduction and Prevention Amendment Act**

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



These are the reasons for this petition:

Plastic bags are harmful to humans, animals and the environment.

Toxins from photodegradation, the breakdown of plastic bags, end up in Manitoba's soil, waterways and food supply.

Plastic bags take many years to photodegrade and are a blemish on our roadways, parks, streets, hang from bushes and trees and litter our landfills.

There are many alternatives readily available, ranging from re-usable bags to biodegradable bags to crates and boxes.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge all members of the Legislative Assembly to consider supporting Bill 200, The Waste Reduction and Prevention Amendment Act, presented by the honourable Member for River Heights, which will ban single-use checkout bags in Manitoba.

Signed by Teaira Turner, Mystique Turner, Chris Curpen and many others.

### **Lake Dauphin Fishery**

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

Fishing is an important industry on Lake Dauphin.

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Water Stewardship (Ms. Melnick) to consider placing a moratorium on harvesting of any species of fish on Lake Dauphin

and its tributaries for the period of April 1 to May 15 annually.

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

This petition is signed by Megan Laviolette, Gwen Becker, Norma Gaber and many, many others.

### **Power Line Development**

**Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

The reasons for this petition are:

Manitoba Hydro has been forced by the NDP government to construct a third high voltage transmission line, Bipole III, down the west side of Lake Winnipegosis instead of the east side of Lake Winnipeg, as recommended by Manitoba Hydro.

The NDP detour is more than 400 kilometres longer than the eastern route recommended by Manitoba Hydro experts.

The line losses created by the NDP detour will result in a lost opportunity to displace dirty coal-generated electricity, which will create added and unnecessary greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to an additional 57,000 vehicles on our roads.

The former chair of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee has stated that an east-side bipole and a UNESCO World Heritage Site can co-exist contrary to NDP claims.

The NDP detour will cut through more forest than the eastern route, and will cut through threatened aspen parkland areas, unlike the eastern route.

Former member of the Legislative Assembly Elijah Harper has stated that the east-side communities are devastated by the government's decision to abandon the east-side route, stating that this decision will resign them to poverty in perpetuity.

Manitoba MKO, an organization that represents northern Manitoba First Nations chiefs, has stated that the government has acted unilaterally to abandon the eastern route without consultation with northern

First Nations despite repeated requests by MKO for consultations.

The NDP detour will lead to an additional debt of at least \$400 million related to the capital cost of line construction alone, to be left to future generations of Manitobans.

The NDP detour will result in increased line losses due to friction leading to lost energy sales of between \$250 million and \$1 billion over the life of the project.

The added debt and lost sales created by the NDP detour will make every Manitoba family at least \$4,000 poorer.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the provincial government to abandon the NDP detour on the basis that it will result in massive environmental, social and economic damage to Manitoba.

To urge the provincial government to consider proceeding with the route originally recommended by Manitoba Hydro, subject to necessary regulatory approvals.

This petition is signed by Doug Denning, Randy Dahl, Hazel Andrews and many, many other fine Manitobans.

#### **The Elections Act Amendments**

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

In the constituencies of The Maples and Wellington, serious allegations were made about inappropriate behaviour by high-ranking NDP members, and the Premier (Mr. Doer) failed to show leadership in enforcing a political code of ethical conduct.

Elections Manitoba has made it clear that it does not have the jurisdiction or the authority to enforce in any way a shared code of ethical conduct.

The '99 Monnin inquiry clearly wanted an effective code of ethics, not the current non-enforceable code of ethics that the Premier and others continue to ignore.

The '99 Monnin report states: "If the political parties fail to implement a Code of Ethics by

December 31, 2001, that the standard Code be made compulsory by legislation."

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Manitoba Legislature to consider acting on the 1999 Alfred Monnin report and include the principles of a shared code of ethical conduct into The Elections Act.

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by W. Giordmaina, L. Allen, E. Dayrit and many, many other fine Manitobans.

#### **TABLING OF REPORTS**

**Mr. Speaker:** I'm pleased to table in accordance with section 43 of The Ombudsman Act a Report regarding the Licensing and Enforcement Practices of Manitoba Water Stewardship from the Manitoba Ombudsman.

**Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Conservation):** I'd like to table the 2008-2009 Departmental Expenditure Estimates for the Sustainable Development Innovations Fund, and also the 2008-2009 Departmental Expenditure Estimates for the Department of Manitoba Conservation.

**Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Labour and Immigration):** I'd like to table the 2008-2009 Departmental Expenditure Estimates for the Department of Labour and Immigration.

#### **MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS**

##### **Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Memorial Day**

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

Tomorrow, on May 2, we join with people all over the world to observe Yom Hashoah, or Holocaust Memorial Day.

May 1, 2000, Manitoba's Legislative Assembly unanimously passed Bill 19, The Holocaust Memorial Day Act. This day is dedicated to the memory of the six million Jewish people and the millions of other victims who were murdered in Nazi death camps during World War II.

Though the Holocaust took place decades ago on another continent, the names that appear on the monument here on the legislative grounds are evidence of the direct, vital connection that all Manitobans have to this atrocity.

\* (14:10)

There are Holocaust survivors living in our province. Thousands of Manitobans are relatives of Holocaust victims, and today, on Yom Hashoah, we remember them and renew our commitment to vigilance against this kind of human rights tragedy.

Over the last two months, we have held observances of many important human rights issues and milestones. In March, we observed International Women's Day and the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Along with Yom Hashoah, these internationally recognized events keep us aware of the past inhumanity and injustices that the world has witnessed and also give us the opportunity to discuss the progress we have made in the human rights arena, as well as the challenges that lie before us.

As colleagues and members of an international community, we must continue to work together to ensure that this tragic history is never repeated. Mr. Speaker, following statements by my colleagues, I ask that all members observe a moment of silence in memory of those who suffered and died in the Holocaust.

**Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood):** At Yom Hashoah today, we commemorated the lives lost and forever changed because of the Holocaust. Six million lives were destroyed through the actions of the Nazi regime and their collaborators. While most victims were of Jewish descent, the Nazis also used ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and physical or mental challenges as justification for persecution of many groups of people. Through the testimonies of survivors and archival records, we have a better understanding of the fear and anguish that so many people endured in their lives and sadly suffered with until their deaths. We continue to honour and remember the victims of the Holocaust.

Today, the League of Human Rights of B'nai Brith Canada continued their annual presentation of the Unto Every Person There is a Name ceremony attended by members from our caucus and others in government. This is the 16th year survivors, family members of victims and citizens of the community have joined together at the Legislature to read aloud the names of those who died during the Holocaust. This ceremony is a moving act to perpetuate the memory of those six million lives lost, and it is a small but significant gesture to return an identity to every individual who was killed. Often, when the number of those murdered is so extreme, we can lose sight of the fact that each life taken was a person

with a name, a family and a storied life that tragically met a brutal end.

We must also remember those who survived the Holocaust who have shared their stories. These survivors were forever affected by the violence and hatred associated with this period of time. The pain many have dealt with throughout their lives remains unimaginable to most of us today. It is vitally important to recognize the tragic events of the Holocaust, to honour those who were affected by these appalling acts of genocide and to remind us that they should never happen again. This is why we read the names of Holocaust victims each year.

Unto Every Person There is a Name.

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

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

**Mr. Gerrard:** Mr. Speaker, we remember the Holocaust. The dreadful, awful things that happened during the Holocaust are part of Yom Hashoah. I, too, was pleased to be able to participate in the ceremony this morning, Unto Every Person There is a Name. It recognizes something very, very important, and that is that each individual person who was killed during the Holocaust was a person and that we never should forget that.

I was also pleased to attend the ceremony by the Holocaust Memorial on the legislative grounds over the noon hour, to listen to students who had been to the Washington Holocaust Museum and to hear their memories of moments during their tour of the museum. Several years ago I had the opportunity also of visiting the same museum and seeing the memories, the facts, the things that happened that really were incredibly awful.

We need to remind ourselves constantly that such genocides are not restricted to what happened during the Second World War, that there was the awful famine and genocide, the Holodomor in Ukraine, that we had the awful situation in Rwanda and that even today we have terrible things happening in Darfur and that we need to be there time and time again to stand up and to make sure that these are recognized and that we're doing everything we can to prevent them in the future.

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

*A moment of silence was observed.*

## ORAL QUESTIONS

### Bill 37

#### Government Intent

**Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition):** Mr. Speaker, late yesterday afternoon, under the cover of a toxic cloud of NDP misinformation, the government tabled Bill 37. The government at the time said that that legislation provided a fixed date for the next election when, in fact, the date for the next election is not fixed under the legislation.

The legislation contains a Cabinet-appointed registrar for lobbyists when the right thing to do would be an independent officer responsible for lobbyists. It brought in new limits on political party communications and new limits on caucus communications. Here's the kicker, Mr. Speaker. At a time when Manitoba seniors, many of whom fought in wars to protect our democratic rights, are being asked to pay more for their prescription medicine, the bill contains a big, fat taxpayer-funded cheque to the Premier and his friends at NDP headquarters in order to give them an unfair advantage going into the next election campaign.

Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the Premier: After all these years in power, has he run out of ideas? Is he so desperate that he's now afraid of open debate?

**Hon. Gary Doer (Premier):** Mr. Speaker, we welcome debate. The Elections Act changes we believe are going to be very well received by the public of Manitoba. We have, obviously, the provision that's comparable to the federal government, Saskatchewan and British Columbia on a fixed election date.

Mr. Speaker, the members opposite, you know, complain about advertising in election campaigns. They spent more money than us on advertising in the last election campaign and—

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Doer:** They spent more money in the last election campaign. They spent double the advertising of Mr. Stuart Murray and got less seats, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps they feel that whining about the election results is admirable. I know that they certainly have carried on this campaign, this post-election campaign.

You know, Mr. Speaker, when the members opposite—and he was chief of staff when they spent incredible amounts of money in a pre-election effort, when they delayed the election to four and a half years. Instead of having the election in the spring of '99, they delayed it right through the summer into September of 1999.

They won't see any whining on my part. You go out and win the elections. You don't whine after, Mr. Speaker.

\* (14:20)

**Mr. McFadyen:** Mr. Speaker, nowhere in that newest toxic cloud of spin from the Premier did I hear a response to the question about the bill that was introduced late in the day yesterday.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier, who ducked all the debates during the election campaign, hid out in various backyards around the province, making announcements within the bubble that he operated with through the election campaign, refused to come to debates, has now introduced a piece of legislation where he put out misleading information about what was contained in the bill and also within that bill brought in new restrictions on those fundamental kinds of communications within a democratic society: the right of political parties to communicate with citizens; the right of elected members of the Legislative Assembly to communicate with citizens; the right of the public to know now who's involved in lobbying through an independent officer charged with the responsibility of keeping track of these things; and along with this package, a big fat cheque from Manitoba taxpayers, who don't have any choice about whether to pay taxes or not, going into the bank accounts of him and his friends at NDP headquarters to build up an unfair pre-election advantage.

Now, I want to ask the Premier, who's been in politics for more than 20 years—he's been Premier for more than eight years; he's been Premier for longer than George W. Bush has been president; he's won three elections, Mr. Speaker—why, at the height of his powers, would he run the risk, through the introduction of this bill, of having the Premier of Manitoba becoming known as a coward?

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**Mr. Speaker:** No. Order. Unparliamentary language is not accepted in this House, and the word you just used is very unparliamentary. So I ask the

honourable Leader of the Official Opposition to withdraw that word.

**Mr. McFadyen:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was concerned that—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. When someone breaches a rule in the House, and if the Speaker asks the person for a withdrawal, it should be unequivocal withdrawal without explanation.

The honourable Leader of the Official Opposition, I ask you to withdraw the word you used.

**Mr. McFadyen:** I withdraw the word, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

**Mr. Speaker:** I thank the honourable member for that, and the honourable First Minister has the floor.

**Mr. Doer:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the boldness to call an election in around the four-year period is something that I practised since I've been Premier. I did not hold on month after month after month when the member opposite was the chief of staff receiving memos from Greg Lyle asking them to advertise more in health care before the election, holding on month after month, the timidity of members opposite. I did not complain or whine about only three debates in 1999, including only one TV debate, as opposed to the six debates that he's been spinning to the media as being inadequate during the election campaign.

Mr. Speaker, every month that the Tories did not call an election, we did not complain about it. We did not cry about it. We went boldly into the campaign, knowing at the end of the day, all this—you can spend twice as much advertising, as you did in 2003, but if your message and your messenger are not consistent with what Manitobans want, you're going to get the result that you got in the last election campaign.

**Mr. McFadyen:** What a remarkable display of entitlement, that this Premier would think that you could spend hundreds of thousands of dollars of taxpayers' money without their consent, that he could enlist the help of third parties, that he could hide out in backyards and duck debates through the election campaign, and then stand up in the House today and make these sorts of comments.

He promised in the election campaign, and I quote: I will not build the hydro line on the west side of Manitoba. He made other statements through the

course of the election campaign that misled Manitobans. He hid from debates. He doesn't want to be held accountable.

Now he's introduced a bill under a toxic cloud of misinformation yesterday afternoon that doesn't do what they said it would do. It does other things. It limits political communications. It violates the Charter of Rights of our country.

I want to ask the Premier why it is that he's afraid of debate. Why won't he withdraw Bill 37 today?

**Mr. Doer:** The biggest entitlement a premier has, up to five years, is the right to call an election, which we have now proposed to the public that we have—

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Doer:** We have proposed, based on the advice from the Chief Electoral Officer, in terms of improving enumeration and advance polls, that we actually go to the date which we proposed, comparable wording to the federal government, comparable wording to British Columbia and Saskatchewan.

Mr. Speaker, contrary to the toxic spin yesterday, I also would point out—*[interjection]* Yes, there's a difference between a Lieutenant-Governor and Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council.

Mr. Speaker, I would also point out that members opposite oppose limits on third-party advertising. In fact, some of their surrogates were going to court, like the National Citizens' Coalition, the Taxpayers' Association, the group that wanted to get rid of the Canadian Wheat Board. Actually, a whole series of surrogates opposed the introduction of third-party limitations, and then there's sort of a conversion on the road to Damascus on this issue.

Thirdly, the member opposite is saying that this is unheard of in the western world in terms of political parties having rules outside of election periods. Mr. Speaker, New Brunswick brought that in first. It was a Conservative premier, Richard Hatfield. It was kept in place by Frank McKenna, a Liberal, by that good New Democrat, Bernard Lord, over the years.

He says there's nowhere else in the western world that has it. He might want to look in Saskatchewan. It is west of us in the western world.

So he spins the media in his toxic way. I know, Mr. Speaker—

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

We have to be cautious how we pick our words here. I just heard that he spins toxic comments. All members are honourable members, and I'm sure they bring factual information to the House.

The comment was just personalized. I ask the First Minister to withdraw that comment, please.

**Mr. Doer:** I withdraw and apologize, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** The honourable First Minister, thank you for that. You still have the floor.

**Mr. Doer:** It's not a hard thing to do, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much, and I want to continue on. I want to point out—

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**Mr. Speaker:** I need some co-operation from the House, please. We need to be able to hear the questions and the answers, please. Let's have some decorum. The honourable First Minister has the floor.

**Mr. Doer:** I also want to point out in this law that there is a similar wording to the provisions provided in the federal law in terms of media charging the same GRP point for ads in the election campaign.

I certainly am willing to fully divulge the GRP cost of our ads in the last campaign. I wonder if the member opposite wants to divulge all the GRP costs of the ads that they had in the last campaign. Maybe we should just check and see how hard done he was by that election campaign.

\* (14:30)

### **Bill 37 Government Intent**

**Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach):** Mr. Speaker, I'm glad the Premier has an easy time apologizing because he's got a lot more of it to do yet to Manitobans.

We know, Mr. Speaker, there's a great many things that this government wouldn't want Manitobans to continue to hear about. They don't want them to continue to hear about the \$2 billion extra that's going down the west-side hydro line, the unprecedented violent crime in the city of Winnipeg and the province of Manitoba, the unrelenting high

taxes in Manitoba. But the role of government isn't to hide from opposition; it's to defend its policy. It's not to stifle debate; it's to go out there and engage people in discussion.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 37 is an affront to those democratic principles. Can this Minister of Justice tell us what he's so scared about Manitobans continuing to hear that he had to bring in this undemocratic legislation?

**Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** Mr. Speaker, I would have thought that members of the opposition would have welcomed the fact that we're going to a fixed election date. I would have thought that members would reflect—

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Chomiak:** —that members would have welcomed that. I would have thought that the member would reflect on the fact that the issue of east side, west side was a matter of debate. In fact, less than one year ago, when the previous election that we followed after four years—unlike members opposite, we had an election campaign. East side, west side was debated. They took their position. We took our position. The results were well known. They made their spin about taxes. We talked about our programs. The result is well known.

Now we've brought forward a piece of legislation to have fixed election dates and—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Mr. Speaker, of all people, this Minister of Justice should know that government functions on a basis of checks and balances. This government is trying to erase the check and is trying to erase that balance. Manitobans have a right to hear about the failings of government. Opposition not only has a right but has a duty to report that to Manitobans. Bill 37 is a Trojan horse designed to hide within it undemocratic principles.

Can this Minister of Justice tell us which one of the failings of his government he's trying to stop Manitobans from continuing to hear about in the years ahead?

**Mr. Chomiak:** Yes, Mr. Speaker, I believe I heard the exact same kind of speech when we introduced our bill to ban corporate and union donations in the legislative process.

Now Mr. Speaker that we're attempting to bring in fixed election dates and where we see the unfrenzied spending, complete extravagant waste of energy in the country to the south of us where the only way you can get into office is to have millions and millions of dollars, I think it makes sense for all Manitobans to know we're going to have a fair and recognized process for the next four years and the next four years after that and the next four years after.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice and the Attorney General has a special role in this Legislature even though he chooses not to embrace it. As the Attorney General, his role is to protect the rights of all Manitobans, including democratic rights here in the Legislature. The fact that he would bring forward a bill, a Trojan horse bill that hides within it undemocratic principles, is unconscionable for any member but especially for this Minister of Justice.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Justice tell us whatever happened to free speech in Manitoba?

**Hon. Gary Doer (Premier):** Well, Mr. Speaker, we're free to speak every day in this Chamber. And we're free to speak outside of this Chamber. There's nothing stopping anyone from speaking in our society. I noticed the same lines were used by members opposite—

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Doer:** Banning union and corporate donations, there was the same concerns raised. Now in Ottawa you have similar bans in place and similar provisions on the financial side.

The third-party issue, it was opposed by the citizens coalition; it was opposed by Adrienne Batra and all the other groups, and now they complain about it because we did not want to have one court case in Ottawa and one court case in Manitoba, again saving taxpayers' money. They're all over the map.

### **Bill 38 Government Intent**

**Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West):** Bill 38 is a dangerous weapon in the Minister of Finance's arsenal of weapons. Bill 38 is a scud missile pointed directly at fiscal accountability in this province. Mr. Speaker, the new balanced budget legislation introduced yesterday is going to give the Finance Minister the legislative authority to cook the books. This bill gives the government the ability to pillage

Crown corporations, like Manitoba Hydro, who simply cannot afford it.

Mr. Speaker, how can this minister be so smug knowing full well, when he introduced Bill 38, that he removed all accountability from his government's spending?

**Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance):** Mr. Speaker, as I recall in the last election, it was the member opposite and his team that ran on raising hydro rates 40 percent and then using that for a tax cut. That would have constituted the largest raid on a Crown corporation since they sold off MTS to balance the books.

Mr. Speaker, this bill puts into law a requirement to have one set of books instead of two sets of books. That's what the members opposite had, two sets of books. We will only have one with only one bottom line. This bill puts into law that you can't use the Fiscal Stabilization Fund to balance the budget, which the members opposite did on a frequent basis. They used to count the revenue once as a surplus, put it into a fund, take it out and count it a second time to balance the budget again. That's no longer possible. No more double counts.

Mr. Speaker, one law, one bottom line—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Borotsik:** Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely absurd. What it gives this minister the ability to do is to expend for three years, over-expend and try to balance the budget in the four years. We just heard the Justice Minister say, in four years, in four years. They can drive us into bankruptcy in three years and try to balance the budget in the fourth year on the backs of the Crown corporations, on the backs of taxpayers of this province.

This minister, by having that one set of books, has the ability to hide everything that he possibly can, whether it's mismanagement, misspending, from the taxpayers of this province, Mr. Speaker.

Why is he taking such smug opportunity right now to make sure that Manitobans are hidden from his true fiscal mismanagement?

**Mr. Selinger:** Mr. Speaker, since 1998, Auditor Generals of Manitoba have said you should not have two sets of books. You should not leave the pension liability off the books. This bill puts the pension liability on the books. It puts it right there beside the general purpose debt. It has a requirement to pay it down on a regular formula-driven basis.

If there's a problem in one year that results in a shortfall of revenue overexpenditure, that has to be made up in subsequent years. You can't run away from a deficit in one year. The rolling average requires that you balance over a four-year period. So any difficulties have to be made up over time. It's more accountable; it's more transparent. It avoids all the problems that the members had put into law in the past which were a unique set of rules completely out of sync with generally accepted accounting principles.

**Mr. Borotsik:** Mr. Speaker, that is absolutely not true. What it does, it gives them the opportunity to cook the books for the three years. As a matter of fact, in this legislation in clause 3(1), it says that this doesn't have to be balanced in 2012. Well, guess what?—2012 comes conveniently after the next election. Four years. So what we're going to do is we're going to put forward a false fiscal picture right now showing full well that we don't have a deficit, borrow more money, borrow more money as they are wont to do and they're going to try and balance after an election.

Why can't he balance the books before the election and be honest with Manitobans?

**Mr. Selinger:** Mr. Speaker, I think the member has misread the legislation. The test is an annual balance. The test is an annual balance that takes into account a three-year rolling average which requires that experience to be accounted for the next year to balance the budget. If you don't do that, you will take a penalty, as prescribed in the legislation.

Now, let's look at the way members like to do business. They took three draws from the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, which counted the revenue twice and the Auditor—*[inaudible]*

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Selinger:** —Crown corporation and used the profits of that to balance. That is—*[inaudible]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Mr. Selinger:** —in this budget. They ignored the pension liability. That is now illegal under this law. They have to not use the Fiscal Stabilization Fund account for pension liabilities, have one bottom line and be transparent about it.

\* (14:40)

### **Workers Compensation Board Expansion of Coverage**

**Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris):** Mr. Speaker, today marks the deadline for employers to make submissions to the Workers Compensation Board regarding extension of coverage. A letter sent to stakeholders from the WCB in regard to extending Workers Compensation coverage states: The Manitoba government now intends to significantly increase Workers Compensation coverage.

In the 2005 Legislative Review Committee report, recommendation No. 7 states that the extension of coverage should only occur after employers and workers have had a full and free opportunity for consultation and discussion.

Mr. Speaker, does the minister believe that a directive stating what the government intends to do constitutes a full and free opportunity for consultation and discussion?

**Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Labour and Immigration):** I'm pleased to have an opportunity to put factual information on the record in regard to the expansion of coverage. The WCB is consulting for the second time in the last two years in regard to the expansion of coverage. There has been no expansion of coverage for WCB since 1959, Mr. Speaker. The industries that are covered actually remain almost the same as when the act was adopted in 1917.

I know this is going to be very difficult for members opposite, but expansion is probably going to occur once I've received information from the WCB.

**Mrs. Taillieu:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the minister has just said that she does intend to extend the coverage. Why the sham of this consultation, those 44,000 letters being sent out then?

She keeps talking about a unanimous recommendation from the advisory review board, but not one of those 100 recommendations says that there should be compulsory expansion to low-risk workplaces. Yet now a directive goes out saying what the government intends to do, and the minister just admits she's going to force this on employers.

Mr. Speaker, I have a simple question for the minister: Can she put the needs of workers in this province first and commit today that no industries will be forced to pay into Workers Compensation Board if they already have comparable or superior



benefits that they have in place right now with their employers?

**Ms. Allan:** Mr. Speaker, these are the facts. First of all, Manitoba has the lowest coverage of any jurisdiction in Canada at 70 percent, 70 percent. We have five jurisdictions in Canada with 90 percent coverage. We are consulting with employers and labour in regard to how we should proceed, following the unanimous recommendation in the report to expand coverage in three to five years.

I will wait till I receive the document from the WCB that will give me some indication as to what that consultation looked like. Then we will proceed once I have that information.

**Mrs. Taillieu:** Mr. Speaker, she can't do cherry-picking from the report because we know—she talks about unanimous, but we know there was a unanimous decision in that report, as well, that Workplace Safety and Health division should be funded from general revenues of the Province. They did not take that one on. They, instead, want to continue to leave that on the backs of premium-paying employers.

Low-risk employers offer more coverage than provided by the Workers Compensation Board, Mr. Speaker. They neither need nor want this coverage. All this does is increase the financial burden on businesses and organizations.

It's interesting, Mr. Speaker, that all the Crown corporations self-insure. If self-insurance is good enough for Manitoba Hydro, for MPI, for the Manitoba Lotteries Commission, for MLCC and for the Workers Compensation Board itself, why then is it not good enough for lowest-risk industries that already have insurance?

Why is she shoving it down their throat, Mr. Speaker?

**Ms. Allan:** Well, I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, that the MLA for Morris is so worked up about this issue. You know, we take our consultation with employers and labour very, very seriously in this province, and I'd like to thank the opposition for supporting the WCB legislation when it was passed in this House. The WCB legislation was passed unanimously. I'd like to remind them of that.

So as we proceed with—

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Ms. Allan:** I know members opposite are fresh from a leadership convention and a policy convention in Brandon three weeks ago, and the WCB—  
[interjection] Well, should be policy--

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

### **Building Canada Fund Implementation**

**Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson):** Mr. Speaker, the Premier (Mr. Doer) still has not signed the Building Canada Fund but there have been top-level discussions with the federal minister of Treasury about a \$75-million upgrade to the port of Emerson in regard to the Asia-Pacific Gateway and Corridor in conjunction with the Building Canada Fund.

I'd like to ask the Premier: Does he feel that that money that is being offered is going to be jeopardized by not signing the Building Canada Fund? Is he prepared to let this funding slip away?

**Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation):** Mr. Speaker, we're pleased to work with Minister Emerson on the Asia-Pacific Gateway corridors. We're looking at the improvement on Inkster and certainly looking at Highway No. 1 and Highway 16 with regard to the improvements on the Asia-Pacific Gateway.

As a government, we're indeed pleased to partner and work with the federal government on inland ports and other initiatives that we're looking forward to improve the economy of Manitoba for many, many years going forward.

**Mr. Graydon:** How long does the First Minister expect Vic Toews to sit there holding the money while he diddles away?

Mr. Speaker, in the Infrastructure and Transportation Estimates on Tuesday, the Minister of Infrastructure referenced the Building Canada Fund which he ensured us would be straightened out. He stated, and I quote: We will work with our partners in Ottawa and I'm sure amicably we will resolve that.

While this minister dithers, valuable projects such as the needed upgrade to the port of Emerson are on the back burner. Mr. Speaker, I ask the minister again: What will it take to get out his pen and sign a Building Canada Fund?

**Hon. Gary Doer (Premier):** There's a Web site, and I'll see if it's still up, from Building Canada Fund. It has a per capita amount for Manitoba. We said we'd sign that yesterday, two months ago, three

months ago, the per capita number. What we won't do is sign the number and have subtracted from it 50 percent based on the commitment made in February of 2007 by the same Mr. Toews and by Mr. Cannon.

They said the new—

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. The Honourable First Minister.

**Mr. Doer:** I'm surprised the Member for Brandon would not want money from the floodway subtracted and not have money for Brandon. That's not standing up for Brandon. That's standing up for partisan politics. We should put Manitoba first.

The bottom line is the floodway was promised to be outside of the infrastructure program. We'll sign that. We're not going to sign it if it's subtracted from the infrastructure program in Manitoba.

**Mr. Graydon:** Mr. Speaker, it's unfortunate that the minister has kept his high-level conversations and discussions away from his ministers. Surely the Minister of Infrastructure must recognize the value of ports to Manitoba's economy. Hundreds and hundreds of trucks go through our ports on a daily basis. Having top quality ports is critical to business and trade, and the port of Emerson is in need of upgrades.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Infrastructure again: What is he doing to get the port of Emerson's project underway and to secure the dollars from the Building Fund.

**Mr. Lemieux:** Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier answered the question, that we're not prepared to sign an agreement that takes 50 percent of the Building Canada Fund away.

The Member for Emerson should be standing up and speaking on behalf of his constituents in Manitoba with regard to his cousins in Ottawa and expressing the importance of a full fund, not half the fund.

We're just on the verge, Mr. Speaker, we're moving ahead nevertheless with regard to our friends in North Dakota, and very shortly we'll be signing an RFP with them looking at the border with regard to Pembina and Emerson. We still continue to work on behalf of Manitobans.

I just ask the Member for Emerson: Stand up on behalf of your constituents and Manitobans. Get the full package of money in the Building Canada Fund.

\* (14:50)

### Lake Dauphin Conservation

**Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose):** Mr. Speaker, seven years, close to half a million dollars, declining stocks, especially in two- and three- and four-year-old walleye, fishery in crisis, no co-management plan, no action is taken. No action will be needed; there won't be any walleye.

Is the minister going to continue to ignore the issue and hope it will go away or will she tell this House today the action she is going to take to protect the Lake Dauphin fishery?

**Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Water Stewardship):** Mr. Speaker, the only fishing that is going on is sustenance fishing for the people of the First Nations, respecting the treaties. Right now, there are Natural Resource officers out there. They are monitoring the fishing. They are looking at any illegal fishing that is going on. They are laying charges, as is appropriate. They are confiscating equipment, as is appropriate. There are elders out there who are educating the First Nations fishers to take only the post-spawned fish from the trap net, as has been set up.

This is a project that we're working with the West Region Tribal Council. We are looking at the long-term fishery, Mr. Speaker. We are looking at the sustenance fishery. We are looking at education. We are working with the community.

We will make sure that there will be a safe and long-term fishery in Dauphin Lake. It's unfortunate that members opposite don't believe that we should all be working with the community.

**Mr. Briese:** Mr. Speaker, there's a moratorium on the use of nets in the tributaries of Lake Dauphin. Yet we are told the province has placed a trap net on the Turtle River at Ste. Rose. Are they so arrogant as to ignore their own moratorium?

I ask the minister today: Will she go to Ste. Rose with me this Saturday, meet the people there and actually see what is going on?

**Ms. Melnick:** Mr. Speaker, despite misinformation from members opposite, the only fish that is being taken from the trap net are post-spawned fish. Pre-spawned fish are being returned back into the river, as is appropriate. There is staff from the Department of Water Stewardship, from the Fisheries branch, out there today. There are elders out there today. There

are chiefs who come by and talk to people who are angling. There are Natural Resource officers out there today.

I am aware of what is going on, Mr. Speaker. We are monitoring it. We are making sure that there are steps being taken for a long-term sustainable fishery that respects the treaty rights, and we are working with the local community.

**Mr. Briese:** The Minister of Water Stewardship has heard me mention the Turtle River, but I wonder if she's ever heard of the Vermillion River, the Ochre River, the Valley River, Wilson River, Crawford Creek, Crooked Creek or Mink Creek. They're all tributaries of Lake Dauphin, critical to walleye spawning areas.

I again ask the minister: Come to Dauphin; meet the people; go with me. I'll go up there with her, buy her lunch and let her talk to the people and see what is actually going on up there.

**Ms. Melnick:** Mr. Speaker, I am aware of the spawning that is taking place throughout the province right now. I've been to Dauphin many times. It is a beautiful part of our wonderful province. It is very important that we continue to work with the stakeholders. We continue to work with the—

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Ms. Melnick:** It is very important that we continue to work with the community, not only in the tributaries at this time of year, Mr. Speaker, but with all the fishers, recreational and commercial, throughout our province.

This government is doing that and I would love to go to Dauphin anytime that I could, Mr. Speaker.

### **Bill 37 Government Intent**

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster):** Mr. Speaker, once again, the Premier has succeeded in getting the headline that he wanted. He wanted Manitobans to believe that we have fixed election dates. The reality is that the only thing that he has successfully done is manipulated the situation.

Mr. Speaker, we do not have fixed election dates in the province of Manitoba, and the Premier knows full well that that is the case. June 14 is not necessarily the next provincial election date. The

Premier has the ability to be able to call the election any time he wants as long as it's before June 14.

My question to the Premier is: How is it possible that the Premier believes that he should be able to call the election before June 14?

**Hon. Gary Doer (Premier):** Mr. Speaker, the wording, if he notes his federal leader, Stéphane Dion, says that we have now got the right, we think, to call the election, because our legislation is modelled after the federal legislation. The only difference is the word "Governor General" is replaced with "Lieutenant-Governor." The word "Council" is not in the wording. The Premier deals with the Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council. The Prime Minister would be the Prime Minister-in-Council, but the substitution of Governor General is the Lieutenant-Governor.

There is a provision dealing with the flooding in the spring that would delay an election. But circle your calendar. If the legislation is passed as proposed—the members opposite obviously are going to be in committee—the next election will be, as in the headline, June 14, 2011.

If there's a minority government after that, which is rare in Manitoba, the requirement is for the Lieutenant-Governor to call the election, not the Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council. We went over that and used comparable wording to what's in place in Parliament today.

**Mr. Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, the Premier could say what he wants. The reality is that he can call the election before June 14. No matter how you try to spin it, Mr. Premier, you're wrong.

Further, if you look at the legislation, the NDP want to know more in terms of what it is that I want to produce. I have to pay for my own business cards. I have to pay for petitions that I table in this House because of restrictions of this government. They want to put even more restrictions on my abilities to be able to communicate to my constituents.

My question is to this Premier: Why does he have a double standard, that those that are in government can do what they want on propaganda, but when it comes to members of the opposition, he wants restrictions? Where does he get the justification to take the type of action he's taking?

**Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General):** Mr. Speaker, the last time I was aware, when we met at LAMC, benefits were

expanded to all members, including the Member for Inkster. That's the first thing. Secondly, benefits will be expanded under the new formula. Third thing, I've been over this bill with the lawyers and other lawyers. If the member is concerned about that election date, he will have the chance to ask the same lawyers that we asked when we drafted this legislation to ensure that it was a fixed date.

If he wants to amend it because we've done something inappropriate, because he's so much wiser than anyone in this Chamber, I'm still waiting for him to live up to his commitment that when he was wrong he would resign his seat. I think that speaks volumes about his legal acuity with respect to dealing with this act. But if he wants to change it or amend it or look at it or talk to our Legislative Counsel, he can do that any time. They're available and he can amend it, and we're going to have an election June 14 as long as there is not high water.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. Time for oral questions has expired.

**Mr. Lamoureux:** I would request leave to finish my question.

**Mr. Speaker:** Does the honourable member have leave to finish his last supplementary question? *[Agreed]*

**Mr. Lamoureux:** Mr. Speaker, I will take the Minister of Justice and the Premier (Mr. Doer) up on the idea of bringing forward amendments because I will bring forward amendments to the legislation to ensure that the legislation will be doing in law what it is that the Premier says he wants it to do, and that is to have a fixed election date.

Having said that, this legislation also puts in limitations on mailing rights. On the one hand, it's okay for the government to pump out all the mail and literature it wants through its departments and so forth, while at the same time it wants to put limits on my abilities to be able to put mail into the mailboxes of Manitobans.

Again I ask the Premier: On what grounds does he base having a double standard for members of opposition versus government members? It's disgraceful.

\* (15:00)

**Mr. Chomiak:** Mr. Speaker, the member is wrong. The legislation—

**Some Honourable Members:** Oh, oh.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. We're almost there.

**Mr. Chomiak:** Mr. Speaker, we have always had mailing privileges as members of the Legislature. We're going to continue to have mailing privileges as members of the Legislature. We are making the accountability of spending that money public, and it'll be provided to the public for the first time so everybody can know what everyone is doing.

If the member has difficulty with the way that people have drafted the legislation—they are experts in drafting; I'm not an expert in drafting—he can talk to the drafters. We follow their advice.

But what the member's saying in his first question is wrong, and what he's saying in his second question is wrong, and what he said in his third question is wrong, Mr. Speaker, but I'm prepared to entertain any amendments that would clarify his misunderstanding.

## MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

### Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Memorial Day

**Ms. Sharon Blady (Kirkfield Park):** Today, on Yom Hashoah, Holocaust remembrance day, we remember those who were the victims of state-sponsored, systematic persecution and annihilation by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945. Earlier this week, all members of this House joined together to denounce those who would deny the events of the Holocaust in passing unanimously a resolution condemning Holocaust denial.

Mr. Speaker, Jews were the primary victims of the Holocaust. Six million were murdered. Gypsies, persons with disabilities and Poles were also targeted for destruction or decimation for racial, ethnic or national reasons. Millions more, including homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Soviet prisoners of war and political dissidents also suffered grievous oppression and death under Nazi tyranny.

Today, here in Winnipeg and throughout the world, victims of Nazism will be remembered and their names read aloud by Holocaust survivors, by family members of victims of the Holocaust and by prominent and private citizens.

As part of Unto Every Person There is a Name, which has been presented for the past 15 years by the League for Human Rights of B'nai Brith Canada, I

was honoured to join with many of my colleagues to read the names of Shoah victims inscribed on the monument on the grounds of the Legislative Building. This monument was erected in 1985.

Manitobans defend human rights and are passionately committed to the principles of diversity and multiculturalism. Canada's commitment to human rights and the history of both egregious transgressions and great victories over oppression will be embodied and enshrined for all time in the Canadian human rights museum to be built in Winnipeg.

It is imperative that we all take a moment to think about those who lost their lives and recall them in our hearts and minds. I would like to thank B'nai Brith Canada for the very moving ceremony today, and every day we should think about what we can do to stop hatred and discrimination in our society. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

#### **Indo-Canada Chamber of Commerce**

**Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood):** Mr. Speaker, as deputy leader, I was pleased to attend, on behalf of the PC caucus, the launch of the Indo-Canada Chamber of Commerce, ICCC Winnipeg Council.

I would like to congratulate all those who worked toward bringing this successful national organization to the Winnipeg Indo-Canadian business community. Amongst several special guests who were in attendance were Council General Satish Mehta, National ICCC President Sunil Jagasia and interim chair of the ICCC Winnipeg Council Digvir Jayas.

The Indo-Canadian business community, indeed, all of Manitoba, will doubtlessly benefit from the future work and opportunities the ICCC will provide.

I would also like to acknowledge the Member for Radisson (Mr. Jha), who's enthusiasm for an ICCC Winnipeg Council is to be commended.

The ICCC, a privately-funded, not-for-profit business organization founded in the late 1970s, and which now has over 1,200 members, has been instrumental in fostering the development of what is now an impressive network of international business representatives, governments and other pertinent third parties. The benefits that have derived from the forging of these new communication corridors and co-operative efforts are an unprecedented blossoming of trade and commerce between Canadian,

Indian and other international businesses and consumer markets.

In addition to nurturing the growth of new markets, the ICCC has also played an integral role in providing a supportive community environment for Indo-Canadian professional and business development. By offering a public forum, the ICCC is able to effectively transmit business and social capital among members by allowing them to share information, business strategies as well as access education and development training opportunities. A review of their future plans reveals the ICCC is committed to continuing its role in supporting, educating and cultivating the Indo-Canadian business community.

I would like to congratulate everyone involved whose work was successful in bringing this important organization to Winnipeg, as well as thank them for their continued efforts in strengthening our local economy and strengthening our communities. Special recognition must also be given to Romel Dhalla. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

#### **Student Recognition**

**Ms. Marilyn Brick (St. Norbert):** Mr. Speaker, a number of outstanding students in my constituency have been acknowledged recently for their excellent work. We all know that our children are our future and I say that, if these students are anything to go by, we have a wonderful future ahead of us.

Four students at Dalhousie elementary school recently placed in the top 10 in Manitoba at the Canadian National Math League Contest. Dancheng Hu, who also placed 15th in Canada, placed first in Manitoba. Michael Pang placed second and Temulun Bagen and Amy Pochanart both tied for eighth place.

Acadia Junior High's Devon Sawatzky and Fort Richmond Collegiate's Nishant Balakrishnan both got top awards at the Manitoba Schools Science Symposium for their work on a device to warn deaf people of oncoming traffic and a robot used to search for landmines, respectively. They will be representing Manitoba at the Canada Wide Science Fair to be held in Ottawa this month.

Fellow Fort Richmond Collegiate student Beth Ferreira is another outstanding example of the talent that exists in the schools in my constituency. With her research on mercury contamination in ring seals, Beth won the gold medal in earth and environmental sciences at last year's Canada Wide Science Fair, as well as the gold medal at the Sanofi-Aventis

BioTalent competition. She will be competing at the national Sanofi-Aventis competition in Ottawa next month and at the International Science fair in Atlanta after that.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to applaud the work done on behalf of everyone here, by the teachers, the staff and the mentors at Dalhousie elementary school, Acadia Junior High and Fort Richmond Collegiate.

I also ask all honourable members to join me in congratulating these students for their successes and wish them the very best in all their future endeavours. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

#### **Arnold Frieman**

**Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo):** Today on Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Memorial Day, we honour the philosophy behind the truth: Unto every person there is a name. With each name there is a heartbreaking story.

Among those who read the names of lives lost this morning was my constituent, Arnold Frieman. He is a Holocaust survivor who lost his family to the Nazis' atrocities. His personal experiences and courage are moving, both to me and to members of our community.

As a teenager in Hungary, Mr. Frieman survived the ravages of the Nazis' regime, but his parents, siblings and extended family, sadly, did not. After escaping Hungary and travelling to Norway, Mr. Frieman went on to bravely serve in the Israeli War of Independence. He later settled in Winnipeg where he overcame the great sorrows of his past to become a dedicated family man, entrepreneur and local leader.

Mr. Speaker, in honour of Mr. Frieman, a Holocaust survivor, and the members of his loving family who perished during the Holocaust, I'd like to read into the record the poem, *Unto Every Person There is a Name*. This verse expresses what we must hold true.

"Unto Every Person There is a Name / bestowed upon him by God / and given to him by his father and mother. / Unto Every Person There is a Name / accorded him by his stature / and the manner of his smile / and given him by his style of dress. / Unto Every Person There is a Name conferred on him by the mountains and given him by his neighbours. / Unto Every Person There is a Name assigned him by his sins / and given him by his yearnings. / Unto

Every Person There is a Name given to him by his enemies / and given him by his love. / Unto Every Person There is a Name derived from his festivals / and given him by his labour. / Unto Every Person There is a Name presented him by the seasons / and given him by his blindness. / Unto Every Person There is a Name."

Mr. Speaker, earlier this week we passed unanimously in this House, a private member's resolution condemning Holocaust denial. I was proud to have been given the opportunity to say a few words in support of this resolution and want to thank the Member for Fort Rouge (Ms. Howard) for bringing it forward in this House, then giving us all an opportunity to stand before Manitobans and condemn Holocaust denial. Thank you very much.

\* (15:10)

#### **International Labour Day**

**Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood):** Mr. Speaker, today is International Labour Day or May Day. This is an excellent opportunity to reflect on some of the events that have shaped our world into what it is today. In 1886, workers in the United States and Canada walked off the job in support of an eight-hour work day. The strikes called by the Knights of Labour pushed back against the oppressive lifestyle being forced on labourers. One of the fundamental ways we balance our lives between work and family today started as labour action over 120 years ago.

We must also mark one of the great labour actions of the modern era which became a major victory in the right to collective bargaining. Mr. Speaker, the 1919 General Strike started on May 15, with the women from the telephone system at the vanguard of both the picket lines and the calls for change. By the end of the second day, 35,000 Winnipeg workers, the majority of them unorganized, had left their jobs in an unprecedented demonstration of solidarity in support of fair treatment, dignity and justice for all working people.

One year later in 1920, Winnipeggers marked the first May Day to protest the imprisonment of the 1919 General Strike leaders. I would like to also recognize the courage of Frederick John Dixon. Dixon was a lone Labour MLA in 1919 and would go on to lead the Independent Labour Party in 1920, securing eight seats with an additional two Socialist seats.

I'm proud to be part of a government that is making a difference in the lives of average working

families in Manitoba. The minimum wage in Manitoba has been increased eight consecutive times since taking office. We've given workers access to unpaid compassionate leave, improved protection for children and improved statutory holiday pay for part-time workers.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to be part of a government that knows how important workers are to our society. I wish all Manitobans a happy International Labour Day.

### ORDERS OF THE DAY (Continued)

#### GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

**Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance):** I'd like to call the Committee of Supply, Mr. Speaker. *[interjection]*

I'd like to, through the orders of the day, resolve into Committee of Supply, please, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** The House will now resolve into Committee of Supply. In the Chamber will be Education, Citizenship and Youth; Room 255 will be Conservation; and Room 254 will be Advanced Education and Literacy.

Will the appropriate Chairs please go to your respective rooms, please.

### COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

#### ADVANCED EDUCATION AND LITERACY

\*(15:20)

**Madam Chairperson (Marilyn Brick):** Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Advanced Education and Literacy.

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

**Hon. Diane McGifford (Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy):** Just prior to the questioning, I'd like to introduce Heather Reichert, who is the Deputy Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy and who wasn't able to be with us yesterday.

Also, I wanted to respond to a question concerning the deputy minister asked yesterday by

my colleague. My colleague asked if Heather Reichert was still on secondment from Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, and the answer is, yes, she is.

**Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood):** I'd like to take this moment to congratulate Heather on her position, and I hope she's finding it very interesting and fulfilling. I'm sure there are probably similar challenges as in Health and that was a big load there. I wish her well in this job.

I guess, based on the fact and I was interested to know whether Ms. Reichert was still on secondment from the WRHA. I would ask then, whether or not it is the WRHA that is paying the salary.

**Ms. McGifford:** Thank you for the question. Indeed, Heather shouldn't be congratulated for being here; I should be congratulated for having her. She's so wonderful. I'm just delighted to have her and she's doing fabulous work.

I'm told that her salary is paid by the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, and then government reimburses the regional health authority.

**Mrs. Driedger:** My question then is why the roundabout way in doing that.

I don't feel particularly comfortable asking about Ms. Reichert in this way. I'm not taking offence with her, because I know that this is not necessarily her doing. I would just like to say to Ms. Reichert that this is not any personal criticism to her, it is just trying to find the correct information about this.

It has been some concern for us for awhile because there are others, and there is another deputy minister, I believe, that is paid by the WRHA as well. This just does not give a sense of transparency and accountability considering that these individuals have been here in government for some time.

I'm going to ask—it's almost like a charade: Why would secondments be allowed?

Why not a clearer line of accountability and just sever the relationship with the WRHA instead of making it look like there could be perceived conflicts of interest and numerous other things. It does not paint a good and clear picture.

I'm wondering why the government continues down this road of putting these two very talented people that are in the jobs of deputy ministers—why is the government putting them in the position of leaving them on the secondments? Why not just

make it clean and clear? The job's there and it's paid for by government, straight up.

**Ms. McGifford:** I, of course, have no knowledge as to this second person. I don't even know who this person may be so that second person need not concern us in these Estimates.

Of course, Ms. Reichert is a professional, and she'll take nothing that's said here personally. I am informed that it is her personal choice. This arrangement is at least partly her personal choice as the transfer of her pension is hugely costly and that there is no conflict because the WRHA is her paymaster only.

**Mrs. Driedger:** I'll accept that statement for now and move on to another topic.

In the budget it was stated by this government that student debt was down by 26 percent, and they credited the tuition freeze for that. Can the minister tell us if that is just public debt, or does that also include private debt, or debt to family members as well?

**Ms. McGifford:** That, of course, includes only public debt because we in government have no way of assessing as to what private debt may be.

Personally, I can't quite remember what it says in the budget. Of course, the tuition freeze is one of the reasons for the low level of debt in Manitoba, but there are several other reasons. I think we dealt with some of our student supports yesterday.

Let me briefly reiterate that one of the very excellent instruments in controlling student debt in Manitoba is the Manitoba Bursary, which is now about \$8.3 million. Secondly, another very helpful instrument was the Canadian Millennium Scholarship, which was funded by the federal government. The foundation was funded by the federal government, and it is now in its last year, which, we think, is, indeed, unfortunate.

There are several other instruments that we have, such as ACCESS program, although that doesn't really minimize student debt, but there is an ACCESS bursary which isn't part of either of the two that I've mentioned. So there are several instruments. I invite the member to look under the Student Aid section of the Estimates book where most of them are listed.

**Mrs. Driedger:** I think what the government did with their budget is cherry-pick a little bit about

student debt, because it's one thing to publicly say, well, student debt is down by 26 percent, and, you know, credit this as being some of the best statistics in Canada, but there is no data out there that actually does say what their private debt is or what the debt is to family members.

I'm told by students whom I've been meeting with that that is something that is a growing concern for them, because there are a number of students that are turned down for student loans and then are going out and they are then getting loans through banks or through family members. So there's really no good reliable number out there that actually does indicate what student debt is in Manitoba.

I'd like to ask the minister how she can say in the budget that Manitoba has the lowest student debt levels outside Québec when, in fact, that could be a very misleading statement, grossly misleading and false, because this minister does not know what the private debt is of the students.

**Ms. McGifford:** When we talk about student debt and make the point that we have the second-lowest student debt in the country, we are comparing, of course, public debt in other jurisdictions to our public debt. Other jurisdictions do not weigh and measure their private debt because, as I told the member, neither Manitoba, nor Québec, nor Saskatchewan, nor Ontario, nor any other province or territory in the country has the wherewithal to measure private debt. So we are comparing like debts.

**Mrs. Driedger:** So can I ask the minister, then, why her government doesn't make that a more clear statement in the budget or to the media, rather than taking those quick sound bites that make things look good, and giving credit to a tuition freeze, when, in fact, it could be quite a different number in total when more and more students may be forced to be taking out private debt? Why isn't that more clearly articulated, instead of the cherry-picking that seems to go on with the language that's used?

\* (15:30)

**Ms. McGifford:** I guess cherry-picking is the flavour of the week, that particular expression. I think that it's very clear that we're referring to public debt. I can't imagine anybody thinking otherwise. I don't think the media are deluded. I'm sorry that the member opposite has been deluded. I give her clear information today.



**Mrs. Driedger:** The government announced in their budget that they will be choosing a commissioner, appointing a commissioner to decide how to manage lifting the tuition freeze. Can the minister indicate how she's going to go about picking that commissioner, whether that commissioner will be totally independent of any partisan involvement and when that person might be in place?

**Ms. McGifford:** I can assure the member opposite that this issue is being worked on. I can assure the member opposite that the individual who is selected will be a professional who is recognized as a professional across the country. I can assure the member that, when an announcement is made, she will be duly informed.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Does the minister expect to have that person in place before we recess, or is that going to take a little bit longer than that?

**Ms. McGifford:** I'm not giving a time line today.

**Mrs. Driedger:** When we were last talking in Estimates last go around, certainly we were looking at a number of challenges that universities were facing and urgent capital costs and deferred maintenance challenges because universities were using their capital dollars because they didn't have enough operating dollars and they had to defer maintenance projects to the point it reached quite a critical stage. I'm not going to repeat all of the statistics or the percentages of buildings that were crumbling at that time, but it was certainly significant numbers. For instance, at the University of Manitoba, it was something like 64 percent of the buildings were in either very, very poor or critical condition. We had talked about \$3 million a year, and I believe that the minister confirmed that it was \$3 million a year that went from COPSE for maintenance. That number has been pretty static for the past 20 years, and the minister claimed that it was unchanged. Is that still the amount that is given for maintenance, you know, outside of other grants, but is that still the figure that is maintained, \$3 million a year for maintenance projects?

**Ms. McGifford:** Madam Chair, I was very delighted about 10 days ago to be at the University of Manitoba to announce government funding for Project Domino, which is \$47 million to be flowed over three years. The member will know, of course, that much of Project Domino will address deferred maintenance considerations at the University of Manitoba. I can also assure the member that it was very, very obviously well received at the University

of Manitoba by the president and the vice-presidents. Indeed, the president told me that this is the best news that she's had since she became president in 1996.

I take this opportunity on the record to congratulate President Szathmáry since she's leaving on the 1st of July, but I do think it was her creativity and hard work and determination that was responsible for Project Domino. I don't think I've ever had the opportunity to actually put on the record what a wonderful president she's been. So I do say that today.

Also, I want to point out to the member that, in the budget, the Finance Minister announced \$100 million over two years for university capital, and I want to tell the member today that \$40 million of that is earmarked for deferred maintenance

**Mrs. Driedger:** When I look at the deferred maintenance costs that are out there, and I understand that the numbers are significantly higher than \$40 million if you take all the universities together, how does the minister think that those deferred maintenance projects are going to be able to be dealt with, with \$40 million?

**Ms. McGifford:** Well, I'd say it's \$40 million more than was put into deferred maintenance in the '90s. I'd also point out to the member opposite that I did also cite \$47 million devoted to Project Domino, much of which is related to deferred maintenance considerations, and we are starting with \$40 million. That isn't to say it's the only funding that will ever be directed to deferred maintenance, but \$40 million over three—no, over two years, pardon me, over one year is probably just about all that can be used by the system in one year.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Certainly, the universities were very concerned over the obsolete lab equipment that has been in place in a lot of their labs. I know that we raised the issue in Estimates last time, and I know that the universities, the students were also coming out. In Brandon they actually raised this as very, very serious concerns. There was indication that some of the lab equipment was far older than the students were. It certainly has taken a lot of public pressure and pressure from various people to try to get the government to move on addressing the fact that so much lab equipment was obsolete.

Can the minister give us some indication as to what priority she's put on that and the kind of money that has flowed into that recently and whether or not

she thinks that's going to solve the serious problems that they've all raised?

**Ms. McGifford:** Well, the government and I have given it so much priority that the day before the budget we announced \$5.2 million to be devoted to lab equipment. I announced it in Winnipeg, and my colleague the Member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell) announced it in Brandon. We're looking for a breakdown so that I can read it into the record for the member, but I know people in Brandon were absolutely delighted. The president of the University of Winnipeg, Dr. Lloyd Axworthy, was delighted, as was Dr. Szathmáry. We also flowed money to CUSB and a small amount to University College of the North, so, yes, it is a priority. As I said, it's such a priority that we've already—we went out ahead of the budget to announce money funding for lab equipment.

**Mrs. Driedger:** I thought the minister went out with that in order to try to deflect from the fact that the tuition freeze was not going to be in the budget, the thaw of the tuition freeze.

**Ms. McGifford:** That just shows how wrong people can be.

**Mrs. Driedger:** I would like to, at this point, also acknowledge, as the minister has, Emőke Szathmáry for the incredible work that she has done in her position at the University of Manitoba. I think it's going to be very big shoes to fill when she leaves. I was delighted to hear that she wants to make her home here in Winnipeg even after she retires. She has been a remarkable force at the university, very articulate on a number of fronts, and, I think, has been an incredible asset, not just to the University of Manitoba, but to the university community, the post-secondary community here in Manitoba and across Canada. I think it will be a great loss, but we do wish her well in her retirement.

\* (15:40)

The one thing that she has made clear over many, many years and has spoken out about it passionately, too, was what she viewed as a lack of adequate funding for post-secondary education in Manitoba, feeling that the tuition freeze really hurt, that the lack of backfilling really hurt to the point that we've seen some significant challenges that have arisen because of it over the last eight years. When you see those kinds of cuts to post-secondary funding, it is inevitably going to have a profound

effect on post-secondary education, especially when we're trying to create students that can learn in an environment that prepares them well for a global economy, for an economy that is demanding students that do have post-secondary education.

I know she beat her head against the wall a lot trying to get this minister and this government's attention, and spoke passionately about it on a number of occasions, and, I think, was very disappointed that year after year no action was taken. I think it would've been a great gift to her had this minister, this year, in this last budget, actually removed that freeze this year as everybody was being led to believe was going to happen.

Nevertheless, I do know that Project Domino was something that I think they see as a good project there. I think it definitely has some merit, but certainly what we've seen with post-secondary funding—more specifically, I think with universities—is that they have really had to fight a lot, beat their head against the wall and beat their chest to try to get the attention of this government over the last eight years. I don't think they were doing it because they were looking for money they didn't need. If you talk to people at many levels within the institutions, I think they were feeling really with their backs against the wall, that they did not have the dollars they needed to create the excellence in education that they were hoping to create.

Because of that, I think there was a feeling that we were becoming less competitive in some ways across the country. Then when you hear one of the professors at the university make reference to University of Manitoba becoming a farm team to Saskatchewan, because we are losing our competitive edge because of the inadequate funding over the last number of years, it raises some huge concerns. But I give the universities credit for what they're trying very hard to do, and I do wish Dr. Szathmáry all the very best in what she's done for us here in Manitoba and do wish her well in her retirement.

I'd ask the minister if any universities are currently running a deficit.

**Ms. McGifford:** Just to respond a little bit to some of the member's comments, I, first of all, think that Dr. Emőke Szathmáry would be very shocked if she could hear the member speak as she does about her institution, of which Dr. Szathmáry has been such a champion and which has so much to be proud of. I have a whole sheaf of accomplishments from the

University of Manitoba, but I don't want to take the time to read them into the record. But I do suggest that the member acquaint herself with the kinds of cutting-edge research, the kind of internationally respected researcher, writer, scholar that is part and parcel of the faculty at University of Manitoba, because she really is doing the institution a disservice by speaking so disparagingly of it on the record.

Now, I do also want to make the point to the member opposite that from 1990 to 1999-2000, the increase in funding to our post-secondary institutions was 16 percent. During a similar period, that is from 1999-2000 to '08-09, the increase has been 63.4 percent, or approximately 400 percent more in the same time period, so I don't think that this member opposite has anything to tell me about what to do with institutions. If I were her, I would sit in my chair with my head bowed, eyes averted, quietly eating humble pie.

**Mrs. Driedger:** I wish the minister would have paid a little bit more attention to the comments that were made. She's playing around with some words right now. There were no disparaging comments about the successes of any of our institutions. I, in fact, think that they have done great things and have many accomplishments, but they've had a hurdle of trying to work with this government and their tuition freeze.

I think the minister needs to listen most carefully in relationship to what those comments were and not try to twist what I was saying, because I find that extremely offensive. There are wonderful things that are happening in our universities, and the University of Manitoba has a lot to be proud of; there's a lot of talent there, but imagine what more could be happening if they didn't have to fight this government all the time over the past eight years to be able to accomplish much more than what they've been able to do. They have done a lot, but it's in spite of this government and not in co-operation. That is exactly right.

I would urge the members here that are chirping from their chairs, that maybe they needed to be following the comments that are out there much more carefully. I'm not sure they've met with the people that have been providing this information. I'm not sure that either of the two of them have sat down with the university presidents and had any comments about what the tuition freeze and what the funding has done here in Manitoba.

Certainly, the members here that are choosing to heckle are being, I think, out of line because they haven't been involved in these portfolios to the same degree as the people that are running the universities. I really don't think they know what they've heckling about.

The universities have all commented—whether it's been Lloyd Axworthy, Emőke Szathmáry, Louis Visentin from Brandon University, they've all commented about the challenges that they faced and the effect it has had on providing the kind of quality education, and the challenges they felt at trying to become competitive, to attract the professors and the students and have the ability to do everything that they have the potential to do.

I just urge the minister to be a little bit more selective in what she's choosing to put on the record, because I'm certainly not disparaging in any way about the accomplishments. My disparaging comments are related to the tying the hands behind the backs of the universities by this government, which, I think, has put a hurdle in place for what they could or couldn't accomplish. I think they've done a lot, despite having to work within that environment.

So I'll ask the minister again if any universities are currently running a deficit.

**Ms. McGifford:** Madam Chair, I guess, if their hands had been tied in the first decade of the 2000s, in the 1990s their feet and hands were tied and their mouths were gagged, because that was a terrible time for universities and colleges. It's still referred to, I believe, as the dark ages of the '90s.

So I don't know if the member is—[interjection]

**Madam Chairperson:** Order. If the minister could bring her mike just a little closer. Thank you.

**Ms. McGifford:** —I don't know if the member is aware that this year the increase to universities in operating grants was 5 percent, and there was an additional 2 percent that was related to an institution's dependence on tuition, so the University of Manitoba received actually an increase of 8.4, as did the University of Winnipeg.

\* (15:50)

I know that the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) had suggested that grants to universities and colleges be tied to GDP. I don't know what the GDP was this year, or maybe it was CPI, GDP? I don't know what it was; I don't know if any of my

staff know. *[interjection]* About 2.9, all right. So, instead, under an NDP government, they got 8.4.

If, indeed, the opposition were handing out grants to institutions, it would have been about 5 percent lower. I don't know what the member wants to do with that, but the answer to her question is no. No universities are running deficits.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Again, the minister is cherry-picking some of her information a little bit there in terms of what she is saying was a commitment by us at any point in the last election or since, but I would also indicate that the minister knows very well, and we've had this conversation numerous times, that the '90s were a tough decade. There were huge challenges with the recession, and I know the other members sitting here weren't in government in those days so maybe a little history lesson wouldn't hurt.

There was a recession, and I know the two members here might not realize that, and they would probably not also know about federal cutbacks that were unilaterally made by a federal Liberal government to the tune of a billion dollars. Within about a four-year period, the federal government held back a billion dollars. I really wonder what an NDP government would have done in that position because we've seen how this NDP government manipulates numbers, fudges numbers.

I really wonder what this government would do if, in fact, they were faced with a billion-dollar cutback from the federal government. I think they would have a heck of a time because, right now, they're flowing in money that we haven't seen in generations in this province from the federal government. They've had more money than Gary Filmon could have dreamt about in the '90s. So I think it's a little bit disingenuous for them to be sitting here heckling the way they are when they weren't around in those days to see the kind of tough decisions that had to be made.

Yes, they were tough, and some of them were not popular, but I don't know what they would have done different because I don't think these two that are sitting here heckling have the expertise to be able to manage the kind of situation that was faced in the '90s. Those were huge, huge challenges, and I think it's pretty shameful that we always see heckling like this without the knowledge that goes behind the kind of decisions that were tough in those days.

With a government that is flowing in money and is expecting 40 percent of the money spent in

Manitoba right now is coming from taxpayers in other provinces. Madam Chair, 40 percent of the budget here in Manitoba, it comes from taxpayers. Yes, it comes from taxpayers in Saskatchewan, Ontario, Alberta, B.C., all the provinces.

Other than P.E.I., this government's the most reliant on federal handouts. If you didn't have that, this government would be in big trouble, so lucky we didn't have an NDP government when there was a recession or federal cutbacks. Although I imagine they're going to be facing some challenges in the next while if this downturn becomes any worse because I think they'll have a hard time trying to rein in some of their spending.

I'd like to ask the minister, back to the question now that the heckling has slowed down here, and the minister did indicate that no university is running a deficit. I understand that, for a while there, the University of Winnipeg was, and I'd like to ask the minister what happens because I understand there's balanced budget legislation. What happens when a university does run a deficit? What's the process that happens when that occurs?

**Ms. McGifford:** Madam Chairperson, there isn't an institution that is running a deficit, so it is a hypothetical question, and I'm not in the business of answering hypothetical questions.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Well, I understand that the Auditor had done a review—

**Madam Chairperson:** If the honourable member could just bring her mike a little bit closer; you're kind of drifting away a little bit.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Sorry.

**Madam Chairperson:** Thank you.

**Mrs. Driedger:** I understand that the office of the Auditor General had done a review and it was related to the University of Winnipeg, and this review was done in 2004. There was indication that the University of Winnipeg was in a deficit position, and there were a number of recommendations made by the Auditor that would help the University of Winnipeg to better manage their finances and to—I guess a number of recommendations that would help to prevent those kinds of situations from happening again. So I think it's a logical question to ask the minister that if a university were to be running a deficit, what is the minister's role in a situation like that? I don't think that's a hypothetical question.

**Ms. McGifford:** Well, again, to return to the question; the question was: Is any institution currently running a deficit? And the answer is no. No institution is currently running a deficit.

Now, I do understand that in 2004 the incoming president, Dr. Lloyd Axworthy, asked the Auditor to look at the finances of the institution as he was becoming the president of the institution, and I do understand that—[interjection] Certain recommendations were made as a result of that audit, and as a result of that audit, the institution ran a balanced budget. Of course, the role of the minister is to insist with institutions that they run balanced budgets, and our institutions have run and are running balanced budgets.

**Mrs. Driedger:** I'd like to thank the minister for that answer.

University College of the North, is there any movement towards erecting, you know, an actual new facility for that? I'll just leave it at that for now.

**Ms. McGifford:** Yes, there is. As the member might know, announcements have been made about refurbishing the building in The Pas, which is a much superior building than the facility that is currently in Thompson, and then the plan is to make a completely—build a completely new building in Thompson because the building there is quite old. If the member's been there, she will see that they really do need a new one. My understanding is that we are currently—my department is currently working with the Community and Economic Development Committee and with Infrastructure, the department of the honourable Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux), and we expect that in the next two or three months there will be an RFP out.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Has there been a dollar figure put onto this?

**Ms. McGifford:** The announced amounts were \$33 million for Thompson and \$17 million for The Pas.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Can the minister indicate where that money's going to come from?

**Ms. McGifford:** It will come from the government's capital fund.

**Mrs. Driedger:** I'd like to switch gears. I know we don't have a lot of time left, and I'd like to switch gears to talk about student aid. I have met with the Canadian Federation of Students and I had a very interesting meeting with them. They indicate that

Manitoba has the highest student loan interest rates in the country. They have recommended reducing the Manitoba student loan interest rates to the borrowing rate of the government of Manitoba. I know that, I believe, in this budget this government did drop those interest rates by 1 percentage point.

Can she confirm that, in fact, those interest rates were dropped by 1 percent, and is there any movement to look at changing that any further, or is that where that will be?

\* (16:00)

**Ms. McGifford:** Well, I think to say that Manitoba had the highest rates in the country is slightly misleading because Manitoba had the same rate as six other jurisdictions. There were only a couple of other jurisdictions, I believe, Newfoundland, P.E.I., Québec and Nova Scotia, and Ontario, actually areas where tuition was either extremely high or where student loan rates were extremely high or where both were extremely high. Manitoba's was the same as that of the six other jurisdictions, for example, B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan, et cetera.

In this budget, we did drop to prime plus one and a half; in other words we dropped student loans by 1 percent. That only applies, of course, to Manitoba. We have no control over federal loans at all which are prime plus two and a half. The student loan, 60 percent is federal, and 40 percent, provincial.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Madam Chairperson, just to indicate to the minister when I was indicating that Manitoba has the highest student loan interest rates in the country, I was reading from the Canadian Federation of Students document called, *First Aid for Student Aid*, so that is where all my questions are coming from.

**Ms. McGifford:** Is that a public document?

**Mrs. Driedger:** Yes, and the minister would have it.

**Ms. McGifford:** Thank you.

**Mrs. Driedger:** The students also made an indication that the student-aid system provides very little aid for part-time students, a demographic that has been growing rapidly for the past decade, and no grants are awarded to part-time students. Can the minister indicate why? I guess I'm asking that because I'm still fairly new to this portfolio and wonder why that is as it is.

**Ms. McGifford:** Madam Chairperson, I'm told that CSLP, that is, the Canadian Student Loan Program, has just made considerable improvements to loans to part-time students.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Can the minister indicate whether vehicles are still, like if a student owns a car, if that is still part of the equation in looking at how much of a loan is given to a student?

**Ms. McGifford:** Yes, I'm told that it is \$5,000 for a vehicle. That is the federal policy and, along with most jurisdictions, we follow the federal policy.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Now, I understand that that's been in there for a very long time, and you could correct me if I'm wrong, but in today's day and age where we see a lot of people, students living at home and not in residences or living not far from the city and driving in: Is there any movement at all to have a look at whether or not that could be changed and cars removed? I know what I've been told by a number of people. The parents are just turning around then and buying the car.

**Ms. McGifford:** I understand that the whole loan assessment program, including the value of vehicles, is under review and that there is a committee of officials that is meeting on student loans. Officials from across the country because, of course, we need the federal government to be on side too.

**Mrs. Driedger:** How can we help that along a little bit so that they would have a re-look at this whole vehicle aspect and make some reasonable changes to it so that it seems to be in today's day and age a bit punitive?

**Ms. McGifford:** We're helping it along by having our official, Tom Glenwright, who's with us today meet and be part of that committee.

**Mrs. Driedger:** I'd encourage Mr. Glenwright to, you know, speak loudly about that. I'm just hearing from a number of students and then the hoops that they're jumping through.

Can I also ask if there is any movement to streamline the student loan application because it's easier for me to go into a bank and borrow \$10,000 than it is for students to acquire a student loan? Is there any way to—I don't know if it's streamline it—but it seems like a really onerous process for students.

**Ms. McGifford:** It's a very complicated process and, oh, I'm sorry, have I been recognized?

**Madam Chairperson:** No, that's okay.

**Ms. McGifford:** I have been recognized. Because it isn't just applying for the student loan, it's also putting the student in a position through his or her application whereby the student will be in a position to receive the bursaries, et cetera, that are tied to student debt, so there is a little bit more complexity because of that. Then there's also the fact, of course, that we're accountable to the taxpayers for the dollars that students borrow, whereas when the member goes to the bank and takes a loan, she's accountable to the bank. That private loan is a private loan where you're taking bank—where one borrows bank money is a little bit different than a public loan whereby a student, on trust, has public money. I think the difference is quite obvious.

**Mrs. Driedger:** The only thing that, I guess, I'm trying to make the point on is that it seems that that's—and I appreciate the accountability that is expected. I don't think we should be handing out money without an expectation of accountability. But I'm just wondering, just having spoken with students, some in my constituency and certainly the students from the Canadian Federation of Students, that there is some concern that it's a very, very big challenge to fill out these forms.

That's what I'm just wondering, if there is a way of just streamlining the form. I'm not saying take away accountability in any way, but just is there a way to make it a little bit more reasonable?

**Ms. McGifford:** According to a recent survey done here in Manitoba, very few students felt that the process was complicated. I think the member has to realize that the Canadian Federation of Students doesn't speak for all students. We've received the report. We've appreciated the report. We have agreed to react to their report, but they don't necessarily speak for all students.

We have, as I said, done some work here, and the results are that the process was not considered complicated by most students. As I've said, things are constantly under review. There is a table of officials from across the country that is meeting. Our interests, of course, are to have as streamlined a process as is possible, but a process that still addresses the very important need of accountability, which the member's recognized, as well as put students in line to receive the bursaries that they're entitled to if their needs are such that they are in line to receive them.

I'm also told that we meet with the Canadian Federation of Students and their concern isn't particularly with the Manitoba process. They're more concerned with the federal process, and we are meeting with federal officials. My official, Tom Glenwright, and his comrades from across the country are meeting with their federal counterparts because everybody is interested, finally, in a system that works for the public.

\* (16:10)

**Mrs. Driedger:** This same group of students told us that some 12 percent of students are denied student aid. Would that be an accurate reflection of what happens?

**Ms. McGifford:** I'm advised by officials that denied is probably the wrong word, that many students apply and then, when they find out they have to report their income and realize—I don't want to say the enormity of their income—the sum of their income, they don't bother to continue with the process.

**Mrs. Driedger:** To switch gears again, I just have a few more questions. A few years back, Stats Canada indicated that Manitoba had the highest extra student fees in the country. Would that still be accurate today?

**Ms. McGifford:** I don't think it was accurate then. One of the things that Stats Canada was counting into the figure that it used were the monies that students raised in order to create a health plan for themselves.

Students at the University of Winnipeg and the University of Manitoba, I believe, starting first with the University of Winnipeg and then the University of Manitoba, have health plans. Those fees were not included in tuition but in another line called other fees. So the other fees appeared to be quite large, largely because of the Blue Cross or whatever health plan students bought into. I don't know which health plan it is.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Can the minister indicate if there are any discussions currently on the go to implement a midwifery training program at the University of Manitoba?

**Ms. McGifford:** Yes, I understand that there are discussions going on with regard to programming for midwifery but not necessarily only with the University of Manitoba.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Is the minister prepared to fight really hard to get a midwifery training program in place for this fall?

**Ms. McGifford:** I'm certainly willing to have discussions. I don't know that a midwifery program in place for this fall is feasible. It's something that we would have to do some more consulting with and not just with institutions, of course, but within government.

**Mrs. Driedger:** In the interim, would the minister be prepared to—and I know they do it in other programs, buy seats, like perhaps two or four seats in other provinces—starting this fall, so that we can start to have those midwifery numbers go up?

**Ms. McGifford:** Clearly, there's more consultation that needs to happen and that could be part and parcel of that.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Could the minister indicate if Bill 6, The Adult Literacy Act, has been proclaimed.

**Ms. McGifford:** It's been proclaimed and comes into force on January 1, 2009.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Can the minister give us an update in terms of some of the things that have been happening since that legislation was passed and she was putting in the processes to move that legislation forward? Can she indicate—there was talk about consultations and a number of other aspects to it—where that might all be at?

**Ms. McGifford:** We just had a Pan Am literacy forum. I'm sure the member heard about it. The two days in Winnipeg were April 14 and 15. Somebody's given me a note; I can't read the writing but, anyway, never mind that. It's not Ralph's, pardon me, the honourable member from wherever. Since then, consultations are under way. I think we talked about it before, and my former deputy minister, Dwight Botting, is consulting very widely. He will be in four locations in Manitoba: The Pas, Brandon, Winkler and Winnipeg. As well, there are other ways to participate in the consultation by focus discussion, by on-line, and through meetings with stakeholders, which would include the centres, the Aboriginal community, workers, and learners. So there are 30 to 40 opportunities, as well as written opportunities. There, I deciphered it all with the help from my friends over here.

I wonder if I could take this time to point out that we talked about the lab funding earlier. I wanted

to read into the record that \$2.7 million went to the University of Manitoba, \$1.05 million to University of Winnipeg, and \$450,000 to Brandon University. UCN, I was mistaken, will be covered through the capital expansions.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Just a few more questions. I'd like to touch on Red River College. I know that in the past they have had some very problematic waiting lists. I'd like to ask the minister if there has been any movement in terms of the expansion of seats at Red River and any movement in terms of the—I know there was a promise of 4,000 apprenticeship spots—whether some of that has kicked in, in the colleges, as well.

**Ms. McGifford:** The apprenticeship question should be deferred to the Estimates of the Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade.

**Mrs. Driedger:** I'll go back to the beginning to ask the minister to comment on the waiting list that might be present at Red River College, whether there has been expansion of seats related to that to address some of the challenges. There was talk about them looking to set up an expansion through a bank on Main Street or to look at some facility in south Winnipeg because they're so desperately in need of space for adding extra seats.

**Ms. McGifford:** I don't believe that the Royal Bank building is an expansion. I think that there's some talk, and it's very, very, preliminary, but I believe there's been some talk with CentreVenture and Red River College in order to study the feasibility of moving the culinary arts program and possibly using some of the spaces for residence. I think it's very, very preliminary, and so I'm really not in a position to comment on that.

As far as the whole question of seats—*[interjection]* I'm advised that wait lists aren't necessarily related to physical space. I'm sure the member knows that there are wait lists at institutions across the country. I'm not aware that Red River's wait lists are onerous. I know I was very pleased, just last week, to join with the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) to announce an expansion in nursing seats in Manitoba. We announced an expansion of 40 seats, 16 of which were at Red River. So, just to share that information with the member.

**Mrs. Driedger:** I know in Estimates last time, the minister had indicated that—and we were having the

discussion around 4,000 new apprentices—2,500 of those were, notionally to be with Red River. So, in fact, that does fall into this discussion. I would ask the minister what kind of progress has been made to move those 2,500 seats so that we can get the skilled labour that we need in Manitoba. Are those seats, have they been created at Red River?

\* (16:20)

**Ms. McGifford:** Well, the member's right. We do work collaboratively, of course, with our colleagues from Competitiveness, Training and Trade, but they are definitely the lead on this file.

**Mrs. Driedger:** Has the University College of the North been accredited?

**Ms. McGifford:** Is the member referring to accreditation by AUCC? At this stage, it wouldn't be possible for the institution to be accredited by AUCC because it's still in its infancy.

**Mrs. Driedger:** I know the minister and I have had some correspondence about the type of standards that will be accepted at UCN, and there had been comments made by the chancellor of the university. There had been somewhat of a public outcry about the fact that the standards might not be set at the same level as other universities. I know this minister had indicated she didn't feel that was her position to interfere in how universities set standards; but, considering the enormous challenges we see with, you know, Aboriginal students trying to get a post-secondary education—I was speaking with one of my Aboriginal friends whom I've worked with for many years who is quite incensed that there would be lower expectations of Aboriginals. She feels that that is a very unfair place to put Aboriginal people by having lower standards put into any of their institutions. In fact, she's quite vocal about it and feels that is totally unacceptable.

Is the minister still of the same position that she will not make any comments either up front or behind the scenes to address this issue?

**Ms. McGifford:** I think the member is referring to remarks taken out of context made by Chancellor Ovide Mercredi, who was appointed by the governing council in the institution to represent the council. The chancellor is an institution's best friend—I suppose you may describe the relationship that way—and the chancellor is the person who is responsible ultimately for awarding degrees, but not setting standards, in the institution. It is the



institution's learning council that sets the standards in the institution.

Yes, I think that Ovide Mercredi's sentiment was that the entrance standards at University College of the North need to be such so that they can allow more people in, but he wasn't really referring to quality of students coming out. I think that we all realize and know that, in some of our northern communities, our Aboriginal students don't have the same kinds of opportunities to prepare themselves for post-secondary education as students do in other areas. I think that the chancellor believes that it is these students more than any other kind of students who need entrance, and I'm just imagining myself as the chancellor, but who need entrance to the institution in order to hone their skills and prepare themselves for the knowledge-based economy.

I think Chancellor Ovide Mercredi knows more about Aboriginal education than I do. I think he knows more about Aboriginal people than I do. He has, of course, been a national chief twice. He is universally respected in this country. I can't imagine my having the temerity to tell Ovide Mercredi, I can't imagine my telling him anything about Aboriginal education, but if the member opposite thinks that she can, I welcome her to do that. I would like to be a fly on the wall at that conversation.

**Mrs. Driedger:** I'm not sure why the minister would get her back up on a question like that. I think that's a fair question to ask. I know we've communicated by letters on it. I'm just a little bit surprised at her comments. I'm aware that Health is waiting to come to the table so, as much as I have other questions, I will just end on a final one.

I would just like to ask, what are the further plans in terms of moving forward with a strategic plan, a bigger picture for what will happen to ACC? There's been some movement, but there's been no talk of a big-vision picture where people could plan for that.

Have there been some changes in that since the last set of Estimates? Is there now a bigger plan available so that people will know what's happening and when it's happening over the next number of years?

**Ms. McGifford:** Well, as the member knows, the relocation has already been announced. Phase 1 is completed. I attended the opening of phase 1 along with the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Borotsik)

this fall. It was a very successful occasion. The culinary arts theatre is under way.

I believe in the very near future two options will be considered for phase 2 of the BMHC redevelopment. That is, of course, the new trades building. So we move from there.

**Mrs. Driedger:** That just led me to one more question. When does the minister anticipate the trades building to be completed?

**Ms. McGifford:** The date that we're working with is September 2010.

I should add it wasn't just the Member for Brandon West, it was the Member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell), of course, who joined me on that very momentous occasion.

**Mrs. Driedger:** I'll cease my questions now in order to move on to Health.

**Madam Chairperson:** Resolution 44.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$480,672,500 for Advanced Education and Literacy, Support for Universities and Colleges, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2009.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 44.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$57,290,500 for Advanced Education and Literacy, Manitoba Student Aid, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2009.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 44.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$19,339,900 for Advanced Education and Literacy, Adult Learning and Literacy, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2009.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 44.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$13,070,600 for Advanced Education and Literacy, Capital Grants, for the fiscal year ending the 31 day of March, 2009.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 44.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$298,200 for Advanced Education and Literacy,

Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending the 31 day of March, 2009.

**Resolution agreed to.**

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

\* (16:30)

At this point, we request that the minister's staff leave the table for the consideration of this last item.

The floor is open for questions.

Resolution 44.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,662,900 for Advanced Education and Literacy, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009.

**Resolution agreed to.**

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

We thank all members for their participation.

The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is the Department of Health and Healthy Living.

Shall we briefly recess to allow the minister and critics the opportunity to prepare? *[Agreed]*

*The committee recessed at 4:31 p.m.*

*The committee resumed at 4:33 p.m.*

**HEALTH AND HEALTHY LIVING**

**Madam Chairperson (Marilyn Brick):** We're beginning the Estimates for the Department of Health and Healthy Living.

Does the honourable Minister of Health have an opening statement?

**Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health):** Madam Chairperson, it's my privilege to make a few remarks, having now been in this chair for a year or so. I know that the last time we met, the critic and I had just really entered our roles and had a few items upon which to reflect. I do want to take a few moments, having had this time now, to first of all pay tribute to the professionals with whom I am so privileged to work.

There are many people within the Department of Health that really are invested in the job that they're doing and very, very dedicated to the people of Manitoba, too numerous to mention, but led by deputy minister Arlene Wilgosh who is really the most excellent of persons, thoughtful and a terrific leader.

I also want to acknowledge in the journey that I've been on in over a year in Health what an incredible privilege it is to work with professionals in the field, from CEOs and board chairs of regional health authorities, doctors in a variety of environments, nurses, health-care aides, technologists. These are voices that all have a lot to bear on improving health care, making health care even better in Manitoba, and I have the privilege to learn from these individuals.

It's for that reason that I do want to take just a moment this afternoon to speak about the kinds of things that I think we could all agree don't often garner the headlines. We don't often get to read about or view on the evening news what a great day it was in health care in Manitoba; indeed, there are many, many of them. While, of course, I take pride in our government's continued commitment to health care, it's really for those people that dedicate their lives each and every day, the paramedics, the lab technicians, technologists, as I said. All of these people that work in paid positions, and, indeed, in volunteer positions, that I want to spend just a moment talking about what's happened in the past year that we won't necessarily read about in the headlines.

We know that together we have worked to drastically reduce wait times here in Manitoba. We know we continue to have the shortest time for radiation therapy, in tandem with B.C. might I add, at one week. This doesn't happen by accident; it happens in a very planful, dedicated way, through investments and through the unbelievable hard work of doctors and the people at CancerCare.

We know that Manitoba, along with Alberta, continues to have the shortest wait time for cardiac bypass surgery. Of course, urgent cases don't wait, but this is something that requires an ongoing commitment.

Wait times for MRIs are down to seven weeks from 28 weeks when we took government. We know CT wait times are down from 18 weeks to six weeks today. We have more work to do in that area, but this

happens because people work together to improve the system, its efficiency, while, at the same time, taking the special care with people who are arguably very frightened when they have to come for those tests.

We know the quality of life surgeries, like hip and knee surgeries, are down to 18 weeks from some 44 weeks when we announced our plan in 2005 to really aggressively address those times.

One of the things that's come to the conversation, of course, by many people, many voices in Manitoba, is that while we are making very good strides on some of these surgical wait times and treatment wait time, we need to do more on what one might define as the wait before the wait, bridging the gap from general to specialist care. We acknowledge that point and, in partnership with funds from the federal government which I can say very plainly we are very grateful, have committed to do our pilot project concerning the wait time guarantee money—the agreement that we would come up with a pilot project to really work hard to improve that referral system between family docs and specialist, to reduce that time that patients wait to see their specialists.

We know that this is the time when people feel the most worried perhaps, and we want to bring that time down as best we can. I don't deny it's not going to be an easy task. There are cultural and systemic changes that will have to occur, but what I've seen in the little over a year that I've been in this chair of the co-operative nature of our health-care professionals, of the innovation that they are willing to come forward with and the dedication, I truly believe that we are going to be leaders in the nation on bridging the gap from general to specialist care. We will be a model for the rest of Canada on how we can bring that wait time down. So I look forward to our continued efforts on that front.

I also want to pay tribute, of course, to those people that have worked so diligently to ensure that we have more doctors in Manitoba—which we do. We know that we have a net gain of 235 more doctors today than we did when we came into government in 1999. This doesn't happen by accident. It happens because there are aggressive recruitment and retention exercises that go on. It happens because we've committed to educate more doctors. We know that we've made a commitment to hire 100 more doctors over the course of our mandate, and we are fully committed to do this.

I also want to acknowledge the creative thinking that has gone on among many of the partners in health care—the Faculty of Medicine, the Manitoba Medical Association, the College of Physicians and Surgeons, the Department of Health—to come up with a multi-tiered plan to retain more doctors, including our \$4-million announcement to improve access to doctors in northern communities, boosting residency opportunities for Manitoba-trained grads and to attract top talent from outside of the province. That plan also will increase the number of spaces for international medical graduates to 35 from 25, and provides the newly licensed doctors with mentorship and support which we have learned over time is so critical to their success and to their putting down roots, becoming lifelong Manitobans and, indeed, functioning in the most happy way that they can, as new citizens to our country and to our province.

\*(16:40)

We know that we have announced a new provincial nursing strategy which features additional training and retention initiatives, including adding 40 additional seats this fall; upgrading the training facilities at Red River College; helping more internationally educated nurses practice in Manitoba through providing a bridging program and other supports; and increasing our investment in the Nurses Recruitment and Retention Fund which has been pivotal, of course, to our ability to build our complement of nurses to what was recently posted by the colleges, to be an increase of 200 just in the last year.

We know that there are 1,789 more nurses practising than there were in 1999, but members opposite will be quick to acknowledge that we need more. We're committed to bring more, just as we said we were a year ago during the election.

We know that working to improve capital infrastructure and investing in state-of-the-art facilities has been a major commitment. We have seen in the last year remarkable progress on this front. We can not possibly meet every capital demand that is placed upon the Department of Health, but the dedicated officials that work to prioritize and to meet the commitments of the people of Manitoba are to be commended. I would be wholly enthusiastic about listing some of those achievements, but I know my time for the opening statement is running short.

I just want to congratulate those people who invest their hearts and their souls into the health of

the people of Manitoba. I am privileged to be part of the group that is working to lead that charge. Thank you, Madam Chairperson.

**Madam Chairperson:** We thank the minister. Does the official opposition critic have any opening comments?

**Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach):** I thank the minister for her opening comments. It has been about a year, I know, since I've filled the role on behalf of my caucus in the Health portfolio, and the minister has been the Health Minister for some time longer than that.

Obviously, I would echo some of the comments that she made. We both know, from our experiences in our various roles, how important the health-care system is to all Manitobans. I don't think that there's any Manitoban that hasn't been touched in some way, either personally or through a family member, by the health-care system.

I wouldn't want to speak disparagingly about the needs of other departments, certainly not for the ministers of highways or Finance or any other departments. We're all important in government, and all provide needed and necessary services to the people of Manitoba. I do think that most people would acknowledge that, without a person's health, quality erodes and a lot of other services that we might take for granted or ask for aren't as important. Nothing really comes above a person's health.

We've all experienced that in one way or another, either personally or through a family member, so it is a very important portfolio. I certainly acknowledge and respect the role that the minister has to fulfil. I know it's not an easy job or ministry, not that any one would be, but I do recognize that there are personal stresses, that there are people who are contacting the department. I think all the members on our side of the House do recognize that and acknowledge, even though there are times when we have disagreements, and there will be times in the future when we have disagreements in terms of how things could be done and how things could be improved, that's part of the democratic process but it never takes away from anybody's feeling of the importance of the Department of Health and the role that takes place within it.

We also acknowledge that there are departmental staff who do an outstanding job every day in the difficult and diverse roles that they hold. I was

talking just a little earlier with one of the people in my caucus about how it is that I have brought forward some cases, in recent times, to the minister's office from the local constituency, and they've actually been dealt with, I think, rather well. I don't want to leave on the record, or ever leave the impression, that even though I hold the responsibility as a critic, all I do is criticize. There are certainly times when—

**An Honourable Member:** Well, sometimes we wonder.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Well, I know the Member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) might wonder sometimes, but he could listen more often and I think he'd hear.

There certainly are times when there are good things to report on an individual in a constituency level, and I'm more than happy to say that that happens. So I acknowledge the work that the staff do in responding to some of the concerns that I raise on behalf of my own constituents, quite apart from my role as Health critic, but representing the fine people of Steinbach, Hanover, Niverville and even, sometimes, some of the constituents in La Verendrye who might call my office for whatever reason. I'm sure it's just the name that came to their mind that day.

**An Honourable Member:** It's probably to thank you for all the work that the Minister of Health is doing for Steinbach hospitals and Ste. Anne's hospital.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Well, the MLA for La Verendrye (Mr. Lemieux) seems to want to want to impute motives in terms of why his constituents would call me for assistance. I'm not going to try and delve into the very reasons that that might be happening.

But, whatever the reason is, I do want to acknowledge that staff, led by the Deputy Minister of Health, do very good work and that they are under difficult circumstances. I know they always do their best on behalf of Manitobans, even if we have disagreements with how the process or how the system is working.

I also want to acknowledge my own staff, Tricia Chestnut is working with me in terms of the research, sort of as my own deputy minister, in a way, within our office, not to put too much pressure on her, but I appreciate the work that all the staff in our caucus do and, certainly, the work that Tricia does, working with me. We all rely on people within our life, but particularly within our positions as

elected officials. I appreciate the work that she's done.

I want to also acknowledge, as the minister has, the many health-care professionals that work within the system. The unsung heroes: the doctors, the nurses, technologists, paramedics, and many, many others who deal on the front lines, as we often say, in the health-care system and who are really the face of health care and who are often at the end of the chain to a lot of decisions that are made. Some of the decisions, they might find helpful. Some of the decisions, they don't find helpful, and they often comment on that to me and, I'm sure, to the minister. But, whatever situation they're dealing with, we know they do their job professionally and with all the best intentions and with all the best motivation. We appreciate the work that they do every day in what's often a difficult and stressful time.

Certainly, the minister wanted to list off a variety of news releases or announcements that she's made recently or maybe not so recently. But we know that there are many stresses within the health-care system. The minister talked about wait times. Didn't talk about ultrasound wait times and how they seem to be considerably longer than the one week that was promised by her Premier (Mr. Doer). Didn't want to talk about past promises, whether they were related to hallway medicine, which haven't been fulfilled.

In fact, I heard an interesting interview on one of the local radio stations, last week, where Dr. Postl was saying that it would probably be several years before hallway medicine was actually alleviated in the province. That was an interesting admission on two fronts. One, of course, on the face of it, acknowledging that hallway medicine is alive and well, to use the term, in Manitoba, but also that it's nowhere near coming to an end despite a promise back in 1999. I know that the minister likes to talk about 1999, so we will talk a bit about that and how that promise was made and not fulfilled.

I also want to mention that there still are many communities—I don't think it's limited to any particular region in the province, certainly, in the community of Steinbach, which is dealing with a doctor shortage that it's never seen before. So the minister talks about new doctors coming into the province. We could debate numbers about doctors leaving and coming, and that sort of thing, but, at the end of the day, when you talk to individuals and the struggle that they're having getting family doctors—in

a city like Steinbach, which will have 4,000 to 5,000 people without a family doctor, come mid- to late June, those are real stories. I don't think any amount of statistics, in fact, I know that no amount of statistics to them and no amount of sort of government spin, or anybody else's spin, is going to convince them that, for them, the system is getting better. In fact, they're having more challenges finding doctors in the area that I represent than less challenges. That's true, I think, in many different areas.

\* (16:50)

I've had the opportunity to visit with a number of different RHAs and doctors in different regions over the last few months, and they all sort of tell a similar story about the challenges that they have keeping doctors here and recruiting doctors in Manitoba. Sometimes I raise the statistics because I try to play fair on these things that the minister brings forward, and I get that blank stare back. I certainly don't get the impression from them that it's easier to find a doctor now than it has been in the past. In fact, I get the opposite impression.

Those are the real-life stories and I suppose no amount of back and forth fact checking among politicians in a committee room in the Legislature changes any of those real-life stories or any of those real-life pressures that people will come to me with and I know that they also come to the minister with.

With those comments, I think we're going to have some good discussion. I look forward to some meaningful discussions, some meaningful questions and some meaningful answers. I'll do my part; I know the minister will do her part, and we'll try to get some good information for the betterment of the health-care system and for Manitobans overall.

With that, Madam Chairperson, I look forward to the minister bringing forward and introducing staff from the department.

**Madam Chairperson:** Thank you. We thank the official opposition critic for his opening comments. Under Manitoba practice, debate on the Minister's Salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 21.1.(a) containing resolution 21.1. 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. Oswald:** Madam Chairperson, it's my privilege to introduce Ms. Arlene Wilgosh, Deputy Minister of

Health and Healthy Living, and Ms. Karen Herd, Acting CFO for the Department of Health and Healthy Living.

**Madam Chairperson:** Thank you. Does the committee wish to proceed through the Estimates of this department chronologically or have a global discussion?

**Mr. Goertzen:** I believe the tradition of the Legislature has been to hold global discussions, so, if the minister has no objection to that, I think proceeding that way would be expedient.

**Ms. Oswald:** Madam Chairperson, yes, we are happy to follow along those lines of tradition. I would ask the critic if he would indulge us in, perhaps, as best as he can, in any event, offering us some notice as to when the opposition may be wishing to question the Minister responsible for Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross) and, of course, what I should have said first is remind him that we have in partnership designated areas of responsibility with which I think the members opposite are aware. So we would ask that those areas of responsibility under Healthy Living are dealt with in that way, and the areas under Health are dealt with under my time at the mike.

**Mr. Goertzen:** I thank the minister for the co-operation on the global discussion. I made the commitment to the Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross) in the House that I would give that notice and I want to fulfil that commitment. Certainly, for the balance of the day, I can assure her there won't be any Healthy Living questions, nor tomorrow morning. So, if she's able to attend tomorrow morning, I'm sure she'd love the discussion, but, if not, I wish her a good and healthy long weekend.

**Madam Chairperson:** The floor is now open for questions. Before I do, I just wanted to say that we will be proceeding in a global discussion and the floor is now open for questions.

**Mr. Goertzen:** Madam Chairperson, today I did something that I've never done in the history of my time here in the Legislature, not that it's been that long; still, it was unique for me to actually tell the minister the question that I was going to ask first in Estimates and that is because I simply wanted a fulsome answer for me personally and also for the people that I represent and really all southeastern Manitoba is an important issue. Could she update the committee on the status or the plans for the expanded

emergency room at Bethesda Hospital in Steinbach, please?

**Ms. Oswald:** Steinbach? I thought you said Ste. Anne. No, I'm kidding. Yes, the member did alert me to this question, so I've endeavoured to gather as much information on this and a connected issue, I think. Certainly, the member knows that we announced on October 2, 2007, that we're investing \$4.5 million to expand and renovate the ER at Bethesda Hospital in Steinbach. That is, of course, in response to the wonderful growing population that is happening in Steinbach in that region. The expansion—this will expand the ER at the 80-bed hospital—will include an observation area, a dedicated special-care unit, a private admitting area, additional exam rooms and treatment areas and also a mental health exam room, which, as the member opposite knows, is a critical part of any capital development that we're making with ERs. The status of the plan as of now is that the functional programming for the hospital is just wrapping up. That's the first part of the design stage. There is an advertisement for an architect that closes on May 5. We expect the tender to occur next spring, and we are on track for construction to be completed in the spring of 2010.

We know that during that time any recruitment efforts that will be required to go on will be actively engaged in by Bethesda and by the regional health authority. We know, presently, that there are no doctor vacancies at the Bethesda ER. The member opposite has acknowledged that the community is facing a challenge upcoming, with two community doctors announcing that they would be leaving. We know, of course, that the doctors in a private or a fee-for-service clinic would—the members of that clinic would be responsible to do their recruiting. That's the nature of how things work, but this is a growing community and we have been in consultation with the regional health authority, who, we know, is actively working with the clinic to assist in the recruitment. We know that we're going to do whatever we can to support them in addressing this issue that, as the member points out, is very concerning to members of the community who will find themselves without a family doctor. We want to ensure that we work as quickly and expediently as we can with that clinic to endeavour to assist.

We know that that particular clinic has a walk-in that sees some 100 patients a day. This in and of itself takes pressure off an emergency room, so not having doctors in that clinic can have a domino

effect on challenges in the region. We want to ensure that we work diligently to assist with the recruitment efforts there.

**Mr. Goertzen:** I appreciate the minister's response on the update on the expanded emergency room. It was a full response, and so I'm glad that I prepared her for the question. That'll probably be the last time I ever do that, but I think it was still a worthy experiment to go forward with it.

In her comments, she touched on—but I want to touch on it more specifically, probably tomorrow—the doctor shortage in that community; she said that they're working with the clinic to try to alleviate that situation. Can she be more specific in terms of what her department is doing in co-operation with the clinic?

**Ms. Oswald:** Certainly, the nature of those conversations with the region, you know, is born out of the Physician Recruitment Coordination Office, which has a number of strategies at its disposal on the recruitment and retention side. Also, we know that we have seen success in other areas of the province where nurse practitioners are concerned, and we continue to take the good advice of doctors and nurses in our communities, in urban centres and in rural communities, to do the best that we can to build our complement as to how we may be able to utilize our resources in the best possible way for people in the region.

**Madam Chairperson:** The time being 5 p.m., I am interrupting proceedings. The Committee of Supply will resume sitting tomorrow at 10 a.m. (Friday).

### CONSERVATION

\* (15:10)

**Mr. Chairperson (Rob Altemeyer):** Will the Committee of Supply please come to some semblance of order.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Conservation. As had been previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

**Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo):** Mr. Chair, I do have a number of questions that I have for the minister in many, many different areas, but what I might do is just—I know I didn't get a chance to do any opening statements or anything like that and

might just take a minute to just sort of reflect for a moment before I ask my questions and get into my line of questioning.

I just wanted to say that I am happy once again to be in the Estimates process with the minister. I know it wasn't so long ago that we were in this process, and I think it's been good. We've been able to ask some questions, actually get some answers at times, and I do certainly appreciate that on behalf of the minister on that side.

Maybe what I'll do, just actually in the interest of time, because I know we're probably going to be wrapping up today in this Conservation Estimates. I think what I will do is just get right into the questioning. Again, I'm just trying to get some background information from the minister with respect to provincial park passes and how they work.

I'm just wondering what the government's policy is on issuing provincial park vehicle permits to permanent residents of Hecla Island Provincial Park. We've been contacted by a permanent resident of Hecla Island who has not yet received a new provincial park pass. As I understand it, the old park pass has expired, I think it was yesterday, but maybe within the last couple of days.

I'm just wondering, has there been any kind of policy change here, or when can the residents expect to receive their new passes?

\* (15:20)

**Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Conservation):** Those folks can receive their passes when they purchase them for \$25.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** So what is the renewal process? There are, obviously, expiry dates. Has there been a change in policy recently, or is this sort of normal for park passes for permanent residents to expire and new ones not be sent out until later?

**Mr. Struthers:** The passes that they have in their possession right now expired as of April 1. There is an expectation that they will, like any other Manitoban, purchase their park pass at \$25 a pop. I'm sorry, April 30 is the expiry.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Is there a place for them to send this fee ahead of time? Is that sort of what normally happens? Do they send their fee ahead of time so that there isn't a period of time where they can't have a park vehicle permit?

**Mr. Struthers:** Any Manitoban can get the park pass through an outlet, a vendor that's close to them that is authorized to sell the park passes. They can be obtained at our district offices scattered throughout the province of Manitoba. When there are people staffing the park gates, they can be purchased. They can be purchased at park gates as well. That kind of information is all available on our Web site. We want to make it as easy as possible for Manitobans to gain access to these park passes.

I will again correct the minister. It's \$28, not \$25 as I indicated earlier. They are available at a whole number of different outlets around the province, and I must say that we compare quite nicely to what I see in other provinces and territories in Canada.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** I think what this is, is that this person has actually, as I understand, has paid for the park pass but has not yet received it. So, when they haven't received it and there is a period of time between actually receiving the pass and the old pass, if they're stopped by someone, they may not have their pass. So how does that work? Is there a temporary pass or—?

**Mr. Struthers:** The change that we've instituted is that we're not mailing those park passes out to cottagers. In the past, that was a complimentary pass that was provided for cottagers. This year, the cottagers, like everyone else, will be going to the vendors that I talked about earlier or the park district offices or the gates, if there's somebody staffing the gate, and purchase those park passes. That's different than it was last year. So she needs to be advising the people that contact her that they need to go to a vendor and actually purchase, for \$28, the park pass.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Okay, this is not a cottager. This is a permanent resident. Is there a difference between the changes that have taken place for cottagers as opposed to permanent residents?

**Mr. Struthers:** What I had said in the previous answer also applies to permanent residents.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Well, I think, I mean, these are permanent residents of this area that I'm referring to, as well as others. I think it's probably incumbent upon the minister to come up with some sort of a strategy to let permanent residents know how they can go about making it a little bit easier to know where to go to obtain these. You know, we've had complaints in the past from people who have driven up to the gates at provincial parks and found them

not staffed and have been given sort of no direction on the pass as to where to buy a pass. In some instances, they would have to drive many miles from the park to buy a pass. If they didn't purchase the pass and went into the park, they would run into the risk of getting a ticket. This is sort of an issue that's not just come up as one incident. I think there are many out there.

So I would just like to ask the minister if there is a new strategy in place to maybe more properly inform both permanent residents as well cottagers, and those people that just want to frequently come to our parks and enjoy the wonderful nature in our parks.

**Mr. Struthers:** We do have some great parks for people to visit. I'm always amazed at, anytime I go into a park, the kinds of things that are available for not only Manitoba families, but seniors and tourists and people who visit our province. I think we're all quite proud of the things that we have to offer in our parks.

I think it's good advice from the member to make sure that as many people are aware of changes in policy that take place. We made sure that this was very clearly spelled out in a news release that we did put out. We are following up with our own newsletter that hasn't gone out yet, but will include an explanation of this for cottagers and permanent residents. We want to make every effort to have people understand what the rules are and understand what they need to be doing in order to enjoy living or visiting in our parks.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Yes, I thank the minister for that. I would encourage him to develop some sort of a strategy with respect to getting this information out to as many people as possible who are certainly affected by this on a regular basis. You know, I understand, news releases are sent out. I think the member can, you know, understand that often time there are so many news releases sent out by government and opposition and political parties and not everyone takes the time to peruse all of the news releases. It may not be the best way of getting a message out to those people who are, you know, who are residents of our provincial parks. So I would encourage him to also, and I know he says he's got a newsletter going out. The one problem with that is that these particular provincial park permits are, I mean, they expired April 30, which was yesterday. So, by sending out a news release now, it's probably a little bit after the fact.



\* (15:30)

In the interim, you know, how are we going to get this message out to these people whose passes have expired so that they know, and they don't have to drive many, many, many miles? I mean, there should be sort of a list of all of the places they can go to purchase provincial park passes and permits. Maybe you could, in fact, make a list of that and put it up at the park gates. Maybe that's a way that could at least let people know the times that they're open, that they will be staffed because, again, we've had many incidences of people who have called who are trying to go to our parks. They don't want to be breaking the law, especially those people that are permanent residents. So we're coming up to the summer seasons, and people want to go and enjoy their cottages. I think we need to let them know and make it as easy as possible for them to be able to go out and purchase these.

I'm wondering if the minister, could you just explain to me what the hours are in terms of—I mean, if people were to go to the park gates and—let's talk, let's specifically, maybe for now, for an example, use Hecla Island Provincial Park. What are the hours that the gates are open where people can purchase the passes in that area?

**Mr. Struthers:** In terms of the park gates, there are varying opening dates varying from one park to the next. They don't all open on the same date. They have different weekends that we do openings. What we do is we make sure that there's signage at the gates. If there's not a staff person in there, we have a sign indicating where the visitors can go to obtain a park pass. Usually, those are close by in the park that the person's interested in visiting. If they're traveling out from, say, the city of Winnipeg, you could go to wherever there's, usually where there's a fishing licence that's being sold, and pick up your park pass, along with a fishing licence at a number of different locations around the city of Winnipeg.

The vendors that are selling fishing licences, usually you can track down a park pass there as well.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Okay, I want to thank the minister for that. I mean, it's—obviously, I just want to try and get as much information out to people as possible so they make it as easy as possible for these people out there. Again, I would just encourage, you know, maybe posting signs or something as to where the nearest place is and, if it's done, then great. But, obviously, these people are having difficulties finding that, so maybe if we can endeavour to get

that information out. I will as well, now that we've got some of the answers.

You had mentioned a fee of \$28. This one, I believe, is from last year that I'm looking at now. I know we're not supposed to use props in these so I won't refer to it, but it looks like the fee was \$24.75, which includes GST. You were referring to the new pass being \$28. Is that an increase in the cost of the permit from last year?

**Mr. Struthers:** Yes, not to refer to it as a prop or anything, but if she would look at the permit that she has in her hand, there's a beautiful picture of a yurt, a Manitoba yurt, which is absolutely popular in this province. We need to be able to raise some revenue to offer yurting kinds of experiences in many of our parks.

We've undertaken a lot of upgrades in our parks. We've undertaken many improvements in every region of the province. The yurt, which I mentioned, is something that has been very popular with people. Especially to start out, there are expenses we come across in terms of providing those upgraded—more facilities, more enjoyment of the parks. We have to pay for that so this is an increase in our park pass from last year.

As I have indicated before, looking at the figures around the country, we are pretty much the lowest, almost the lowest in all of Canada. We'd like to believe we are keeping our costs and expenses for Manitoba campers down to as low amount as we can, but still offer a very good experience throughout Manitoba parks.

Another initiative that is costing us money that we have undertaken is the conversion of camp sites from unserviced to serviced, which, really, again, is something that's popular. We've had experiences in the past with a park having a lineup of people waiting for a site, especially with electricity on them, and having the frustration of sites without services going empty for a weekend. We didn't want that to happen.

The only other improvement I want to mention just now is the undertaking of providing 911 services in many of the parks. We've undertaken that. We've had some success with a number of parks, and I think that's worthwhile. But all these need to be paid for, and that is one of the ways in which we do it, through the park pass.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** I certainly recognize that it's important for us to upgrade various things within our

park and to just enhance the beauty that's there. I love visiting our parks. I have lots of friends and their families that go on a regular basis. It's wonderful to be able to go there and do that.

In terms of raising the revenue for it, though, I would just say that I think one of the areas, and the suggestions that I would make, is that if you make it easier for people to actually renew their provincial park passes, that's probably a way to better raise the funds than just raising the actual fee for the park. I would encourage the minister to make it a lot easier for people to enter our parks and to enjoy them and to purchase their passes and all of those things. It almost seems like we need more revenue so we got to raise the fees. There are other ways of increasing revenues.

In particular, when we have a number of people calling our office now who are concerned that they don't want to be breaking the law but they want to go to our parks, I would just encourage the minister. I'm surprised that the fee has gone up and without looking at other ways of encouraging more people to renew their passes and making it easier for people to renew their passes. I'm concerned that just automatically we would go towards raising the fees. I would want to keep it as easy as possible for more people to come into our parks.

Does the minister not agree that that is a way of increasing our revenue, and that we should exhaust all ways of increasing our revenues before we start increasing the fees?

**Mr. Struthers:** A number of times over the past number of years, we've looked at ways in which we can make park passes more accessible, making it easier for people to purchase. I think the member's got a good point that the more people we can ensure are purchasing the park passes, that's stronger revenue for us to then work back into our park system.

\* (15:40)

I want to assure her that it just wasn't a knee-jerk reaction just to bump up the fee on the park permit. We always look at as many different ways as we can. I think in the name of fairness we must do that. We have to raise revenue if we are going to continue to make improvement to our parks. In raising that revenue, we need to be fair, and we need to be as transparent as we possibly can. That is always what we strive for when I look at these kinds of fees. I think it's good advice for the member to make those

park permits as easy to purchase as we can, and we'll continue to look for ways of doing that.

If there are ideas that she has or any of her colleagues, I'd encourage them to come forth with those. When you make the kind of improvements in the park reservation system that we've made, for example, to produce such a good opening day with 10,365 bookings in one day to set an all-time record, you know that that's costing us money, and we're making investments in our system to make it work that good. So we're always looking for ways in which we can improve the efficiency of the fees that we use, but we also know that we want to make these fair.

Part of it is looking at the technology that we use to make it easier for people to enter our parks and our campsites. We've gone to bar code scanning which has, we've noticed, really improved and made better for people and improved their access to our parks. So we're looking at it in a comprehensive way to make sure that parks can be as accessible to Manitobans as possible.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** I just wanted to ask a few questions regarding the cottage lot draw. Obviously, last year, we had some significant issues. There was a cancellation of the eastern area cottage lot selection and cottage lot draw.

I'm just wondering if the minister could update us on that situation and the impact that it may have on a cottage lot draw process for this year.

**Mr. Struthers:** No, I think it's pretty clear that the first 1,000 cottage lots that we had committed to offering to Manitobans was very successful. We did offer 1,000 to Manitobans. Some of those were—well, the members made a big deal a couple of Estimates ago about me offering cottages on swamp land, but that didn't jibe with the number of people that were then putting their names forward, and, actually, right now, probably have not only purchased the so-called swamp land that the Member for Portage refers to, but are building on that so-called swamp land and are very happy living on, or at least building a cottage on that so-called swamp land. I don't characterize it using those kinds of harsh terms.

We provided Manitobans with an opportunity to lay their hands on some of the most attractive, most beautiful cottage lots anywhere in the country, and many Manitoba families were made very happy by that. What we have committed to is another 1,000. We are absolutely certain that we will fulfil that like

we did the first round of 1,000. We will come across some challenges in the next 1,000, as we saw last fall. The members fully remembered the debates and the questions in the House about the blockade challenges that we were up against. They know that we postponed the cottage lot draw that was supposed to take place last year, and we have every intention of following through with that and honouring our commitment to those people who had their names on the list. We still have those folks on that list, because they contact us, they're eager to proceed, and it's our intention to proceed. I'm hopeful that that can happen as early as this summer. So we believe it's a good policy direction. We believe it's a good thing for Manitobans.

We have to take the time to work out those things that present challenges to us, and one is the involvement of First Nations, the kind of consultations that we need to undertake with First Nations. We have been doing that. We've been doing it all along with First Nations. As a matter of fact, with Black River First Nation and with Fisher River First Nation, we've signed a memorandum of understanding to bring forward cottage lot opportunities jointly, sharing the cost, sharing in the promotion and, of course, sharing in the benefits. It's good because some of the area that we're working with is absolutely fabulous cottage lot area, and it's a real opportunity for First Nations to take part in an economic development opportunity. So we are totally committed to the next lot of a thousand. We are dealing with, in a very careful way, the challenges that present itself in terms of offering these cottages up.

Another challenge as had been pointed out in the House as well—the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) has brought this up, in terms of developing cottage lots with a plan to take care of those mundane things like septage and water and all of those challenges, so we're undertaking those challenges and working our way through them with every intent on bringing forward the next draw for those very beautiful lots on the eastern side of Manitoba.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** How many applicants applied for the fall 2007 eastern area cottage lot draw?

**Mr. Struthers:** It was in excess of 300 people.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** And how many applicants withdrew from the draw following its postponement?

**Mr. Struthers:** We had just in excess of 300. We believe we have right now, still interested 280-290. I think I owe it to the member to be a little more specific than that, and I'll get her a more specific number. But that's the ballpark that we're dealing with right now.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** I thank the minister for that. Now, you said in excess of 300, so, yes, I'll need some specific numbers, if I could. But the 20 or 30 or whatever it is in terms of those that withdrew from the cottage lot draw process, were their fees refunded? If so, how much was paid back in total?

\* (15:50)

**Mr. Struthers:** Those people would have paid a \$100 fee. When they announced that they were not interested in continuing, we refunded to each of them, each of the ones who dropped out, the full \$100.

**Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie):** Just a couple of quick questions. I appreciate the opportunity.

The minister spoke in opposition to the resolution that I brought forward earlier in session regarding beverage container recycling. He spoke that there would be a comprehensive program shortly. Can he perhaps narrow that time line down? When can we expect to hear the comprehensive program being introduced into the House?

**Mr. Struthers:** We are very close to coming forward with a regulation. What we have done is put a draft regulation together, have handed out to the people of Manitoba, have got some advice back from Manitobans, and we're at the stage now of incorporating those requests and that advice into our final regulation that we'll be bringing forward.

I appreciate the advice that the Member for Portage has given me on this issue for a period of time now. I know that he's interested in it, and I think that's commendable. I think he also understands that we have to come forward with a broad-based comprehensive environmentally responsible system that Manitobans can count on from day to day.

The stewardship program that was put in place back in the 1990s, I think, at the time, was amongst the best in the country. I think it has served us well, but there is a better way to go, and it involves, very much, industry partners, and saying to industry that, if you're producing a product, on day one you're responsible for that product, right through until the

end of that product's life cycle. There's nothing more frustrating, to me, and I think to others, than to dig your way through a whole pile of packaging to get to a certain product. We go through it at Christmas in our family all the time, birthdays. It's just frustrating digging through a whole bunch of stuff to get to a little toy, or whatever that product may be.

So we have to design this new world we're heading to in terms of product stewardship in such a way that that's a broad, comprehensive program, that it has got a revenue base that it can count on, and that the industry can have the ability to set the rates and understand what they need to do in order to offer Manitobans an even better system than the one that we've had in place in the past.

Any advice from the Member for Portage is welcome.

**Mr. Faurshou:** Well, as time marches on here, our landfills continue to be in receipt of beverage containers that could very easily be recycled and reused. I encourage the minister to act swiftly on this particular program.

The other point of interest I have is the progress toward the SEAT program, which allowed for firefighting to take place through the contracting of single-engine planes that the minister knows very well was a cost-effective, very efficient, very, very quick-to-react way of addressing forest fire situations.

Has he come to an agreement, though, with the operators who have previously served the province with their equipment?

**Mr. Struthers:** This is always a tough one, because you'd like to see the individual business people involved in this do well. Unfortunately, that sometimes means there's an intense fire year in order for them to do well. Last year, or the year before, my understanding is that they did fairly well.

In Manitoba, we've also made them available through the national agency that we belong to in terms of sharing equipment and resources interjurisdictionally. We know that the SEATs are an integral part of our overall fire program, especially these days, with human caused fires, where there's kind of an interface between the prairie grass and forests. We know that they're especially effective then. That doesn't mean they're not effective in the northern boreal forest that we hear so much about in

dry years. We make every effort to deploy these SEATs in all of those kinds of situations.

Of course, my hope is that it's not as dry a summer as we usually have, and that we aren't in a position where we've got large forest fires threatening communities and threatening valuable timber stands and those such things, but if we do have one of those summers again we will be working with the SEATs to make sure that they're part of our attack on a forest fire.

**Mr. Faurshou:** One last question, which I've been very vocal on, is the outstanding liability that exists in the tire stewardship area. As the minister is quite aware, everyone who has purchased new tires has paid up front for their recycling through the levy that exists today, and has every expectation that that money will be available to recycle that specific tire come the end of its lifespan. That does not exist currently because the prepaid monies have been used to effectively dispose of tires which did not have the levy on them, and also used to dispose of tires that were previously used up. So that pool of money does not exist.

It's in excess of \$8 million in estimate. I'm wondering, has the minister spoken with his Cabinet colleagues in order to address this outstanding liability?

**Mr. Struthers:** I was asked this question this morning, so, hopefully, when the member checks my answer from this morning it matches what I'm about to say. *[interjection]* So do you, right? I better hope so. I'm sure you'll point it out to me if it doesn't.

The only liability we have right now is some tires that we are rounding up. To do that roundup, we have \$300,000 that was left over from the previous board. We're using that money to round up the tires that are out there on landscapes, which is something that municipalities—the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Briece) knows this—are very interested in, and others.

All those decisions, on a go-forward basis, as of April 1, will be made by the new industry-led board. They will be working to determine what revenues and then what fees need to be collected. I think the member's in a hurry, so I'll cut my answer short right there.

\* (16:00)

**Mr. Faurshou:** Yes, the minister is very perceptive. I do have to leave at 4.

Not to create any misunderstanding, there are millions of tires out there today on the roadways of Manitoba that have had prepaid their disposition through the levies, and there should be a pool of money reflective of the prepaid levies, which does not exist. Therefore, it's an outstanding liability to which the government, who is the collector of this levy, is responsible.

**Mr. Struthers:** I understand what the member is saying. Those tires are now the responsibility of the new board. The new board has assured us that they will have the capabilities of making sure that those tires are collected and properly disposed of, given the tools that they have to work with. So that's what the new board is dealing with.

**Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose):** I'm going to go on a completely different line, and I'm not sure it totally pertains to this department, but the Snoman club of Manitoba, one of the things they're telling me is the infrastructure has outgrown their volunteer capacity. That's on the trail grooming and stuff. There's quite an expansion going on in the trail system. The volunteers are literally wearing out. I know, in our own area, the minister's and mine, there's a movement right now to put the trails all the way through on the east side of Riding Mountain National Park. That would be quite a tourism impact in our area.

Now Saskatchewan, in 2005, introduced legislation that allowed the fees to be collected with the registrations, which would be through MPI, that would look after the maintenance of these trails. I'm told that that fee would be, roughly, \$85.

My question is, I think: Is the Province entertaining the idea of going this way, because it would sure be helpful to them?

It has been proven also that the groomed trails result in a lot less fatalities.

**Mr. Struthers:** Yes, we are looking at that. Snoman has made very persuasive arguments to this minister. I'm convinced that it's the way to go. We are working with MPI now to see what the best way to implement this kind of integration would be.

The Member for Ste. Rose, I think, puts his finger on the most salient point in this debate, and that is safety. When you look at the numbers of fatalities, the number of people who have been hurt snowmobiling, there's a big difference between those who are just out riding on the fields as opposed to

those who are travelling on well-groomed, well-signed trails, whether they be on the eastern side of the province or, as he's mentioned, up through our area, and to some very beautiful trails through the constituency of Swan River, in the Duck Mountains.

I think what we need to do is look for a way that we can allow the volunteers to do what the volunteers do best, and that is to be out there on the landscape developing trails, rather than spending their time with paperwork and with worrying about collecting fees. It makes a lot of sense to me to do it through MPI and, yes, we are looking at that proposal that Snoman has put forward.

I think it's very wise to take a look at what the Saskatchewan experience is and learn from that one.

But, yes, that is something that we're actively considering.

**Mr. Briese:** Thank you, Mr. Minister. I hope you proceed with that as quickly as possible, because it is one that makes absolute sense.

I'm going to go in a little different direction. I wasn't in here this morning when they were talking about the hog moratorium and various aspects of it. I notice in the Estimates book, pages 69 and 70, a whole number of things that pertain to livestock operations. I also spent 20 years on a planning district, and 12 of those years as chair, quite involved in development plans, zoning by-laws, and implementing livestock regulations into them.

What I really don't get and don't understand is the need for the moratorium. We had the livestock manure and mortalities act with a lot of regulations in it, and we had the local planning act aspect. We had the tools already in place to, I think, curtail the need for a moratorium at all. The tools were there to address individual operations on their own.

I'd like to hear some of your thoughts on that.

**Mr. Struthers:** Clearly, there were some tools in place, and, over the course of the mandates of this current provincial government, we have strengthened the water protection. Right from the beginning after the 1999 election, we moved very quickly to ban the movement of bulk water. We've taken this on from the beginning. That followed a decade in the '90s of unprecedented growth in the hog industry. There's no denying that.

We believe, and I think the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Briese) understands, that, along with any

kind of growth, you need to have a solid system of planning in place, so that growth that you're experiencing is managed in such a way that it doesn't leave a huge footprint on Mother Earth.

When we, in the fall of 2006, in November, moved forward with our phosphorus regulation based on the recommendations of the phosphorus expert committee, and, at the same time, I think we very prudently put a pause in place, and turned to the Clean Environment Commission and said, take a look at this industry, since there was this kind of unprecedented growth, and come back to us with a report and some recommendations as to how we can move forward to protect water in Manitoba, they did that. They very diligently went out and consulted with the people of Manitoba, a number of meetings around the province. They commissioned a number of research works, and met with scientists, experts who advised them on how to move forward and what advice they should be giving to me, as minister, and to our government. They did that. They came back to us and they said very clearly that the framework we had in place, including the phosphorus reg that we introduced in November of '06, they said, that's not strong enough. That's not the kind of framework that's necessary if you're going to be serious about protecting Manitoba's water.

I believe that I have, as the environment minister, as Conservation Minister, an obligation to protect the environment, to protect water. I have an obligation to take seriously the report that the CEC brought forward, which clearly said, your framework isn't strong enough and you have to do something about it.

They also said that there have developed, in Manitoba, regional imbalances. Whereas one part of the province is really experiencing a lot of development, other parts of the province are not. We took that seriously as well, and we, I think, very correctly, came to the announcement that there would be three regional moratoriums put in place, one in the La Broquerie, Hanover, De Salaberry, Ste. Anne area, where very clearly the challenge there is to find enough spread land to take up the manure that would be spread.

\* (16:10)

We also looked at the special management area, the Red River Valley up through the city of Winnipeg, up through to the marsh there at the south end of Lake Winnipeg. We looked at that and based on what the phosphorus expert committee had said

about that area and the regular flooding that takes place, sometimes massive flooding that takes place along the Red River, we determined it was prudent to extend that moratorium into that part of our province.

Finally, we looked at the area, the Interlake between the lakes, between Lake Manitoba and Lake Winnipeg. We looked at the karst landscape, the availability of and proximity of water and where all the rivers and creeks and streams flow in that part of our province, and I think quite correctly determined that a moratorium was needed there as well. On the basis of that, on the basis of those recommendations from the CEC, we have a moratorium in place. It's a moratorium that we said would be backed up by legislation and so, true to our word, we introduced Bill 17 and I'm looking forward to more debate on that.

**Mr. Briese:** Thank you for the comments. I don't agree with the minister. The regulations on the land area were already in place. Hanover, I've seen the setup they had in their council chambers and their planning office. They were probably one of the most heavily populated areas, and they'd already put in place the things that needed to be done to assess each operation on its own merits.

This industry, I think there's a bad message went out to the whole agricultural industry in Manitoba and probably to industries that are even beyond that. But this industry has been very responsible. They've embraced technology. They've spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on research. They're not getting much credit for doing that, in my view. One other thing that I'm aware of from back in another life was that of all the boil-water orders in the province, and at the time that I'm talking about there was around 60 of them, not one of them was livestock related. Every single one was human related. I think that still holds true to this day. There's very few of the boil-water orders in the province have anything to do with livestock.

I'll go on to just one other question that was quite a problem at the time when we were implementing our livestock management portion of our development plan. Just recently, ours has gone through, as you probably heard in the House one day when the minister made some fanfare about it, but one of the big, big problems we were dealing with putting that in place, we were trying to be responsible and there was disagreement between the departments of government, interdepartmental problems which, I think, probably still go on. I think

that was very unfair to the planning districts to end up actually standing in the middle of departmental controversy. We had three departments and I can name them if you want, on side and one department that was causing all sorts of problems with it. I think there's a long way to go in here on interdepartmental co-operation where local land-use planning is concerned.

**Mr. Struthers:** Yes, I want to address a little bit what the member is saying about sending the wrong signal to the industry. The signal that I believe has been sent, not only to this industry, but to everybody who contributes to the problem on Lake Winnipeg and other lakes and rivers, was that everybody who contributes to the problem needs to contribute to the solution. We've been making that clear right across the board whether it's hog producers that come to meet with me or cattle producers, farmers in general, cities, towns, villages who contribute to sewage and other source points for nutrients, cottagers who need to deal with the on-site waste-water approach that we've been taking, people who have septic fields that leak into the water table.

Everybody who contributes to the problem needs to contribute to the solution. I don't want hog producers to—they may feel like they're being picked on, but I want them to know that that's not the intent. The intent, first and foremost, is to protect water and everybody needs to do that, including hog producers. My experience has been, not just recently but well before I ever became an MLA 13 years ago, was that hog producers and farmers don't get enough credit for the kind of good environmental decisions that they make. I think that's not fair. I think some of the best decisions that I've seen made in terms of the environment happen on day-to-day activities of a farm in Manitoba. I know that.

I also want to mention that part of the pressures that hog producers are under emanate from discussions having to do with the country-of-origin labelling. I know this Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Briese) knows that we've taken steps in his community of Neepawa—Neepawa and Brandon—in terms of helping to fund to increase the slaughter capacity here in Manitoba, something that I think sends the right signal to hog producers. It sends a signal that they got a provincial government and partners in terms of that funding to move ahead in a strong way to protect their ability to grow hogs.

I also want to say that that's not just a win in terms of the COOL legislation. As the environment

minister, as a Conservation minister, that's a win for me, too. When you remove the kind of nutrients in the province that we're doing, that Brandon and Neepawa, Winnipeg and, you know, Portage is doing a feasibility study now, that's a win for us, as well, in terms of water protection. I think that was a very good move forward.

In terms of what the member says about planning districts, I know exactly the issue that he's referring to. I think he needs to understand that as a provincial government, we represent all of the interests across the board. Our departments—Conservation, Water Stewardship, Intergovernmental Affairs, Agriculture—all have a very legitimate role to play in terms of decision making when it comes to planning. All of our departments come forward from a little bit different perspective, and that is as it should be. That, I think, to me, ensures the due diligence that we as a provincial government need to show. We have to understand all of those different angles so that we can make better planning decisions.

What we have to do is recommit ourselves to working co-operatively with the municipal level and making sure that at the table, everybody is there and that their interests are being brought forward in a free and democratic way and that nobody at that table is intimidated out of saying what's on their minds. So we need to keep working at making our planning processes better, and that's the commitment that we've made as a government.

**Mr. Briese:** I think I will go on the record. I think the tactics that were used by the Department of Agriculture in that whole process were quite heavy-handed. We had taken a fairly protective look at a couple of areas in our planning district, and they questioned every word, every nuance, and stayed at it, stayed at it till we finally had to back down.

\*(16:20)

I'll give you an example. The R.M. of Rosedale was in our planning district, and along the escarpment, which is a shale escarpment—and I know the minister's familiar with it—we put a two-mile buffer zone on intensive livestock operations around the park perimeter and they wanted a lot less than that. We finally put it down to a mile and that was finally accepted but they really wanted it at half a mile. I think it was just ludicrous, but they just stayed at it and stayed at it and stayed at it and wouldn't back off until we made that change.

The other change was actually in the aquifer area, the Assiniboine Delta aquifer, where we'd allowed an 800-animal unit. All the rest of our planning district was unlimited and we were cutting that area to an 800-animal unit because it's a shallow sand aquifer and they insisted that it be unlimited there too.

We talk about protecting our environment. They were going in the other direction. That's all I have to say on it so thank you very much.

**Mr. Struthers:** Yes, I'm aware of the situation that the member brings forward. I think I need to reiterate, though, that the provincial government's mandate, from my perspective, is to protect the environment, protect our water resources, and the best way we can do that, in my mind, is to have a solid planning process and have everybody at the table to do that including Agriculture, because I think we have to make good environmental and good agricultural policy in Manitoba.

You can't do that without all of the players at the table. So the member has made his point, and we always need to be looking for ways that we can work co-operatively with the local planning districts.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** I just have a couple of quick questions for the minister. How many conservation officers are there now in total with the department? I know it's probably in the Estimates books, but I apologize I haven't had a chance to pursue them in full because they were not tabled until just recently but that's okay. I'm not going to make a political statement on that, but if you could just explain how many conservation officers there are in total across the department and if you could compare that over the last five years.

**Mr. Struthers:** From Churchill to Antler to Middlebro and all points in between we have 125 or so natural resource officers, and that's a pretty stable number over the course of the last four or five years.

What we've been trying to do is take a look at where those officers are positioned and where they make the most sense to be. We have to be able to respond very quickly when there's something going on out there in the landscape, so we always look for the most efficient and effective way to utilize the NROs.

In addition to that we have approximately 70 parks patrol that are seasonal that are of a great assistance when things heat up in the summertime in good old Manitoba.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** Can I just endeavour the minister to—and if he doesn't have this information now he could agree to get it for me later but a complete list of all the offences for which his department can lay charges against someone or an entity, lay charges at all, I guess, not just on individuals?

Can I just continue there?

**Mr. Chairperson:** Of course, you still have the floor.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** The next thing is along with a breakdown of the charges, or sorry, of the charges that can be laid, the fines that have been collected for each offence over the last five budget years.

**Mr. Struthers:** That should be quite easy. That is all contained in our annual reports and we can make that available to the member.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** I know there's been new legislation that's been passed and new areas that need to be enforced, and so on, over the last five years or, say, eight or nine years since they came into government. If the minister is saying that essentially the resource officers that are out there roughly have stayed the same over the last number of years, does the minister believe that we have sufficient staff out there to be able to enforce the laws that need to be enforced?

**Mr. Struthers:** I know the member agrees with me with what I'm about to say, and that is that our resource officers, the park patrols and all the staff that we have in Conservation, I find it quite amazing the workload that they do, the effectiveness that they are. I would, as minister—sure, I guess we'd all like to always have more, more, more, but one of the things I think we really do a good job at, the staff just to my left here, do a very good job at, is moving staff members to places that are needed the most.

When we have, let's say, the May long weekend and there's a liquor ban and we need extra staff at certain parks that are very busy, we very quickly get people to those areas. If there's a blockade that comes up, we very quickly get staff to those areas. If there's a forest fire that breaks out in the Northeast Region, we very quickly move staff from one part of the province to the next, as needed. It requires very specified, very specific training requirements, at the same time being very general in your ability to move from one situation in one part of the province to a totally different situation in another part of the province. I'm always amazed at how well our staff



responds, moving from one region to the next as they're needed.

So I'm very confident that we have a staffing complement that can take on the day-to-day activities of the department. Any kind of inspection requirements that we have, any kind of enforcement requirements that we have, I'm very confident that our folks can do the job.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** I did have the opportunity to meet and discuss various concerns from the Manitoba Midwest Lodge & Outfitters Association, and I, unfortunately, am not going to have a chance to get through all of those today. I do want to give other members a chance to ask questions, but I will do what I can in the next 30 seconds I've got.

\* (16:30)

One of the areas is the removal of tree stands, and I guess this arose as a result of permanent tree stands on private and Crown land surrounding the Riding Mountain National Park. I guess legislation was created stating that all the tree stands can only be placed and must be removed within fixed time frames. Many outfitters with bear and deer allocations have upwards of between 50 and 80 stands providing for their client bases, and in many instances it is virtually impossible to place these within two weeks of opening and then remove them within two weeks of closing. Many of these are in remote areas that never see any public eyes and they're spread out all over, so it's difficult to be able to place them and remove them.

I'm wondering, now the government, through the legislation, I guess, was asking that the tree stands be removed and is threatening fines or worse, potentially cutting down the trees holding the stands. I'm wondering if the minister—I mean, to me, it sort of sounds like a common-sense sort of thing that why can't they just stay rather than making this so cumbersome on the outfitters to have to put them in and take them out. I agree with what the minister said earlier, that our natural resource officers are excellent in our province. I mean, I just wonder when some legislation that is sort of brought through—with this type of legislation, I mean how do you police it, and is this, in fact, necessary?

**Mr. Struthers:** I spent a great day a couple of summers ago with one of the outfitters. She and her son showed me the area that they set tree stands in. We went out on these quads and she—because I'll be up front—I hardly really even realized what was all

involved in a tree stand, and I wanted to learn. So I went out with her and her son. We went all through their area. It was a pretty remote area of the Parklands, and I could understand very quickly the balancing act that needs to be achieved, and we do have that legislation in place.

As you've pointed out quite rightly, our officers out on the landscape are very good at dealing with people who have a living to make. They depend on us to make good common-sense decisions, and when the legislation is passed and needs to be implemented and enforced, my hope always is that our officers, instead of hiding behind a tree, jumping out and finding somebody, would be able to establish a relationship with the outfitter in that designated area and then work with that person to accommodate a whole number of interests that there are out in some of these areas.

One of the things that I found interesting was that there we were, way out in the bush—you would not think that there was a lot of interest in the area. In some of those areas, you'd think the last guy to walk ahead of you on the trail was Henry Kelsey himself, but there's always lots of interest out there in the woods. We've got people, hunters, who are not happy that somebody has a tree stand, and sometimes those tree stands are quite elaborate structures up in the tree or trees sometimes. They want to provide a good experience for the hunter that they bring up there, so they maybe build a tree stand that's almost the size of my house in Dauphin sometimes, I think.

What we try to do, what our officers try to do is establish a relationship with the outfitter and then work with them so that we don't end up with these big monstrosities in the trees to begin with and that if we do, then we can work with them instead of just going straight to the fine book, but work with them to work out a way that they can remove that tree stand in an acceptable fashion.

I've heard from birders who frequent those far-off parts of our province who don't want to be walking underneath a tree stand. They tell me that there's a level of ownership then, that there's a radius around that tree stand that they don't feel they're welcome in, and we can't have one person exercising that kind of quasi-ownership of an area. That's what making decisions in Crown land is all about. These are tree stands. They were supposed to be removed.

So we find ways to work with outfitters to make sure we move those tree stands out of there in a

reasonable amount of time. But, again, it is a balancing act between the interests of others in the area and wanting to help an outfitter with his or her livelihood. We always try to find that middle ground.

**Mrs. Stefanson:** I thank the minister for that, and when I did meet with the Manitoba Midwest Lodge & Outfitters, they did raise a number of concerns that, obviously, I'm not going to have a chance to get into today, but other concerns such as illegal outfitting that is taking place. They're concerned about a two-deer season in areas where there is depletion of population. They believe probably one season it should maybe be done on a GHA sort of basis.

Other areas of concern are—there was an issue with an ecotourism operator. I guess it's illegal for them to carry any firearms, and I think when they're taking people through, they could potentially become in a dangerous situation. I know they're not allowed to carry firearms. There's concern out there that their lives could be endangered, and it could be endangering the lives of the people who are with them as well, and so I know they're concerned about that and they would like to know where the minister stands on those.

Also, with the sales of allocations, contracts, allocation fees, et cetera. There are a number of issues, and I would like to know if the minister will agree to meet with them or has he met with them to discuss these issues, and if he hasn't, if he will agree to meet with them to make sure that their concerns are addressed.

**Mr. Struthers:** I have met with them. I'm willing to meet with them again. I've made that clear with Carl Wall, who's their executive director. I know many of the people on the MLOA through the four and a half years I've been the minister. I think they're a valuable part of Manitoba society. I think they make a good contribution to our economic success, and they're integral parts of many small communities all throughout rural and northern Manitoba.

I'm also very proud of the relationship that our department and particularly the Wildlife Branch has been able to develop with the MLOA and with other groups, Manitoba Wildlife Federation, and others so that we can have a direct discussion about some of these very issues.

We want to make decisions based on the surveys that we get for every game-hunting area. My bottom

line is that conservation comes first in any decision we make in terms of those game hunting areas, and the decisions need to be based on the data that's available through the surveys that we do. We're more than open to combining hunts to make better the hunting experience for people who are here in the province and who come to our province.

\* (16:40)

We also need to balance—what I heard from the MLOA in terms of the issue that the member brings forward in terms of a firearm, it's not that they can't have firearms, it's they can't have a rifle. They are allowed to carry a shotgun. The debate is whether the shotgun is preferable to a rifle. A number of the MLOA members have indicated to me they feel safer with a rifle. A number of MLOA members have indicated that they feel perfectly safe with a shotgun, but those sorts of things we need to continue to work with the MLOA on, and I'm open to meeting with them any time. If there are other issues outside of, just because they're running out of time with Estimates, if there are other issues, just let me know and we can sit and chat about that.

**Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights):** I have a number of questions and we've got limited time, so I'll try and move quickly. My first point, I just want to let the minister know that we'll be moving second reading of the bill to ban plastic bags next Tuesday morning. So the heads up and I'm looking forward to the minister's comments. I hope that he will support the bill. It would not be good if we are behind China on environmental—

**Mr. Chairperson:** Order. Sorry. If I could just ask the background noise to come down a few levels, that would be a help. Thank you. Please proceed.

**Mr. Gerrard:** My first question deals with the Owl Lake caribou herd. Can the minister provide the status of that herd under The Endangered Species Act? I gather that there is an important calving area in Nopiming Park but that that calving area is not actually protected. Can the minister tell me why?

**Mr. Struthers:** I appreciate the question from the Member for River Heights. I think we have been moving quite strongly in terms of protection for the woodland caribou. We've listed it in our act. We've worked with a whole number of stakeholders in terms of putting together a management plan for the whole herd, including an analysis of the calving

grounds that he has referenced in the park. That plan will be forthcoming.

I've mentioned stakeholders, stakeholders such as the Manitoba Model Forest. We've got letters from Hydro, from Tembec, from a whole number of stakeholders. I don't want what I am about say to be misconstrued as stakeholders because the other thing we need to realize is that we have to work with First Nations on this whole file. First Nations are not stakeholders in this. They are governments. That is more important than being a stakeholder. We need to be very careful in how we consult with First Nations in terms of decisions that we make. That is why I delayed the announcement of the caribou on the endangered species list, because I wanted to make sure that we did our proper due diligence in terms of working with the First Nations.

Their interests cannot be subverted in this process. Their interests need to be, first and foremost, understanding that this government and chiefs and councils of affected First Nations and all the stakeholders come at this from a conservation-first perspective. We need to understand that the decisions we make, first and foremost, have to be to conserve the woodland caribou. Everything else falls into place behind that.

**Mr. Gerrard:** The Owl Lake caribou herd, is it endangered, is it threatened or what is its status on the endangered species list? That was the question.

**Mr. Struthers:** I believe we have 16 caribou herds around Manitoba. Four of those caribou herds we've listed as high risk and the Owl Lake herd is one of those four. When it's listed as high risk, that means it gets special attention. It gets special attention in terms of a management plan and those sorts of things. It's at high risk partly because it ventures into areas that are further south closer to communities, close to economic activities. That's partly what puts it into high risk and why it needs to have some special attention to it.

What we have noticed is, the population has remained stable over a period of time. The research that we've been doing will continue to be done so that we monitor what that herd is up to and understand the impacts of decisions that we or others make in the area of either its migration routes or its calving areas.

**Mr. Gerrard:** The minister is reviewing the situation in terms of the environmental licences for Tembec, Tolko and Louisiana-Pacific.

Can the minister tell me whether he has signed any contracts moving forward for Tembec, Tolko and Louisiana-Pacific?

**Mr. Struthers:** One thing I want to add, just to finish off the caribou discussions, we actually put in place caribou biologists, one in the north and one in the south, people who know much more about the caribou than this minister does. I rely on those folks to make good recommendations and to include all of those people we had talked about earlier. That's the last point I wanted to make there.

In terms of Tembec, Tolko, L-P and licensing, there is a definite process that is in place and that process is there to protect all the interests, including Conservation interests out in the woodlands. The first thing I need to make clear is that the forest management plans for each of these companies are at different stages.

For example, with Louisiana-Pacific, we're right now in the process of going through a section 35 consultation. It's our duty to consult and accommodate. We are going through that process with the Aboriginal communities within the Louisiana-Pacific cut area; that's north of Swan River, the southern portion of the Swampy Cree Tribal Council, most of the West Region Tribal Council communities and other Aboriginal communities in-between. That is ongoing now. At some point, that will wrap up and we'll be looking then at the Louisiana-Pacific plan through the lens of environmental licensing.

\*(16:50)

Each of Tembec, Tolko and Louisiana-Pacific have a requirement to submit to us annual operating plans; every year we work with them on that and each of those three do that every year with us. We're at different points with each of these three licence areas. We are very committed to the section 35 process. We're very committed to a thorough environmental licensing process, and on a year-by-year basis we take a hard look at the AOPs.

**Mr. Gerrard:** I know the minister is involved in the WNO process. There have been grants to communities. Can the minister provide information on which communities have received grants to date and whether there are any second grants to any communities?

**Mr. Struthers:** Two things: One, I can provide a detailed list of the communities but also for the member, we have committed \$500,000 a year for

five years to be split amongst the 16 communities, and the WNO council makes the decisions based on the applications that come forward from those communities.

A number of communities have benefited from that investment. The money is for developing community land-use plans.

**Mr. Gerrard:** I look forward to receiving this specific list of communities and grants in the near future then from the minister. Thank you.

Paint Lake park was expanded but my understanding is that it is now open to logging. This is the first park that has been a new area provincial park in many, many, many, many years which has been open to logging. So can the minister explain why he's done that?

**Mr. Struthers:** There was an area there that was park reserve. When we removed the park reserve status, we came to an agreement with Tolko that there wouldn't be any logging in that park. So there is no logging there. The difficulty came on the mining side where there were some claims that we needed to honour.

So in that park as it exists now there is no logging, but there could be some mining activity.

**Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West):** In 30 seconds or less, Mr. Minister, can you please tell me when you will expand the hazardous waste depot in the city of Brandon which has been accepted by the citizens? They would like to have it expanded and extended. Thirty seconds, please, when will you make that announcement?

**Mr. Struthers:** Telling this minister to stick to 30 seconds is like waving a red flag in front of the bull. It's your nickel, and I'm going to attempt to be very accommodating and very co-operative, but if there's going to be red flags thrown in front of me, I'm going to come charging at them. It's that easy.

There will be another roundup of—this summer like the very successful one we had in all kinds of places across the province including Brandon. We will do that again this summer, and we are continuing to work on a regulation that'll set up a consistent day-to-day collection system for all Manitobans.

Was I under 30 seconds?

**An Honourable Member:** Yes, but you didn't answer my question. All you had to do was say, next week.

**Mr. Chairperson:** Seeing no further questions or comments, we will move to resolutions.

Resolution 12.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,883,100 for Conservation, Support Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009.

*Resolution agreed to.*

Resolution 12.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$69,182,100 for Conservation, Regional Operations, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009.

*Resolution agreed to.*

Resolution 12.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$24,334,300 for Conservation, Conservation Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009.

*Resolution agreed to.*

Resolution 12.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$7,436,800 for Conservation, Environmental Stewardship, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009.

*Resolution agreed to.*

Resolution 12.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,195,900 for Conservation, International Institute for Sustainable Development, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009.

*Resolution agreed to.*

Resolution 12.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$3,669,700 for Conservation, Minor Capital Projects, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009.

*Resolution agreed to.*

Resolution 12.8: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$6,506,500 for Conservation, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009.

*Resolution agreed to.*

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of this department is item 12.1.(a) the Minister's Salary contained in resolution 12.1.

The floor is open for questions, if any. Seeing none,

Resolution 12.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$8,868,100 for Conservation, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009.

**Resolution agreed to.**

This concludes the Estimates for this department.

The time now being 5 o'clock, I'm interrupting the proceedings, and the Committee of Supply will resume sitting tomorrow (Friday) at 10 a.m.

**EDUCATION, CITIZENSHIP AND YOUTH**

\* (15:20)

**The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Daryl Reid):** Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply has been dealing with the Estimates of the Department of Education, Citizenship and Youth.

Would the minister's staff please enter the Chamber.

As previously agreed, the discussion will be a global one, and the floor is now open for questions.

**Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield):** I was wondering if the minister could tell us, the Inter-Divisional Program for Students with Autism, IPSA, when was that first created?

**Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth):** I didn't catch—

**The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Reid):** Perhaps, the honourable Member for Springfield could repeat the question.

**Mr. Schuler:** Yes, thank you, and I also didn't hear the minister, so we'll start this all over again.

Can the minister tell us, the Inter-Divisional Program for Students with Autism, when that program was first created?

**Mr. Bjornson:** The program that the member is speaking of began in the early 1980s as a partnership between Manitoba Education and urban school divisions.

**Mr. Schuler:** If the committee would indulge us here for a moment, the honourable Member for Portage la Prairie has to be in another Estimates section. If the minister doesn't mind, I'll continue with my line of questioning as soon as the member is done, because he's supposed to be in another section of Estimates.

**Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie):** Mr. Acting Chairperson, I do appreciate the opportunity to participate in the committee of Estimates regarding Education because, without question, I know the minister recognizes the paramount importance of education.

What I asked about in the other section of Advanced Education is the continuing partnership with Advanced Ed in providing to school divisions the instructional opportunities in vocational programming, such as at Red River. Portage Collegiate right now is offering the nurse's assistant program as an optional program to the students, so, when graduation does come, the student is graduating with two diplomas, dual accreditation, not only the nurse's assistant diploma but also the high school diploma.

Where I have levels of concern is that there is, first off, limitation as to investments that are required by the school division in order to be able to put the capital into the facilities.

Mr. Acting Chairperson, I'm having difficulty, and I know the minister is having a hard time, hearing, as well. We have a lot of commotion in the Chamber.

**The Acting Chairperson:** I thank the honourable member.

Order, please. Those members in the Chamber wishing to have private conversations, if I might suggest that perhaps you might want to move into the loge so that we could facilitate the Estimates debate here. Thank you for your co-operation.

**Mr. Faurshou:** So the bottom line of the situation in Portage la Prairie, which I am very familiar with, is the borrowings of monies by the Portage la Prairie School Division to essentially put in place, through capital expenditure, the necessary facilities to afford the vocational instruction to the students of Portage la Prairie. It has not, at this point in time, been a priority of the Minister of Education to make those resources available rather than the school divisions having to go out in the general marketplace and acquire monies through loans.

**Mr. Bjornson:** I thank the member for the question. I suspect he'll come up with a supplemental on the same issue. I'd just like to inform him that indeed we do put a tremendous emphasis on technical-vocational training. We've had three-year technical-vocational initiatives in partnership with the Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy (Ms. McGifford). We've had a lot of demonstration projects throughout the province of Manitoba.

The infrastructure issue that the member speaks of, I did have an opportunity to meet with the Portage School Division. I enjoyed a fine lunch, and the issue that they raised with me was exactly that, the infrastructure for the technical-vocational program. That was the only issue that we discussed. I said to them at the time that we would certainly consider a request for the funds from the sale of the, I believe it's Victoria School, which is a surplus building that they're looking to sell as part of the source revenues for the purpose of that renovation. They have made a couple of other suggestions that I've taken as consideration and will certainly be getting back to them when we've had an opportunity to look at what those requests are and what they would mean in our long-term capital plan.

**Mr. Faurshou:** Well, I know that this minister seems to rely on his Cabinet colleagues to really address this very, very important issue. Advanced Education, he mentioned in his response. Also, too, there is currently another program of this nature coming from the Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade (Mr. Swan), and it is a program that is valuable. But, once again, I'm curious as to why his department is sort of offloading to other Cabinet colleagues an initiative that is very important, especially to those students taking their education in the rural areas of Manitoba where there is no other option. Here in Winnipeg, that is not the case. There are many opportunities for reduced travel distances but not in rural Manitoba.

So, I want to ask the minister again: Is his department going to reassess its priorities and recognize the need for expenditure to provide for vocational training in rural Manitoba?

**Mr. Bjornson:** Actually, I should let the member know that it was the Department of Education, Citizenship and Youth that initiated the technical-vocational partnership, and certainly it makes good sense for departments to work together when they have, obviously, the same objectives. Obviously, Advanced Education was a natural partner in this

endeavour when you consider that one of the initiatives we brought forward and worked with Advanced Education on is the recognition of dual credits for students who are taking courses in the high school level that could be recognized as credit to be applied to acquiring a certificate in a community college course.

We've worked together with the department on a number of different technical-vocational initiatives. So, for the member to suggest that tech-voc is not important to our department, it has remained a priority for technical-vocational education for Education, Citizenship and Youth and a very important partnership. Certainly, the member could appreciate that Competitiveness, Training and Trade, now with the training portfolio coming into the economic portfolio of Competitiveness, Training and Trade, would also be important to work in partnership with that department.

We continue to do so on a number of different initiatives. For the member to suggest that it's not a priority for Education, Citizenship and Youth, I would have to disagree with the member. It certainly is a priority. It has been, it is a priority, and it will continue to be a priority.

**Mr. Faurshou:** Mr. Acting Chairperson, perhaps if one does say it is a priority, then so should the cheque book follow from the minister's office in order to show his true commitment.

I would like, though, to just say a shortcoming in the program which he just cited. It is for expenditure and support for equipment, yet it's not allowing for any capital to essentially house or protect that equipment. It's again left up to the school division to look for other sources of monies in order to effectively store, as I said, protect that equipment. I don't see why the clause in the criteria that would prevent the storage and safe-keeping of the very expensive equipment is not a consideration for support under the program.

**Mr. Bjornson:** I should point out to the member that our expenditure for operating in support of technical-vocational training or opportunities in the school system is \$8.5 million. We provide \$2.2 million for equipment purchases on the capital side. As the member knows, when school divisions make requests for capital, each of those capital requests is considered.

Yesterday, I spoke to the Member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck) who was speaking about the Garden

Valley Technical Vocational Centre, which we did support through capital funds. Portage had made a request to self-fund the facility to speed up the facility as part of an amalgamation of the campuses of schools as the member, I'm sure, is aware. When they self-finance, they have to do due diligence and provide the department with a sound financial plan in order to finance a capital project as they have, before their department will agree to school divisions proceeding with those projects of that nature.

That's what happened in Portage, and I did meet with them to talk about some of the issues and the costs. We have committed to entertain full profits from the sale of the Victoria School to be applied to that particular cost as a revenue stream. We are looking at other measures that we're considering for supporting that particular capital investment.

**Mr. Faursehou:** I appreciate the minister's response. I guess we'll see how it does play out, but I think it's short-sighted in regard to the program. What I'm referring to is the one coming out of the Minister of Competitiveness, Trade and Industry; it does now allow for the actual capitalization, the housing of the expensive equipment. It's in the criteria that that has to come from some place else. I would suggest that if you're buying some very expensive equipment, you'd like to have a roof over it in order to protect it. I think it will go part and parcel with that expenditure.

\* (15:30)

I would like, though, to leave with the minister also the thoughts of clarifying the acquisitions of properties by a school division, as it pertains to potential future needs. There may be property that comes on the marketplace that does not often happen and the school divisions are in the dilemma of are they purchasing this property on speculation and is it something that is outside the scope of the department?

This, I believe, needs to be clarified because those schools that are expanding may not have the need to expand today or next year, but maybe three years, five years down the road will need that property to do so. I don't think it's out of scope of the department to consider the acquisition of the properties in advance of these potential uses. I don't know whether the minister wants to comment on that because currently there are a lot of misgivings and apprehension as to whether to acquire properties in this light.

**Mr. Bjornson:** School divisions, when they do acquire land, it is specifically for educational purposes. In order for them to do so, they must do so with a sound financial plan and demonstrate that there are sound educational needs for the purpose of purchasing of the land. It's not something that's bought on speculation. It's a very thorough process that's undertaken to ascertain that through the PSFB before that approval is granted.

**Mr. Faursehou:** I'll just leave that point being that it's not very clear that this proposal is in the current process and leaves a lot of apprehension on behalf of school trustees.

My other remaining question is in regard to the physical education component which the minister has given great fanfare to. I understand there is an aquatic component to the physical education program. Could perhaps the minister elaborate on the percentage of allocated time for physical education that could be maxed out in the swimming pool?

**Mr. Bjornson:** These decisions are determined locally based on the recreation facilities and agreements that they might have with communities as pools are not something you find in schools. I believe Selkirk comprehensive secondary school and The Pas are the only two that have pools attached to the buildings.

The design of the physical education curriculum is such that students have a lot of flexibility. Parents, teachers, schools and school divisions, quite frankly, have a lot of flexibility in terms of delivery models that would best meet the educational needs of those students. If communities are fortunate enough to have a good working relationship with the recreation authority and are able to have access to a pool or if the students are already enrolled in programs outside of the scope of the school that could be recognized by the board as being an appropriate physical education credit, then the hours and the amount of in-class, out-of-class time instruction would be determined at the local level.

We recognize that the traditional delivery model of gym space for the purpose of physical education was not going to be practical or not going to be feasible, in fact, for a couple of reasons. The idea behind the physical education initiative is that students will take more ownership of their physical education credits and choose activities that they would find meet their expectations in terms of their physical abilities, meet their expectations in terms of

their interests and, hopefully, meet their expectations in terms of a life sport that they would participate in well into adulthood and beyond. The model was extremely flexible for that reason. The amount of time that the member's asking specifically could be spent in the pool for credit, that would be determined at the local level with agreement with the phys ed teacher that would be awarding credit.

**Mr. Faursehou:** Just dating back myself to the boardroom at the school division level, I understood that there is provincial support for an X amount of dollar value that could be added to the support for a school division, if they offer an aquatic component of a physical education program.

**Mr. Bjornson:** The additional support is \$70 per pupil; \$2.1 million, that is the funding that we announced. We're also going to be monitoring the impact of that funding.

**Mr. Schuler:** I know the Member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Faursehou) appreciates the indulgence of the committee to allow him to raise some questions. This is one of those opportunities you actually get, if you will, face-time with the minister, so I appreciate members coming in. I know the minister understands.

I'd like to go back to our initial discussion about the IPSA; the minister mentioned that it had been started in the early '80s. Would that be '81, '82, '83? Does the department know?

**Mr. Bjornson:** As I said in my initial response, early '80s. That's as specific as I can get.

**Mr. Schuler:** Just for the record, we're talking about autism spectrum disorder or ASD. If from here on in we refer to it as ASD, the record knows what we're talking about.

Can the minister tell us how many students there are in Manitoba with ASD?

**Mr. Bjornson:** We do know that number but we do not have that here. I can get that for the member.

**Mr. Schuler:** Can the minister tell us, are there various levels of ASD, and what would those be?

**Mr. Bjornson:** It is a gradient of the disorder from very mild to very severe. Certainly, as an educator, I've had students who have been on either side of that spectrum.

**Mr. Schuler:** I take it that IPSA was created to deal with those that have the most need of a comprehensive program.

**Mr. Bjornson:** Yes, the original purpose of the program was to provide an educational setting for students with autism spectrum disorder who could not be accommodated in their own school or their own school division. That was, as I said, something that was established by school divisions.

\*(15:40)

**Mr. Schuler:** Can the minister tell us, IPSA, which is a provincial program, are there also similar programs run by school divisions?

**Mr. Bjornson:** The way our special needs funding works in the province of Manitoba; of course, students have a variety of needs that are assessed. With that assessment, there is the germination of levels of funding that are assigned to meet those needs.

The programming that's provided though is developed at the local level to address those needs. Of course, with Bill 13 there is a requirement for an IEP, or an individualized education plan, and that is up to the school divisions to work with the parents and work with clinicians or resource teachers to develop those IEPs. With respect to specific programs like IPSA, that was something that had been developed at the local level by school boards and school divisions. That was something that reflected their commitment to meet those educational needs of the students using the funding that is provided by the Province.

**Mr. Schuler:** Again the question was, other than IPSA, is there another school division, and Winnipeg No. 1 being one of those, is there, other than Winnipeg No. 1 and IPSA, any other school division that has a similar program for students with autism like IPSA?

**Mr. Bjornson:** I guess it would be important to differentiate between the program versus the Inter-Divisional Program for Students with Autism. Now that in itself spoke to the arrangement that four schools had made within three different school divisions. It was the Winnipeg School Division, the Riel School Division, Pembina Trails and Seven Oaks that were all part of IPSA. That in itself wouldn't be construed as a treatment per se, but it was just a model for delivery of the services.



As far as other programs related to autism, there is the autism outreach team of the regional health authority, there's the Manitoba Adolescent Treatment Centre, there are two teaching staff funded by Education, Citizenship and Youth at the Manitoba Adolescent Treatment Centre. There are a number of different initiatives and programs that are designed to address this. As I said, we provide the funding and school divisions determine what exactly they will be delivering in terms of those programs.

I could not tell the member what very specific programs he's asking about as there are many different delivery models throughout the province.

**Mr. Schuler:** It's obviously clear the minister is not that well briefed on this program. The minister does have a large department with many programs, and, again, we understand that he won't know every program intimately.

I guess the question that I'm getting at is, is the minister aware that his government is currently decided to phase out the Inter-Divisional Program for Students with Autism, which the minister might know is basically housed in four different schools. But it is a provincial program. It's not a school division program. It is a provincial program and is being phased out and is being, as they call it, mainstreamed into the—the students are expected to be mainstreamed into the various school divisions. The minister may not even know this, but parents have tried to meet with the minister. He would probably know the issue a lot better if he'd have actually met with them. At some point in time during this process, I will be asking if he would be so kind as to meet with them.

There are 1,100 students with ASD in the province, and in the Inter-Divisional Program for Students with Autism or IPSA, it's basically those with the greatest need, and there's between 30 and 35-ish. The parents don't have access to those numbers. Those are the ones that need the service the most. There's no language capability. They really do face a lot of hardships, and what's happening is, even without grandfathering, this program's being slashed and the students are going to be integrated or mainstreamed into their local schools. The 2008-2009 school year will be a transition year to allow school divisions and families time to plan for appropriate programming and placement of the students within their home school division.

The difficulty is that one of the families that I met with, their child had done so well in this

program, and the application process for IPSA is incredibly arduous; out of 1,100, for them to narrow it down to those that need it the most, keeping in mind that Winnipeg No. 1 has its own program, which I'm sure the minister knows but didn't quite get around to answering that question. So, out of the 1,100, those that are in the most need of this program go to those four schools. The parents are absolutely distraught. It came in the form of a letter. It informed them that the program is going to end; they will now have to deal with their local schools, the school divisions that are not set up for this.

What it was is there were four schools where there was a class in each room where these children then came every day, were used to a very predictable environment. By and large, children with autism don't like noise. It tends to be a quieter setting, and that's all going to change, and there's great, great fear amongst these parents of what will happen when they are mainstreamed.

I was wondering if the minister wanted to comment to that.

**Mr. Bjornson:** Well, the member is making some assumptions about what I do know and don't know about the issue, first of all. I must say it's rather curious that he would ask a question when he has the data in front of him. That's a rather disingenuous question to ask, if you have the data. I don't have it available but he asks a question in terms of the numbers of students with autism spectrum disorder. That's a rather interesting tactic.

The schools are Grant Park, Glenwood, Leila North and Oakenwald. What the member is speaking of, he's also misspoken on—I'm assuming he misspoke. Maybe he's drawing some conclusions, but the IPSA management committee, that was a partnership with Education, Citizenship and Youth. We did work with IPSA. We worked with them from its inception in the 1980s, but it was the management committee, not Education, Citizenship and Youth that announced that the program would conclude on June 30 of '09. It was the management committee that requested that the program in its current configuration no longer would exist. They asked that of the department. It wasn't the Department of Education, Citizenship and Youth cutting or slashing the program, as the member has characterized it as such.

\* (15:50)

In fact, the needs of these children will be met; the educational needs will be met.

Bill 13, Appropriate Educational Programming, is law; it requires individual education plans, IEPs, and their educational needs will be met. The member's drawing a conclusion that, by not following the IPSA model, their needs won't be met, and that's wrong; it's just patently wrong. I should perhaps bring the member up to date with his reference to mainstreaming. That particular phrase has not been used to talk about the educational philosophy of inclusion for over 15 years. It's no longer the word that we use to talk about inclusive education and appropriate educational programming. The word is inclusive. The students will receive supports at their local schools. It's consistent with the philosophy of Bill 13, but, again, the notion of the IPSA model was at the request of the school boards, at the request of the IPSA management committee that that particular program was no longer going to be the model for the delivery of the services for the students, not our government cutting it.

**Mr. Schuler:** First of all, the mainstreaming terminology is what came out with the meeting with the parents, and insofar as asking the minister questions, I mean, they're fair questions; I assume the minister would have these numbers; I just want to make sure the numbers are correct, so the minister need not read into it, plus it gives the committee an understanding of the in-depth knowledge the minister might have of the program.

Can the minister tell us who actually appoints the management committee of IPSA?

**Mr. Bjornson:** The school divisions; these are employees of the school divisions that are on the management committee.

**Mr. Schuler:** But the minister is powerless to save this program.

**Mr. Bjornson:** This was a request of IPSA. This was their request that this model would change, but they would continue to deliver the services and the educational opportunities. Bill 13 requires an IEP. The students' educational needs will be met.

**Mr. Schuler:** Would the minister be prepared to meet with a group of the parents and just hear their concerns? I have to tell the minister, this is probably one of the most distraught group of parents I've had the opportunity to meet with. I don't think there's a

political bone in their body. Happened to be—we came across an e-mail and e-mailed them back and said, you know, do you want to lay out the issue for us, and came in and I have to tell you, Minister, there were a lot of teary eyes; there's no anger, there's no recrimination. I would suspect there's probably more fear and more desire to protect their children than anything. It's not a group that's out for a hanging. They're a very, very low-key group, and again, I don't want to put their name, the contact name on the record and the phone number. We'd be prepared to e-mail it to his office in the morning. Would the minister be prepared to meet with them and listen to their concerns?

**Mr. Bjornson:** I will certainly do that. I can assure the member that we share the concerns of the school division and the parents that the students are getting the appropriate supports and programming that they need. That has been our commitment as government through the recommendations that came through the Special Ed Review initiative. That's been our commitment of government since we've increased funding significantly to support children with special needs. I meet with parents all the time. So I will meet with these parents.

**Mr. Schuler:** We will pass on to the minister's assistant that the individual that we lined up the meeting for the bill briefing, we have that individual's e-mail address. Can we just e-mail it to that individual, the contact names? Again, I would ask the minister on their behalf, could he please meet with them in a timely fashion. They do have some time yet, but the level of distraught was surprising, and these are people who deal with children. The minister and I have spoken about our children. I spent a lot of time the last couple of weeks driving my kids to soccer clinics and soccer games, and I don't want to rub it in here that both my oldest daughter and my son both won the city championships for their respective teams, but we wouldn't want to be doing taking precious time of this House.

I can tell the minister, as he would know, these parents don't participate in those activities. Their children are not going to be soccer players. They are not going to have that thrill of winning a city championship. For us who don't have children with ASD, you know my heart breaks for them, my heart bleeds for them because I go home to a completely, as does the minister, and we go home to a completely different environment. I'll tell the minister, I could have brought this up in the House and slagged them

in question period, and I just did not have the stomach for that.

These parents deserve more than playing politics with them. The minister has agreed to meet with them. I would like to thank him for that. Please do meet with them and listen to their concerns.

I have a few other issues that I'd like to deal with. I don't know if he wants to comment on that and then I'd like to go to other issues.

**Mr. Bjornson:** By all means, forward that information to the appropriate individual, and I will assure you that we'll set up a meeting.

**Mr. Schuler:** Yes, thank you.

I'd like to ask the minister: Does he have any record, and he might have answered this from another colleague, the number of schools who have had lockdowns this last school year?

**Mr. Bjornson:** Mr. Acting Chairperson, actually, I can tell the member the number. Before I do that, I'll provide some context for that number. There have been lockdowns on occasion where there has been an incident in the neighbourhood, not necessarily in the school. There's been an incident in close proximity to school grounds which would warrant a lockdown, including suspects fleeing robberies and things of that nature, somebody having reported seeing a weapon on a person and that necessitated the lockdown. The total number of lockdowns that were reported last year was 14.

**Mr. Schuler:** Is that for the city or for the province?

\* (16:00)

**Mr. Bjornson:** That would be for the province. We had requested that school division started reporting incidents because that had not been the past practice. As the member knows, we have certainly done a lot to support safe schools and support school safety, including the legislation, including resources, including partnerships, including safety forums, including updating the safe schools act. With that being done, we want to ensure that all these initiatives are having the desired effect, and we required that school divisions would report major incidents and start tracking that data in seeing if there are areas that would need more attention or more supports or more resources so we could plan appropriately.

**Mr. Schuler:** So, just to be very clear, when there's a lockdown, they report that lockdown to the department?

**Mr. Bjornson:** We requested that they do so, yes.

**Mr. Schuler:** Is it something that they have to do immediately? Do they notify the department right away, or do they do it after the fact?

**Mr. Bjornson:** Well, certainly, my first concern would be that the lockdown process is initiated, that everything is secure, if 911 needs to be called and law enforcement officers need to attend. I'm happy to hear from them at their earliest convenience, as soon as possible. Obviously, if the school is in lockdown mode, there's greater concern, so I'm not going to say you have to phone me right after you phone 911, but I do need to know that this has indeed taken place.

**Mr. Schuler:** Of those 14 incidents, how many of them involved incidents within the school and not something that was happening outside of the school?

**Mr. Bjornson:** I thank the member for the question. I'd have to go back and check the reports because I can't tell you right now which was in school and which was as a result of something in the community, but I do know that there have been episodes in the community that have necessitated a lockdown.

**Mr. Schuler:** On to my next topic. Some time ago, the member's party, the NDP party, made a commitment to elementary e-mail addresses, and I was wondering how many elementary students currently have an e-mail address.

**Mr. Bjornson:** I can't tell the member what that number is right now. We don't have that information.

**Mr. Schuler:** Is the department tracking that number?

**Mr. Bjornson:** We would have to check with MERLIN, and MERLIN is based out of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines, but I do know that we have one of the highest—or one of the best ratios of peoples—or, pardon me, computers per pupil in the country. We have one of the best ratios, so access to computers is fairly positive in terms of access. I do know that there are some connectivity issues where some very remote communities in the absence of a publicly owned telecommunications system, without a social mandate, they don't have access to affordable connectivity, so connectivity remains a problem, but we are continuing to work on that as well.

**Mr. Schuler:** So the minister doesn't know if the commitment has been lived up to.

**Mr. Bjornson:** Well, again, the issue of connectivity is a challenge, but we are going to check with MERLIN—Manitoba Education and Research—what's that acronym? I'm sorry, it's Learning Information Network. Yes, thank you. I've got 732 acronyms in my department. Manitoba Education Research Learning Information Network. That's the one.

We would have to check with MERLIN and MERLIN is based in the Science, Technology, Energy and Mines portfolio.

**Mr. Schuler:** Thank you, and I guess the connectivity issues were an issue when the big announcement was made in regard to this. I guess it was just another one of these great political announcements and then—what did the former Minister of Education always say? My favourite quote: the devil's in the details. I guess that's another one of these where the devil's in the details.

I would like to ask the minister if he can turn his mind to the latest results that came out on students' grades. I found out that Manitoba students are performing below the Canadian average in reading, math and science. Can the minister explain to us why it is that under his watch we are ranking so poorly?

**Mr. Bjornson:** First of all, we're not ranking that poorly as the member has put it. The discrepancy between the PCAP results and the PISA results, I'm asking the department to look into why that is the case in terms of the science outcomes. In the PISA results, the province was fourth, I believe, and in PCAP it was eighth, so, obviously, that is a cause for concern and I've asked the department to look into why that is the case. You have two externally administered assessments: one that's international, and one that is national, under the auspices of the Council of Ministers of Education Canada.

But the member needs to put this in context as well. When Canada participates in PISA, we are usually ranking in the top three or five performers, but what that doesn't tell you on the surface is the fact that Finland, who invariably does very well, or other jurisdictions that invariably do better, are more culturally homogeneous. When you look at Canada and the challenges of multicultural learners and the significant increase in EAL students and our philosophy of inclusion and all these other variables that could contribute to the test scores or the assessment results, Canada ranks No. 1 on the scores

as a multicultural nation. So you have to provide that context.

The other issue that the member should know is that—and the Premier (Mr. Doer) referenced it, the First Minister (Mr. Doer) referenced it in the House the other day—that the number of participants in one of the jurisdictions in Canada was considerably lower and that is going to have an impact on the results and statistically those results could be challenged. But in Manitoba, we make sure that we have a very high participation rate, and we've increased our participation rate in PISA because we want to get a better picture of our student achievement.

So Manitoba is doing well. Can we do better? Yes, we'll continue to work to that. With the science issue, a couple of years ago when I saw the results on the science, we started a number of initiatives, one being the Scientist in the Classroom initiative where grants are given for a thousand dollars to 10 different schools where scientists can come into the school, work with the students, and they can provide some terms of reference for those students on what they're learning in the books and how it applies everyday to the jobs that those particular individuals do in the business of science.

*Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Madam Chairperson, in the Chair*

\* (16:10)

We also recently hosted a meeting, hosted a luncheon for people in the research community, people involved in the business of science, and people involved in all fields of science and technology, engineers, aeronautical engineers, you name it; they were all at the table. We asked them to assist us as good community members in working together to make our science experiences for our students more meaningful. Teachers are doing a great job; they have a really good new curriculum to work with, but we know that we need to provide more supports and resources for teachers. I know that in my own example of my own community, there's a pultrusion plastics company that—there's a tremendous amount of science that goes into the development of the products of pultrusion plastics, just as there's a tremendous amount of science that goes into the distillery process and the chemistry involved in the distilling process of Diageo. Students drive by that every day. They can make connections

to understanding the chemistry that goes into that particular process every day, two miles north of the high school.

We are trying to make connections to the curriculum in the community, trying to make the curriculum more meaningful. It's about engagement. It's about engaging learners early and thus making the curriculum something that the students can identify with more clearly, other than simply textbook learning. I'm not saying teachers are doing that; teachers are doing a lot of innovative things. If you saw the results of the science fair, there is a young man from Manitoba who is going to an international science fair for his research on cancer. That's two years in a row where that's happened.

There are good things happening, but we know we need to do more to engage our students, and we are committed to do that.

**Mr. Schuler:** I don't want the minister to start perpetuating the big snow-job that was started a couple of days ago in this House.

First of all, let's look at the Canadian results, results in reading by jurisdiction. It goes from Québec, No. 1; Ontario, No. 2; Alberta, No. 3; British Columbia, No. 4; Yukon, No. 5; Manitoba, No. 6, well below the Canadian mean.

Mathematics: Québec, No. 1; Ontario, No. 2; Alberta, No. 3; British Columbia, No. 4; Manitoba, No. 5.

Science: Alberta, No. 1; Québec, No. 2; Ontario, No. 3; British Columbia, No. 4; Newfoundland and Labrador, No. 5; Nova Scotia, No. 6; Saskatchewan, No. 7; Manitoba, No. 8.

The Premier (Mr. Doer) gets up and says, yes, they are very concerned their government about the science results, considering evidently how well they performed on the international or PISA study which I just happen to have in my hand here.

I actually would like to read for the minister and for this committee how we rated in science, according to the rest of the world and I quote: Fifteen-year-old students in all Canadian provinces performed well in science when contributed to Canada's standing in international comparisons. Generally, provinces fell into one of the three groups when compared to the Canadian averages for combined science. The three science sub-domains: the average performance of students in Alberta was significantly above the Canadian average.

So, when they say the Canadian provinces performed well, first of all, they mean Alberta, significantly above the Canadian average. Québec, Ontario and British Columbia performed about the same as the Canadian average, while students in Newfoundland, Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Manitoba and Saskatchewan performed significantly below the Canadian average.

That's not what the Premier said. The Premier put the wrong thing on the record. The minister, rather than going to the real numbers, will just regurgitate wrong *Hansard* quotes. What the Premier should have said is, we've done poorly on an international level; we do poorly on a national level. The NDP government should be ashamed of itself. The minister should be ashamed of himself.

In fact, I happen to have the listings. It goes: Finland, Alberta, New Zealand, British Columbia, Hong Kong, China, Japan, Australia, Chinese Taipei, then Canada, Ontario, Québec, United Kingdom, Newfoundland, Labrador, Netherlands, Slovenia and then Manitoba.

We rank slightly above Liechtenstein. Great. Under this minister, when it comes to science, we get to whup Liechtenstein. Somehow the minister gets up and thumps his chest and seems to want to convince the media that, somehow, we did great on the international level, as compared to the way we did nationally. Not true, not even close.

I would ask, through the Chair to the minister, please don't perpetuate this myth. I ask the minister again: How is it that we seem to be failing to such a degree?

**Mr. Bjornson:** Perhaps the member should look back to when Manitoba ranked 10th in reading. I believe it was 1988 or 1999, I'll have to check the date of that, but right now Manitoba ranks very well in reading, and in reading, 84 percent of Manitoba students meet or exceed reading standards while the Canadian average is 88 percent. We rank fifth in the country. We had been 10th. What the member doesn't acknowledge, if he reads the report thoroughly, is that we have one of the best differentials between gender in terms of achievement. That is becoming a very important issue in many jurisdictions where young boys are not achieving as well as they should in many of the domains, and, in reading, our young men in Manitoba are doing very well. There's less of a

disparity between males and females in reading in Manitoba.

What the member also doesn't acknowledge is the fact that we have one of the lowest disparities between low socio-economic status and high socio-economic status. What the member doesn't acknowledge is the fact that graduation has increased by nine—I believe 10 percent in the province of Manitoba, so add those factors into the equation.

The member should acknowledge that we are doing better as far as the international results are concerned. He mentioned Finland. I don't know if he's had the opportunity to visit Finland. Perhaps I will someday to get my own assessment of why it is that the country does so well, but I will tell you, my understanding of why the country does so well is because it's a culturally homogeneous society where they don't have the same challenges in terms of the delivery of an education system that's equitable for all learners. We have one of the most multicultural societies in the world, and I'm proud of the fact that our multicultural society is one of the highest-achieving societies when you compare it to other multicultural jurisdictions.

Now, I don't know what the member has against Liechtenstein. I happened to drive through Liechtenstein when I was touring Europe many years ago. I thought it was a fine place so I don't know why he seems to think that performing a little bit below the fine citizens of Liechtenstein would be an insult. If the member wants to look at the rest of the data, and look at how we are comparing to other jurisdictions, I can name off several jurisdictions over which we are doing much, much better.

Now, this is hard for you. I know we're doing better than Iceland. We're doing better than Norway, Czech Republic, Latvia, Luxembourg, Croatia, Portugal, Lithuania, Italy, Slovakia, Spain, Greece, Turkey, Chile, Russian Federation, Israel, Thailand, Uruguay, Mexico, there's a lot more that are below—

There's a lot more listed below the achievement than above the achievement levels of Manitoba students and I'm very proud of the work that our students are doing, and our teachers are doing as well, and, as I said, with respect to the science, when we saw the disparity, when we saw the gap between the PISA results and the PCAP results, we've asked the department to go and meet with school divisions and find out why that is the case. We've asked them to act on that.

The member, his glass is obviously less than half full. When I was at the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada, I wish I could recall the gentleman's name, but he was a gentleman who does surveys repeatedly for a big survey company based out of Toronto. I really am struggling to remember his name, but his message to the ministers of Education was why is it that, when we produce our results, our PISA results and make them public, that people are embarrassed that we're third or people are complaining that we're third? And he put it in that context for us. He talked to us about the fact that we are a multicultural country. He talked to the ministers about the fact that culturally homogeneous countries do not have the same challenges. So, in science, Canada, Manitoba performed—the performance improved from 2003 relative to the OECD mean, and he talked about that.

\*(16:20)

Manitoba's increase from 2003 was 11 points, which is similar to most provinces, so it's improved. Now why did the PCAP results vary? We're going to find out. We know that we're on the right course; we're producing more current curriculum, providing more resources. We're funding education appropriately to support the resources. We have favourable teacher-pupil ratios. We have targeted areas where we have students who are at high risk and students with more profound needs. We have targeted low socio-economic communities, and we see the results of that because we know that the variation between their achievement and high socio-economic, as I said, is statistically not that significant.

One of the best indicators that we have is that statistical insignificance. You could combine that with the statistical insignificance with respect to achievement of young men and young women. That speaks to a system that is delivering an equality of educational opportunity for all learners, and we are going to continue to improve.

**Mr. Schuler:** I'm sure most immigrants would find the minister's argument offensive, that because we've immigrants thus we would score less, or because we are a multicultural community, thus we would score lower. I'd like to point the minister out to the list. He's right. Finland is No. 1. Alberta is No. 2, and, you know what? I've actually driven through Alberta. I've been to Alberta, I've walked the streets of Alberta, and you know what, Minister? It's quite a multicultural community; No. 4, British Columbia.

I've been to British Columbia. I've driven the streets of British Columbia, walked the streets of British Columbia, like to point out to the minister that it is not homogeneous. It is very multicultural.

Oh, Canada. I've been to Canada, and I've walked the streets of many places in Canada. It ranks up there above Manitoba, and right below Canada is Ontario. Ontario, now there's another homogeneous, especially if you get into Toronto, Minister. Hardly. It's also very multicultural. Québec also has quite a multicultural component to it. Newfoundland and Labrador, they've got their multicultural communities.

How about the Netherlands? The Netherlands, which they figure by 2020 is going to be 50 percent immigrants and others coming into the country, it's a very multicultural country.

So the argument that somehow, because we are multicultural, that's why we can't score highly is bunk. It's an absolute nonsense argument. I can't believe the minister would actually bring that argument forward. The minister has been minister for five years. We've seen our failings on an international stage. Reading results within Canada, we come in sixth, and minister says, ah, stop looking at it as your glass is half empty. Math we come in fifth; science, we come in eighth.

His colleague the Member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell) six years ago warned that there was a lot of work to be done. At that point in time he already identified that there was a problem. For five years this minister has languished in the minister's chair in his beautiful office and has done nothing. The results, by and large, don't get any better. He questioned this House. He said, well, the last time we placed this poorly was 1988. Yeah, about the last time we threw out the last NDP government. No wonder, and here we go again.

I would like to see the minister say this is going to be a focus of his and that he is going to deal with this. The Premier (Mr. Doer) got it wrong, which is almost an oxymoron. The Premier always gets it wrong, but in this case he got it wrong and indicated that on an international level we scored well, and on a national level we scored poor. Premier's wrong again. We scored very poorly on an international level. We came in very poorly on a national level when it comes to science. I will have to make sure I clip *Hansard* and send this to the Premier so that he can educate himself. It might do him well.

I say to the minister, six years running, there was a warning six years ago. The last time when we asked questions on the international figures, December 5, 2007, here it was, Mr. Speaker, page 385 of *Hansard*: "Mr. Speaker, the Program for International Student Assessment which measures proficiency levels in 57 countries in science, reading, mathematics was released yesterday." Both science and reading in Manitoba ranked significantly lower than the Canadian average.

Under this minister, the percentage of Manitoba students with high-level proficiency in science is slightly better than Liechtenstein, but below Slovenia. I went on to ask the minister why we are not keeping up. He rattled on and rattled on and the results don't seem to improve.

We would like to hear the minister sit in his seat and say the warning was there six years ago and we did not heed the warning and that now he realizes it is time to take on the issue and take it seriously.

**Mr. Bjornson:** Well, again, the member's putting a lot of data on the record. The member is excluding a lot of very important information.

When you look at the science domain in PCAP, it was considered a minor domain, and, as a minor domain, the assessment is not as thorough and accurate as it would be if it was a major domain. So I'll take that into consideration.

But I'm still not satisfied that it's eighth as opposed to fourth, which was the results with PISA. That's why we have made it a priority and we have—*[interjection]* Well, if the member doesn't want to hear the answer. We have made it a priority, and I did explain to the member that we had set up the scientists in the program initiative. I did explain to the member that we had a meeting with the science community because we are hearing from the science community that they're anticipating labour shortages as we have such a booming economy, as we have a robust economy, so you need to work with them to ensure that our students are getting a science education. That's critical; that's important.

So we met with the science community and, as I said, researchers from the aerospace sector, from the biomedical sector, from ag industries. A number of different stakeholders were at the table to talk to us about how we can engage our students more in the study of science, and I think that's a good thing. I think the results of the last couple of science fairs where two young Winnipeggers from the public

school system had been recognized nationally and had gone on internationally to present their research on cancer treatment and cancer research, there are extraordinary achievements—extraordinary achievements.

Now, again, I am really at a loss to understand why the member opposite would have trouble with certain jurisdictions, and I appreciated the geography lesson he was giving me earlier. I'm glad he's traveled those cities and provinces, as have I. But, certainly, when you look at the results, the bottom line is that Canada does exceptionally well internationally. Manitoba always does very well and exceptionally well in Canada.

Put that in context, apply it to all the other jurisdictions, and, you know, the member might find this interesting. The member is from a group that has advocated more standardized testing. More standardized testing is a cure-all. Finland does not have any standardized testing, none. We're engaged in quite a repertoire of assessment, including assessing student engagement, because we know that students mentally drop out of school—mentally, not necessarily physically, but mentally—so they're at risk of dropping out of school when they're in the latter part of their early-years career, grade seven, grade eight.

So we're doing something that hasn't been done before that other jurisdictions are watching with much interest, and that is assessing student engagement. We need to know how our students are engaged as learners because engagement equals a greater chance of success. If the learner is engaged in what he's learning, he or she will experience a greater amount of success. So we're assessing that.

\* (16:30)

I know during the election the member talked about more standardized tests and if you look at the United States, under the No Child Left Behind initiative, they continue to increase the number of standardized tests that students have to take under that initiative. Where's the United States today on the OECD-PISA results compared to where it was before the No Child Left Behind initiative? The member will probably see that the American results have steadily decreased.

So, you know, to be lectured about assessment, I know, as a teacher—as a teacher—that we are on the right path with assessment. I know that we have to continue to work to support learners, and I know that

we have to continue to address areas where we see that we can be doing better, and we'll continue to do that.

I should also correct the member—if he heard me say 1988 was the last assessment done on reading when we were 10th—if that's what I said, that was a mistake. It was actually 1998—in 1998 and '99, in that area or that timeframe when we were assessed at 10th in the country for reading.

We are making significant inroads and those inroads, as I say, are reflected in the achievement in the gaps that we see between low and high socio-economic status, and the gaps that we see in gender. Those gaps are very small in Manitoba compared to everywhere else. So we are doing a very good job in equality of educational opportunity for our students, and that's something I'm very proud of.

So, it's one thing about statistics to look at them on the face value, but the member should also get into a little bit more of the meat and potatoes, and get a better understanding of the statistics. The numbers, you know, as I said, we have a very high participation rate. A very high participation rate. We want as many students to participate as possible in these assessments so we get a very accurate picture, and I do know that there are some jurisdictions where their participation rate is so low that we can question the validity of those statistics, and I think that's fair and reasonable. Because if you want to work with statistics, you have to make sure those statistics are fair and representation for all jurisdictions that are participating in that assessment.

But, as I said, science curriculum is a priority. It has been with our scientists in the classroom. It has been with working with the stakeholders in the science community. It'll continue to be a priority just as all facets of academics are a priority for our government. We'll continue to work to improve not only the curriculum, but the resources and the professional development opportunities for teachers. So I want to assure the member in no uncertain terms that we have made this a priority. We're going to continue to work on it, and that is our commitment to Manitoba teachers, students and parents.

**Mr. Schuler:** The minister mentions measuring engagement. Can he tell us how that's measured, and is that collected by the department?

**Mr. Bjornson:** A couple of things that will be assessed is the extent to which students are engaged in, among other things, extra-curricular activities in



their school. Try to assess how involved they are in their learning. Try to assess their interest in their learning. This is actually a first-year pilot and that first-year pilot will also determine things, among others, how they feel about the environment in their school. How they feel about their school because to be active learners you have to have—you have to feel comfortable in the environment in which you're learning, and to be active learners you have to identify with a curriculum. You have to identify with the teachers. You have to be comfortable in your environment.

So this is part of the pilot that we've initiated this year, and I have to say, it's been something that's very important to me as someone who is, as a teacher, always trying to find ways to engage my learners in my classroom in trying a variety of things. When you consider all the information that is out there in edu-babble terms, if I may, the multiple intelligences, the Gregoric model of learning and learning styles, and understanding the relationship between learning styles and teaching styles and understanding the relationship between learning styles and teaching styles, understanding the relationship between teaching styles and multiple intelligences, it's all really impressive research. We have to know that our students feel that they are part of that learning process. So, again, this is something that is quite unique; it's never been done before, and other jurisdictions are very interested in that.

In fact, the other night I happened to have a conversation with somebody from a federal agency who said that they're trying to do the same thing. They don't know how to go about it, and I haven't mentioned this to the deputy, but we're going to be getting a phone call about what we are doing so that they can look at our model and see if they can apply it to this federal agency and the workforce that they're trying to support in their environment.

So it's something that, as a teacher, I'm very excited about because I think the key for me, as a teacher, is that every student should be afforded an opportunity to explore not only their interests but explore things that engage them in their learning. From my own personal experience, I'll admit math was not my forte, and I know my math teacher tried his best to teach me math, but his teaching style and my learning style were at odds, and I can count how many times I saw his head turn red in his frustration of trying to teach me some of the math at the high school level.

So I know that from my own experience as a learner, and I'm sure a lot of learners can identify with that where they might experience some frustration. So we have to be cognizant of what their learning skills are, learning styles and how they feel about their school and the environment in which they're learning.

**Mr. Schuler:** This pilot, where is it being run? Is it being run at a specific school or in a specific school division?

**Mr. Bjornson:** It is province-wide this year, and it is in grade 7s.

**Mr. Schuler:** Is it a form that's filled out? Is it teacher-driven? Is it pupil-driven?

**Mr. Bjornson:** We provide guidelines and questions for the teachers on the information that we would like them to collect for this assessment.

**Mr. Schuler:** Is that information then sent back to the department, and has that been taking place? Is it being tabulated?

**Mr. Bjornson:** Yes, it will.

**Mr. Schuler:** Yes, it will that they have started to send it in, or yes, it will, that they will send it in?

**Mr. Bjornson:** Sorry, I was responding to the member's question on whether or not it will be tabulated. It will be tabulated. So you could therefore conclude that it will be sent in for that purpose. That's a requirement.

**Mr. Schuler:** Well, what will happen with that information? What is it that the minister will do when he's measured the engagement of grade 7 students, and is it possible for the minister to send me a copy of that guideline, what it is they fill out?

\* (16:40)

**Mr. Bjornson:** What this exercise will do, it's essentially a formative tool that will allow us to identify areas that might be problem areas in terms of the student engagement. If there's a particular pattern where we see that a particular school or a particular area where that might be an issue, then we can have that dialogue on school divisions on what we can do to support their needs and what we can do to support student engagement in the classroom.

As far as, you asked for the guidelines themselves, we could provide that to you. That won't be a problem.

**Mr. Schuler:** If it's fine with the minister, because I know we want to conclude these Estimates at 5 o'clock, would it be agreeable with the minister if we would get to the Minister's Salary and then, just if there's a bit of time, do a few more questions, but just to make sure that we get through passing everything and then, if he doesn't mind, a few more global questions at the end, but I don't want us to get, you know, into a time frame where then we'd have to come back tomorrow? If that's agreeable, then I would say let's go through it.

**Mr. Bjornson:** That's fine with me.

**Madam Chairperson (Bonnie Korzeniowski):** It is agreed.

Resolution 16.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$28,242,600 for Education, Citizenship and Youth, School Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 16.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$10,811,200 for Education, Citizenship and Youth, Bureau de l'éducation française, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 16.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$252,975,000 for Education, Citizenship and Youth, Education and School Tax Credits, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 16.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,057,433,800 for Education, Citizenship and Youth, Support to Schools, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 16.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$7,083,400 for Education, Citizenship and Youth, MB4Youth, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 16.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$47,541,700 for Education, Citizenship and Youth,

Capital Funding, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009.

**Resolution agreed to.**

Resolution 16.8: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$479,000 for Education, Citizenship and Youth, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009.

**Resolution agreed to.**

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of the department is item 1.(a) the Minister's Salary, contained in Resolution 16.1.

At this point we request the minister's staff leave the Chamber for the consideration of this last item.

The floor is open for questions.

**Mr. Schuler:** I did have a few more questions for the minister on assessment. I wanted to ask him if he could indicate to this House where the department is right now on the assessment policy.

**Mr. Bjornson:** First of all, the province-wide assessment that we do have right now is grades 3, 7 and 8. We now test students province-wide.

We know that the former standardized testing did not provide usable feedback because less than 50 percent of the schools were participating. We want to make sure that we're getting the best possible information. It's very comprehensive; the program tests all students at the beginning of the school year. That provides teachers and parents with the information they need to improve and address the learning needs of their students.

The assessment policy is not just limited to the grades 3, 7 and 8 assessment, as the member knows. We just talked about PISA and PCAP; those are programs that we participate in significantly. There is a significant participation rate and PISA, in fact, as I mentioned previously, we actually increased the participation of Manitoba students in PISA because we wanted to get a better picture of student achievement.

As the member knows, we also standardized tests in grade 12 in English and Math. We use a variety of mechanisms to test and assess; of course, teachers assess just about every day in some way, shape or form. There's quite a variety of mechanisms that we currently employ for that purpose of assessment.

**Mr. Schuler:** The grades 3, 7 and 8 assessment, is that a standard assessment? Does it vary? Does it come out from the department to the school divisions? Can the minister please enlighten the committee?

**Mr. Bjornson:** The grade 3 assessment is a standard assessment. It is a method of assessing the students, as I said, at the beginning of the school year. That way, if there are any learning barriers that the students might be experiencing at that time, it's an entry-level assessment rather than an exit-level assessment at the end of the year when it's too late to determine any interventions.

In fact, we're supporting the grade 3 assessment by—last year we introduced the Summer Learning Calendar in grade 2, where every student in grade 2 received a calendar that had a list of activities that they could possibly partake in, many of them at no cost to the family, just a list of activities that they could do that were connected to the curriculum.

\*(16:50)

We're going to be releasing a second Summer Learning Calendar through Healthy Living and the Department of Education, Citizenship and Youth. So these are tools that we're using to see how they impact the assessment at the beginning of the school year. But it is an entry level assessment, as opposed to an exit assessment, and it is throughout the province.

**Mr. Schuler:** What about the grades 7 and 8 assessment?

**Mr. Bjornson:** The grade 7, as I said, is assessing engagement, as will grade 8 be assessing engagement.

**Mr. Schuler:** Is it possible to get copies of those assessments, blank?

**Mr. Bjornson:** You want to find out if you're smarter than a Manitoba third grader? I'm sorry, I couldn't resist. I happened to catch that show the other day.

You know, I'm not sure if we're in the habit of handing them out but, as I said, we have committed to giving you the grade 7, so I don't see why that would be an issue.

**Mr. Schuler:** Right, and, of course, that would be under the understanding that if there is one going out this spring, we would get the one from last year, that

being the understanding. I would caution the minister, I don't know quite where his children are, but my father-in-law has a great saying. Someone asked him if he was smarter than his son. He said, no, I don't think I would say I'm smarter than my son. But he paused and reflected, and he said, but I am wiser. As much as our children might be learning more than we did, and in some respects, maybe, smarter than us, there still is a lot of room for wisdom. I don't know if there's an exam for wisdom because, maybe, that's where the minister and I could actually beat our kids at.

I would say to the minister, if there's ever a point in time when, for instance, he wants to test his physical health, he and I could, and maybe his kids, we could have a he-and-I versus the six children, and then we'll see how well we do, whether it's at academics or at sports. I wouldn't bet the farm on any of those, Minister.

So, if it was possible, I actually wouldn't mind having a look at the assessment. We've spoken about them a lot over the years, and I would like to have a look at what they look like. So I appreciate the minister agreeing to sending copies.

Before we do conclude the Estimates for this department, there are several things, not an awful lot that we've asked for, and the minister has committed to, I was wondering if we could get that information as soon as possible. I take it his department is probably, sort of, tracked the kinds of requests that we've made and if he could get those for us, that would be most appreciative.

**Mr. Bjornson:** I will certainly endeavour to do so in a timely fashion.

Actually, with the member's indulgence, I just wanted to acknowledge one of the staff members who didn't get a chance to sit at this table, but he was waiting in the wings in the event that he might, and that is Dr. David Yeo from administration, who recently, successfully defended his thesis, and I wanted to put it in *Hansard* and congratulate him for that. I have to say that I am very privileged to work with an incredible team of professionals in the Department of Education, Citizenship and Youth. I think that's a tremendous example that Dr. Yeo has set, achieving his Ph.D. with an incredibly busy schedule that he has and his commitment to the department and to the children of Manitoba. So I just wanted to get that in *Hansard* for the good doctor, and I appreciate your indulgence.

**Mr. Schuler:** To conclude the Estimates, I do, also, want to congratulate Dr. Yeo. I had an opportunity to congratulate him personally. I would say that, he, sitting in the gallery, had probably the most backbreaking work, not that he worked any harder than the rest of us, it's just that the seating up there is so brutal. He said the only upside was that he could stand periodically, but I, for some reason think that the designers of this building designed the gallery in such a fashion that people wouldn't overly stay a long time in the gallery because that seating up there is absolutely brutal.

So, with that, I again appreciate the departmental staff and all the work they do and ready to deal with the minister's salary. If we don't deal with the Minister's Salary then, unfortunately, I have to deal with the minister's significant other at the next function. And then not just will I have to be fighting for the minister's COLA, a fair COLA which all retired teachers deserve and sooner than later, when the minister retires and becomes a teacher again, we'll want to see, not just will I have to be responsible for that and then his wife will make me responsible for not having passed the minister's salary and you know what, that is just too much stress for this member to take. So I think maybe we

should deal with the Minister's Salary and just get on with it.

**Madam Chairperson:** Resolution 16.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,571,800 for Education, Citizenship and Youth, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009.

***Resolution agreed to.***

This concludes the Estimates for this department. The next set of Estimates that will be considered by this section of the committee is the Estimates of Labour and Immigration.

Is it the will of the committee to recess until 5 p.m.? *[Agreed]*

*The committee recessed at 4:57 p.m.*

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*The committee resumed at 5 p.m.*

**Madam Chairperson:** Order, please. The hour being 5 p.m., I am interrupting the proceedings of the committee. This section of the Committee of Supply will now recess and will reconvene tomorrow (Friday) at 10 a.m.

# LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 1, 2008

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