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Fourth Session - Thirty-Sixth Legislature

of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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The Honourable Louise M. Dacquay
Speaker*



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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Sixth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ASHTON, Steve	Thompson	N.D.P.
BARRETT, Becky	Wellington	N.D.P.
CERILLI, Marianne	Radisson	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CUMMINGS, Glen, Hon.	Ste. Rose	P.C.
DACQUAY, Louise, Hon.	Seine River	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard, Hon.	Roblin-Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary	Concordia	N.D.P.
DOWNEY, James, Hon.	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
DRIEDGER, Albert	Steinbach	P.C.
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
ENNS, Harry, Hon.	Lakeside	P.C.
EVANS, Clif	Interlake	N.D.P.
EVANS, Leonard S.	Brandon East	N.D.P.
FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
FILMON, Gary, Hon.	Tuxedo	P.C.
FINDLAY, Glen, Hon.	Springfield	P.C.
FRIESEN, Jean	Wolseley	N.D.P.
GAUDRY, Neil	St. Boniface	Lib.
GILLESHAMMER, Harold, Hon.	Minnedosa	P.C.
HELWER, Edward	Gimli	P.C.
HICKES, George	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
JENNISSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
KOWALSKI, Gary	The Maples	Lib.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
LATHLIN, Oscar	The Pas	N.D.P.
LAURENDEAU, Marcel	St. Norbert	P.C.
MACKINTOSH, Gord	St. Johns	N.D.P.
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	N.D.P.
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
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McCRAE, James, Hon.	Brandon West	P.C.
McGIFFORD, Diane	Osborne	N.D.P.
McINTOSH, Linda, Hon.	Assiniboia	P.C.
MIHYCHUK, MaryAnn	St. James	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie, Hon.	River East	P.C.
NEWMAN, David, Hon.	Riel	P.C.
PENNER, Jack	Emerson	P.C.
PITURA, Frank, Hon.	Morris	P.C.
PRAZNIK, Darren, Hon.	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
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REIMER, Jack, Hon.	Niakwa	P.C.
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ROBINSON, Eric	Rupert's Island	N.D.P.
ROCAN, Denis	Gladstone	P.C.
SALE, Tim	Crescentwood	N.D.P.
SANTOS, Conrad	Broadway	N.D.P.
STEFANSON, Eric, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	P.C.
STRUTHERS, Stan	Dauphin	N.D.P.
SVEINSON, Ben	La Verendrye	P.C.
TOEWS, Vic, Hon.	Rossmere	P.C.
TWEED, Mervin	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
VODREY, Rosemary, Hon.	Fort Garry	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, June 1, 1998

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Rail Line Abandonment

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): Madam Speaker, I beg to present the petition of W. Griffith, L. Graham, D. Long and others praying that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba request the provincial government to go on record requesting CN and CPR to not proceed with any discontinuance of lines until the report has been tabled, that being the Estey Grain Transportation report.

Mining Reserve Fund

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): Madam Speaker, I beg to present the petition of D. Grenier, L. Grenier and R. Grenier, praying that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba may be pleased to request the Minister of Energy and Mines (Mr. Newman) to consider transferring the account of the Mining Reserve Fund to a banking service in Lynn Lake should such a facility meet provincial standards.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Rail Line Abandonment

Madam Speaker: I have reviewed the petition of the honourable member for Swan River (Mrs. Wowchuk), and it complies with the rules and practices of the House (by leave). Is it the will of the House to have the petition read?

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Madam Speaker: Dispense.

WHEREAS affordable transportation is a critical component of grain production; and

WHEREAS under the Crow rate benefit, Manitoba was the cheapest place on the Prairies from which to ship grain but became the most expensive following the abolishment of the Crow rate; and

WHEREAS the Canada Transportation Act proclaimed on July 1, 1996, gave railways the ability to discontinue and scrap branch lines without public input; and

WHEREAS several lines were targeted immediately by CN for abandonment; and

WHEREAS CN gave notice on May 6, 1998, that the Erwood Subdivision will be discontinued in 1998; and

WHEREAS the loss of this line would severely impact upon the communities of Bowsman and Birch River as well as surrounding communities; and

WHEREAS in 1997, western grainfarmers lost millions of dollars due to backlogs and delays by the major railways; and

WHEREAS as a result the federal government set up the Estey Grain Transportation Review which is scheduled to release a report later this year.

WHEREFORE your petitioners humbly pray that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba request that the provincial government go on record requesting CN and CPR to not proceed with any discontinuance of lines until that report has been tabled

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

Committee of Supply

Mr. Marcel Laurendeau (Chairperson): Madam Speaker, the Committee of Supply has adopted certain resolutions, directs me to report the same and asks leave to sit again.

I move, seconded by the honourable member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Tweed), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): It is my pleasure to table the Annual Report, 1997-1998, of the Seizure and Impoundment Registry.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members, firstly, to the Speaker's Gallery where we have with us today His Excellency Jim Gerard, New Zealand High Commissioner to Canada.

On behalf of all honourable members, I welcome you this afternoon.

Also, seated in the public gallery, we have this afternoon sixty-five Grade 5 students from Constable Edward Finney School under the direction of Mrs. Diane Minaker. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable member for The Maples (Mr. Kowalski).

On behalf of all honourable members, I welcome you this afternoon.

* (1335)

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Winnipeg Child and Family Services Caseloads

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, my question is to the First Minister (Mr. Filmon). Last week we asked a number of questions about the caseloads dealing with children in our communities, the Child and Family Services department. The government has talked repeatedly about a strategic planning process that they are in. We have a copy now of a document dealing with the strategic planning process, prepared this year, that talks about

the context of caseloads within the cutbacks made by this government on health, education and social assistance and, further, within the context of cutbacks dealing with their very own department, the Department of Family Services.

The document also confirms that the caseloads are above the national standards and above the standards of the Child Welfare League of America. I would like to ask the Minister of Family Services or the Premier: does he feel it is healthy for children to have an average caseload of 38 clients per worker, way above the standard for the North American standard for child and family services?

Hon. Bonnie Mitchelson (Minister of Family Services): I thank the Leader of the Opposition for that question because it does provide me with the opportunity to indicate that right across the country there are issues around child protection that governments of all political stripes are attempting to address. It is no easy issue, and there are no easy quick-fix answers in the area of child protection or services to children and families in need. I can indicate to you that we have increased funding year after year in the area, and we are still seeing unacceptably high numbers of children in care in the province of Manitoba, higher numbers than many other provinces across the country, which is of significant concern to our government. We are putting the resources in, and I know that the Winnipeg Child and Family Services agency is attempting to deal with the issue of caseloads and the issues around protection of children.

Foster Care Impact of Cutbacks

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): The document, which I will table, also confirms that we have the highest number of children in care. Madam Speaker, of course we already know that we are the child poverty centre of Canada, regrettably. The document also confirms that the supply of foster homes is not meeting the ever-increasing volume in needs of children. The Premier (Mr. Filmon), in 1993, when he cut back on the money and resources for foster children and foster parents, said that foster parents could be replaced. I would like to ask this Premier what impact his cutbacks have been on foster rates in Manitoba.

What impact has there been on lack of care on the one hand and higher costs through short-term stays in hotels and other resources on the other hand?

Hon. Bonnie Mitchelson (Minister of Family Services): Madam Speaker, I do know that Winnipeg Child and Family Services agency has, over the recent months, been recruiting foster parents. I know that the number of children who were in hotels last year, which was unacceptably high, has been significantly decreased as a result of that foster parent recruitment that the Winnipeg agency has undertaken. But I want to indicate that all of the initiatives we have implemented, many that have been announced and some soon to be announced in the area of early intervention, are all initiatives that are looking towards decreasing the number of children that need to come into care, because we are working with parents and children at a very early age to try to ensure that those children are being parented, and there will be less need down the road for Child and Family Services and that system.

As I said in my first answer, there is no easy, quick-fix answer to the issues, but we are working really aggressively to try to ensure that children get off to a healthy start to life.

Mr. Doer: Madam Speaker, we have heard that every year, as the government cuts and cuts and cuts, as it bombs the bridges of opportunity for children, we hear the same recorded announcement from this insensitive government year after year after year.

Madam Speaker, the Mason Report states that hotels are commonly used but they are an expensive solution. They also go on to say the number of hotel rooms has doubled over the '96-97 year in '97-98. They said that part of the reason is the availability of the short-term hotel rooms and the insufficient numbers of foster homes in Manitoba. When is this Premier (Mr. Filmon) going to take responsibility for cutting back the investments in foster homes and creating a higher cost, more used hotel room solution for our children? When is he going to close down the hotel rooms for our kids and get them back in foster homes where they belong?

Mrs. Mitchelson: I indicated in my previous answer, and I will repeat again for the Leader of the Opposition,

that the issue around placement in hotels has been addressed by Winnipeg Child and Family Services agency. Madam Speaker, they have had a comprehensive recruitment plan for foster parents and they have seen success in that recruitment. The numbers of children in hotels today are significantly down from the numbers that my honourable friend was quoting in his question. He says it is their document—yes, but since that document was produced there have been significant changes in the number of children that are in hotels. I have indicated many times, and I want to tell the Leader of the Opposition that \$20 million—over \$20 million in increases to services for children and families in this year's budget is not a cut.

* (1340)

Mr. Doer: And their own strategic document says it is going into the higher cost placements and short-term placement facilities. Your own document confirms those penny-wise and pound-foolish kinds of strategies of your department when the Premier cut foster parent care and kids ended up in hotels, double the number from one year over the previous year, Madam Speaker, and this is in their own strategic planning document.

Madam Speaker, in 1994, the government cut the extended care rate for foster children. We, at that time, warned about the impact that would have on aboriginal children, one-half of whom were going to be aboriginal families and children. Today again we see a report that says most of the children are now being placed in facilities and programs, the aboriginal children, which are culturally inappropriate foster homes. Again, will the government review the bad decision this Premier made for the extended family foster home program and reinstate programs that make cultural and long-term sense for our children in care?

Mrs. Mitchelson: One of the issues that is of great concern to our government is the number of aboriginal children that require support from our Child and Family Services, and yet the lack of aboriginal people that are involved in the solutions, Madam Speaker—and that is one of the reasons that we have established a working committee in my department with significant aboriginal representation to try to determine what the answers are. We cannot, in isolation of the aboriginal community, make decisions on what kinds of services and supports

need to be available, and we are working right now with the aboriginal community to try to find those solutions.

Winnipeg Child and Family Services Caseloads

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Madam Speaker, this Minister of Family Services and this insensitive government will not listen to the Children's Advocate. They will not listen to the front-line workers. They will not listen to a supervisor who says at an inquest that he knew that workloads were too high because a baby died. Will they now listen to the management of Winnipeg Child and Family Services, who are saying that each worker has an average of 38 cases, meaning less than an hour per week per family, and will she now do something about the workload issue and at least institute a review, given that on Thursday, one of the people at the inquest said it is impossible for workers to visit homes as much as they would like because of managing daily crises? Will this minister act now?

Hon. Bonnie Mitchelson (Minister of Family Services): I thank my honourable friend for that question because it does provide me with the opportunity to indicate that we have listened to many Manitobans, many Manitobans within our communities, Madam Speaker, that are saying that early intervention and supports for children are crucial so that, in fact, children will not need the services of our Child and Family Services agency. That is exactly why we have put over \$20 million more in our budget this year to announce early intervention programs like BabyFirst, that has been announced already, like Earlystart, like our fetal alcohol syndrome strategy, like the issues that we announced around dealing with adolescent pregnancy. Those are all concrete examples of how this government is concerned about ensuring that children and families get off to a healthy start to life.

Foster Care Impact of Cutbacks

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Madam Speaker, will this Minister of Family Services, who has been told over and over again by people reviewing the Child and Family Services system that it is their government's cuts to education, their government's cuts to health care, and

the cuts to foster care rates that are causing the highest level of children being in temporary placements, a huge jump and use of short-term placements—will this minister do something to restore the foster care rates, to get children out of hotels and four-bed units and into family homes?

Hon. Bonnie Mitchelson (Minister of Family Services): Madam Speaker, that is exactly why we are looking at ways to try to ensure that families are healthier up front, so they do not need the services of Child and Family Services, so the caseloads will be significantly less, all of the programs that we have put in place, programs that are working with new parents to try to ensure that baby and mom are healthy and that families are healthy and they understand the issues around parenting so they will not need support from the Child and Family Services system.

That is why we have partnered with the daycare community and the Earlystart program that works with parents and children and puts mentors right in the homes of families to keep families together to make those families healthier, so they will not need the services from Winnipeg Child and Family Services. I have many initiatives that I can talk about in detail in my next answer.

* (1345)

Mr. Martindale: Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister of Family Services, who has been part of this government for 10 long years and who has been compounding these problems and has had 10 years to correct them, will she acknowledge that these documents say that the long-term impact of growing days in care has been a strain on foster home resources and do something to increase the number of foster homes so that we can get children out of short-term placements, which are growing, the number of days in care is growing, the workload is growing on the individual workers? Will this minister and her government, after 10 years, finally do something about this problem?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Madam Speaker, I will say again that these are not issues that any government takes lightly. These are issues that all governments right across the country—because I know when I go to

meetings of ministers of social services that the issues are the same right across the country—and obviously, the way that we have been doing business for years and years and years in the area of the child and family services system is not working, despite the fact that we are pouring more money into the system year after year after year. The programs that we have announced around early intervention—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The programs that we have introduced this year, with an additional over \$20 million for children and families, are initiatives that are working with families very early on to try to ensure that baby and parents get off to a healthy start to life so they will not need the kinds of services that have had to be provided. I make no apologies for putting the money in at the front where it is needed.

Winnipeg Child and Family Services Caseloads

Ms. Diane McGifford (Osborne): Madam Speaker, the Winnipeg Child and Family Services strategic planning document makes the point, and I quote: although Manitoba has one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates, services on behalf of expectant parents have steadily decreased.

Of course, Madam Speaker, given Manitoba's unconscionable and unworkable caseloads, it could not be otherwise. Social workers are overburdened and innocent children are victimized. I would like to ask the minister, in light of three recent baby deaths, seven since 1990 and countless injuries, all victims of baby shaking, when she will act to reduce caseloads allowing workers to provide teenage parents and other potentially volatile parents with supports and services. The real question is when will she act to—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. Bonnie Mitchelson (Minister of Family Services): I thank my honourable friend for that question because I do want to indicate to all

Manitobans that the issue of the high numbers of adolescent pregnancies in Manitoba is unacceptable. We have to deal with the whole issue of trying to prevent adolescent pregnancy before it becomes an issue and before we need the kinds of supports that are needed. That is exactly why we have purchased more dolls to work within the school system and within the health system, to have young people understand the issues surrounding what is involved when you become a parent, especially as a young person without the kinds of supports that really are needed to ensure that children get off to a healthy start to life.

So, Madam Speaker, we are trying to ensure, by working with youth and with aboriginal youth, the announcement that maybe my honourable friend should have been at, to hear first-hand what youth in our community were saying and that is, how do we try to ensure that prevention is the first step in trying to ensure that families—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Adolescent Pregnancies Support

Ms. Diane McGifford (Osborne): I want to ask the minister when she will implement Chief Medical Examiner Peter Markestyn's recommendation and provide teenage parents and all needy parents with parental supports and education.

* (1350)

Hon. Bonnie Mitchelson (Minister of Family Services): That is exactly what we are doing with the announcement of BabyFirst, where we are working with prenatal women and adolescents specifically to ensure that they are in contact with the public health system. Through that system, there will be mentors that will be working on an individual basis with young parents and their children to ensure that those children get off to a healthy start to life because their parents have good parenting skills. That is one of the announcements and that is a significant investment that we have just announced. But again, I want to repeat for Manitobans, what our government is looking at is trying to ensure that young girls are not committed to a life of poverty on welfare because they become pregnant. We are trying to ensure that they understand the

implications, what it means to them, that it is a lifelong commitment, and trying to ensure that we can prevent adolescent pregnancy.

Support for Adolescent Fathers

Ms. Diane McGifford (Osborne): I would like to ask the minister about young boys. Since adolescent males are very frequently the perpetrators of violence against children, I would like to ask the minister what programs she has created and are directed at adolescent males.

Hon. Bonnie Mitchelson (Minister of Family Services): That is a very good question, and I thank my honourable friend for that question because the Baby Think It Over Program, where dolls go with young people into their homes for a period of time, is for both males and females. I do know that the aboriginal youth that we are working with are both males and females because young people recognize and realize that there is responsibility on behalf of both sexes. So we are working with them to ensure that we come up with the solutions that deal with both males and females in Manitoba.

Linnet Graphics Undervalued

Mr. Tim Sale (Crescentwood): Madam Speaker, according to the CRTC, this government gave away Manitoba Telephone System at far below its market value. According to MTS's own internal reports, the government had earlier forced MTS to give away its cable business for a fraction of its strategic value to MTS. It forced MTS against its will to enter into sweetheart contracts with Faneuil, after which Michael Bessey got his own sweetheart contract. Now it has given the Finance minister's brother-in-law and other managers 24 percent of Linnet Graphics for half the government's own share of Linnet's retained earnings. Will the government tell us: why should Manitobans believe the Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism when he says the company, after \$30-million worth of forced contracts from this government, is worth only \$1.6 million?

Hon. James Downey (Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism): Madam Speaker, I do not know what the member for Crescentwood is trying to do by putting

so much misinformation on the record. It does nothing to bring out the fact that this province under this government has performed another good deal for the people of Manitoba on the sale of Linnet. I can tell you—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Downey: Madam Speaker, I take strong objection to the reference made to anyone's brother-in-law as it relates to this particular deal or any other. This sale was carried out under the Manitoba Development Corporation which held the share. We have some 60 people working in the province who were not working prior to in this business. It was sold for \$432,000, a number which in fact was given to us by a third-party appraisal which was totally independent.

* (1355)

Linnet Graphics—Mercer Report Request for Tabling of Document

Mr. Tim Sale (Crescentwood): Madam Speaker, will the minister explain why, when the company said it would create over 500 jobs, there are only 60 jobs? The company was given \$200,000. He did not get that back. Will he explain why Mercer and company thinks this company is only worth \$1.6 million, no value on the proprietary software, no value on the contracts since 1997, no value for any of the world-breaking supposed value of Linnet Graphics? Will he table the Mercer document?

Hon. James Downey (Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism): Madam Speaker, I will answer the last question first as it deals with whether or not we will table the appraisal that was done or the evaluation done by William Mercer. We were but one party involved in the hiring of that company to in fact do an appraisal. So we will check with the other two individuals, the other two companies. We do not have a difficulty with that, but we will have to check with them to make sure that there is not any difficulty in doing so, unlike ManOil where the people of Manitoba lost \$16 million under the guidance of those people who are so intelligent. \$29 million to Saudi Arabia. I think this is

a good deal because we in fact made money and have some 60 people working in the province of Manitoba that were not here prior to it.

Mr. Sale: Madam Speaker, will the minister explain to the House why the public interest of Manitoba will not be served by the tabling of a report which claims to show that the value of our shares in that company are only worth \$232,000, after millions of contracts from this government, after the company has supposedly got a worldwide reputation? Our 24 percent stake is only worth \$232,000. Table the assessment.

Mr. Downey: Madam Speaker, he can huff and puff and blow all he likes. We sold the company for \$432,000. [interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order.

Mr. Downey: Yes, if you discount the \$200,000 loan that was given to them if certain conditions were met. So the company was sold for \$432,000, well within the value which was put in place by a third party. He should ask them how they came up with the value of the company. As far as tabling is concerned, I said there are two other parties of which we will be requesting their approval to do so, and if they in fact agree, we have no difficulty in tabling that document.

Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Tory Board Member

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Speaker, when the Premier was the Leader of the official opposition a number of years back, one of the biggest criticisms that he levelled at the government was the politicization of the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation.

Madam Speaker, one can almost take a crystal ball and predict next year that there will be a zero percent increase. Why? Because next year happens to be that election cycle, and you can see the graph going up and down as we get closer to an election.

My question to the Premier: in keeping with his criticism of MPI back in the good old days of official opposition, will the Premier today acknowledge that

there is no need to have a Tory MLA sitting on the MPI board?

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Madam Speaker, one of the things that the member for Inkster neglects to do is to acknowledge that, since we have taken office, we have an opportunity for a public review of the rate-setting process, and that is through the Public Utilities Board that ultimately make the final decision. So, although he can accuse this government of setting the rates, the fact is that the corporation makes proposals to the Public Utilities Board, and those proposals over the years since we made the Public Utilities Board responsible have been changed. Last year, as an example, but virtually every year the PUB does not give MPI what it asks for. So to suggest that somehow we have ultimate control is absolutely false.

* (1400)

Rate Setting

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Speaker, the Premier is being very selective. I would ask the Premier to recognize in '95, I believe it was when we had an election, it was zero percent; in '96, we had an increase of 4.1 percent; '97, 2.5 percent. There was an increase last year. We are getting closer to the election—acknowledge, for the Premier to acknowledge that in fact this government does play somewhat of a role in the setting of the rates in the sense that the government or the board has to decide whether or not to apply for an increase. They have to determine whether they are going to apply to build up on the reserves. Will the Premier—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Madam Speaker, in fact, the PUB has disagreed with the proposal of the corporation about how much should be allocated towards the building up of reserves. On several occasions they have said, no, there is no big rush, and they in fact turned down the board's request for increases in fees, in rates to build up the reserves.

So there is a series of different measures by which the rates are set. In the past, the rates were set solely by the New Democratic government at their cabinet table.

That has not taken place since we have been in office, and indeed it has been done for the protection of the customers, Madam Speaker, as well as in the best interests of the people of Manitoba. We believe that the member for Inkster just simply does not understand the process.

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I understand the process. Taxpayers are out \$2 million.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member, with a final supplementary question.

Point of Order

Mr. Gary Kowalski (The Maples): Madam Speaker, we have rules for Question Period and for questions and answers. Madam Speaker uses her discretion and gives certain latitude, but consistently when certain members are not given the same latitude as other members, it becomes almost a matter of privilege, that certain members are allowed to have extra preambles. Certain members—[interjection] Yes.

So, Madam Speaker, I would ask your discretion and be consistent with all members about your latitude in Question Period.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for The Maples does not have a point of order. All members know that supplementary questions require no preamble or postamble.

Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Lawsuit

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Inkster, to pose his question now.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Speaker, my question to the Premier (Mr. Filmon) is: today we know that there is going to be an additional \$2 million that someone is going to have to pay for. Can the government indicate where that money is going to have to come from, or is there going to be an appeal, or what is the status with the \$2-million successful lawsuit that has been launched?

Hon. James McCrae (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Public Insurance

Corporation Act): Madam Speaker, it is the distinct possibility that there could be an appeal, and for that reason I would not propose to go into the details of the case about which the honourable member is asking.

Claims like this are covered under a general liability policy underwritten by the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation. That policy was for the period August 1, 1984, to September 1, 1987. This policy provides coverage for defamation of character claims, and the coverage for elected officials and MLAs is subject to a \$10,000 deductible which is payable by the government itself. Beyond that deductible, the award would have to be paid by the Manitoba Public Insurance, and we would await any outcome of any decision respecting an appeal or the results of that appeal before wanting to comment further.

Prosecutions Branch—Rate of Prosecution Three Bears Day Care Fire

Mr. Gord Mackintosh (St. Johns): Madam Speaker, two-year-old Katrina Rae Guimond died in a tragic fire at her Pine Falls daycare in August 1996, and after a one-year investigation, I understand that a party was charged with manslaughter, criminal negligence and arson and was then released on bail.

My question to the Minister of Justice: on Thursday, the minister promoted in this House that one of the objective tests of the performance of his Prosecutions branch is the time it takes for a matter to come to trial, and his department has one of the best records in Canada, he said. Would he say this to the family of Katrina Rae?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Madam Speaker, I do not propose to comment on any specific case, but to use a particular family for a political purpose I think is very inappropriate. I know my department works very hard in respect of its prosecutions. Certain things occur, but I know that they are as interested as I am in ensuring that matters move as quickly as they can.

Katrina Rae Guimond Family's Request for Closure

Mr. Gord Mackintosh (St. Johns): Would the minister explain to the family and mother of Katrina

Rae, who is trying to get closure, and by the way, asked that this matter be raised, why in her case his department has so far consented to 16 remands in one year?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Madam Speaker, if the family does want to speak to my department and officials in my department, they can certainly share what information they can share. I understand that at times certain information cannot be shared, but I know that the members in my department are more than willing to share what information they can. I certainly would encourage the family to contact members in my department, or indeed members in my department, if the member for St. Johns wishes, can contact that family directly.

Prosecutions Branch—Rate of Prosecution Three Bears Day Care Fire

Mr. Gord Mackintosh (St. Johns): Would this minister, who should know that the family has contacted members of his department and has been repeatedly told that the preliminary inquiry would be set down at the next date, can he possibly explain why the matter has not even been set down for a preliminary inquiry, and it is now two years after this tragedy?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Madam Speaker, as I have indicated, the record of our department in respect of moving matters to trial quickly and appropriately is unparalleled in Canada. We pride ourselves in respect of moving matters very quickly. There may well be issues that are relevant to why there were certain remands granted in this case. I think that the family is entitled to any explanation that we can possibly give them, and so I would certainly encourage that course of action.

Neurological Services Specialist Workload

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): Over six months ago I wrote to the Minister of Health regarding the loss of pediatric neurological services at the Health Sciences Centre, and still today, Madam Speaker, we have received no response from the minister in this regard. Dr. Pillay, the only remaining epileptologist with pediatric neurological skills practising in Manitoba, is

now leaving for the city of Calgary, leaving Manitoba without those services.

I want to ask the Minister of Health—since he indicated in Estimates for his department he did not know how many neurologists were in Manitoba—how he expects the remaining neurological specialists in the province to take over the workload of Dr. Pillay, since the minister did not even know how many neurologists were practising in the province of Manitoba.

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, the member is wrong. We have had a great discussion over this issue in Estimates. I would not want it to be left on the record that the matter has gone unattended by me. In fact, we had quite a great deal of discussion. We also shared with the member information with respect to the specific individual who was brought to our attention, because we were not the employer of that individual; that person had a relationship with the Health Sciences Centre. There were issues involved in the departure that were discussed, I think, respecting the privacy of that individual.

As we have indicated, the Winnipeg Hospital Authority, as it takes over a greater and greater role in the system, ensuring that we recruit the right number of specialists to fill need is part of their mandate which they are undertaking. So the member should not let it go on the record that his matter has not had an answer or been dealt with or is being dealt with because that would not be accurate.

Waiting List

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): Well, I want to ask the Minister of Health—since he did not know in Estimates—what are the waiting lists for people in Manitoba, and particularly children, suffering with epilepsy who require neurological services, what are the waiting lists for the remaining neurologists in the province of Manitoba, Madam Speaker, since this minister did not know how many neurologists were practising and only relied on the Manitoba Medical Association to provide that information from an outdated list?

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, neurologists are not the only people who work

with individuals with epilepsy. So to leave the impression, as we discussed in Estimates, that that is the only resource available would not, as I remember it, be accurate. As well, each individual physician maintains their own waiting list, dependent on the number of people who want to see them and their success, et cetera. So we do not have access to that particular number with each individual who is practising in that particular field.

The member does know that. It was discussed in Estimates.

* (1410)

Health Sciences Centre Teaching Accreditation

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): Madam Speaker, can the minister explain how he expects the Health Sciences Centre to keep its teaching accreditation in pediatric neurology if the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons investigates the hospital? Since Dr. Pillay is the only remaining person in the province with those skills, how will that hospital keep its accreditation now that Dr. Pillay has gone to Calgary? How does he expect that facility to remain a teaching facility?

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, with respect to the individual that the member keeps referencing, the member is aware of a number of circumstances around his departure that we both agreed we would not discuss in a public forum—and he is aware of that—to respect the privacy of that individual and other individuals as well.

Madam Speaker, the Health Sciences Centre, as part of the Winnipeg Hospital Authority, has a responsibility to ensure that in programs it offers that it recruits specialists to do the work that needs to be done. There is a host of areas, as physicians and specialists move across this country from place to place—some leave, some come, depending upon opportunities that they see for themselves individually—and as they depart, those in authority in those specific institutions begin a process to recruit. We have worked from time to time with the Health Sciences Centre, with the Winnipeg Hospital Authority, now under the new regime, to assist in their

recruitment efforts, whether it be in this area or oncology or others, and we will continue to do so.

Computer Contract Product Quality

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Government Services and concerns the \$150-million computer contract between the government and SHL. The government has confirmed that the price of the computer hardware accounted for only 15 percent of the point system used in the selection of the successful hardware bidders. Bidders have claimed that the 25 percent weighting given to product quality was not defined.

Could the minister release the definition of product quality and presence which made up 25 percent of this point system?

Hon. Frank Pitura (Minister of Government Services): Madam Speaker, in the process of asking for a request for a proposal, in many cases, or in all cases, there is a committee struck amongst the many departments that are involved in that process. Their role is to place before the—in terms of the RFP and work with the company doing it—is to place all these areas in terms of what they are looking for in terms of the product.

I would remind the member across the way that, with respect to this particular contract for the computers, our initial contract, this government was with Systemhouse. It is Systemhouse's responsibility—it was their responsibility to supply the hardware, because they have to have certain performance standards with the provincial government. Therefore, it is in their purview to put the RFP out for the computers, and I am advised in this particular case that this is what they had done.

Madam Speaker: The time for Oral Questions has expired.

Speaker's Ruling

Madam Speaker: I have a ruling for the House.

I am ruling on a point of order I took under advisement on May 5, 1998. The point of order was

raised by the honourable Minister of Education (Mrs. McIntosh), who stated that she had not risen to answer a question because there was no question posed. At the time, I indicated to the House that I had not heard a question but that I would review Hansard.

Having reviewed Hansard, I find that the minister was indeed correct. The honourable member for St. James (Ms. Mihychuk) had not put a complete question. However, what the minister raised was an explanation of her action; it was not a point of order. I would remind the minister, and all members of the House, that a point of order is a question raised with the view of calling attention to any departure from the standing orders or the customary modes of proceeding in debate or in the conduct of legislative business. If a point of order consists of putting a question to the member speaking, if it is a mere interruption, or if it is defective for other reasons, the Speaker will rule it out.

* (1420)

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Arborg, Manitoba—Town Status

Mr. Edward Helwer (Gimli): Madam Speaker, this past weekend I had the pleasure of attending the ceremonies to mark Arborg officially becoming a town. The Village of Arborg was incorporated on January 1, 1964. A few years have passed since then, but Arborg residents have always known that becoming a town was an attainable dream. When the 1991 census figures came out showing that Arborg's population had reached 1,039 people, 39 above the 1,000 people required to achieve town status, their dream had finally been met. The necessary paperwork followed, and on October 25, 1997, town status was officially granted.

Arborg is an important regional trade and agricultural service centre for Manitoba's Interlake. As Mayor Bert Kindzierski has said, having town status provides Arborg with greater recognition. This is important not only when it comes to luring potential businesses and industries to the community, but it also helps reinforce a sense of pride in local residents. So I would like to thank the organizing committee, the municipal council and the residents of Arborg for inviting me to this wonderful event. I want to congratulate all members of

the community for their ongoing involvement and interest in the community as it moved towards town status. I hope Arborg residents undertake many more fruitful projects in the years ahead. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Winnipeg Capital Region

Ms. Becky Barrett (Wellington): Madam Speaker, the Minister of Urban Affairs (Mr. Reimer), in response to the unveiling of the NDP Seven Steps to Restore our Capital, said that everything was just fine in Winnipeg in the Capital Region. Ostrich-like, the minister ignores the fact that since 1988 residents of Winnipeg have been witness to many worrying trends: housing starts falling to one-sixth of their levels; value of older homes in older neighbourhoods diminishing to virtual invisibility; school taxes having risen by over 50 percent; violent crime having risen by 77 percent in Winnipeg; and a nearly doubling of youth crime. Auto theft is three times what it was in 1988, and in the decade since the Filmon government took office, child poverty has been either first or second-rate in the country.

Madam Speaker, our plan, even the Free Press has agreed with our plan, and I quote:—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I am experiencing difficulty hearing the honourable member for Wellington.

Ms. Barrett: Madam Speaker, I quote: "The NDP has clearly recognized that some Winnipeggers feel they are being taken for granted by the provincial government. In doing so, the party is emphasizing that a healthy, vibrant Winnipeg is key to the development of a prosperous province.

"The city's position has been, and continues to be, one of working co-operatively with the surrounding municipalities to develop a plan to strengthen the entire region. The NDP's proposal for city and regional development is built on the same idea—one that tries to unite Manitobans, not divide them. It is a step in the right direction."

Madam Speaker, the citizens of Winnipeg in the Capital Region are looking for leadership to build on our strengths and move us toward a better future. Unfortunately, this government is not providing that leadership; however, the next government, which will be an NDP government, will provide that leadership.

Millennium Project

Hon. Glen Cummings (Minister of Natural Resources): Following on the heels of that nonpolitical statement, I would like to share with the members the privilege that I had in taking part in the millennium project which met in the rotunda this morning. This project is the brainchild of the class of 2000 from the Neepawa Area Collegiate institute, and they have invited other class of 2000 graduates to join them in a project whereby they hope to raise funds and to support research to eventually alleviate juvenile diabetes and also to share those funds with the Trans-Canada trail in the spirit of unity and healthy living that of course goes with the use of something like the Trans-Canada trail.

Their goals are modest in raising \$5 per student graduating, but they expect to link that to community partnerships, to private sector partnerships and multiply that into hopefully a multimillion-dollar project where money can be set aside across Canada in aid of these two very worthwhile projects. I want to commend the class of 2000 from NACI, as well as all the other classes from 25 different high schools who joined them here today, along with I believe hundreds more classes of 2000 who will in all likelihood join them across Canada in this goal, and I salute the principal of NACI, Mr. Phil Shaman and Bob Lepischak who are leading this project.

Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting Co. Limited

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): Northerners are very happy with the recent announcement by Hudson Bay Mining and Smelting Co. at Flin Flon. HBM&S announced that it will proceed with production at Kanuta Lake [phonetic]. Kanuta Lake will produce 800 tonnes of copper ore per day, beginning at the end of June. The ore will be trucked to Flin Flon for processing. The operation will create some 30 new

jobs initially and some 55 jobs once it is in full production. The mine is expected to operate for roughly six years.

This is the third such announcement in the last month. Earlier HBM&S announced a significant find at Flin Flon. Additionally, New Britannia at Snow Lake announced that the mine body there is significantly deeper than perhaps was first anticipated. These finds show once more that this region has still more potential for producing ore. It is our hope that the provincial government will take notice of these developments and strengthen its commitment to exploration in the area. The Leaf Rapids-Lynn Lake area deserves immediate attention. These communities have contributed millions of dollars annually to the provincial economy. Despite this, the provincial government has failed to make a commitment to actively explore in this region. The Manitoba Chamber of Commerce, among others, has proposed that special attention be paid to areas where the life expectancy of mineable ore is five years or less. It is time that the provincial government stood up and acted. The province never misses an opportunity to take taxes from the North. When it comes to providing assistance or services to the North, the province is virtually invisible. It is time for a change.

Teddy Bears' Picnic

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Madam Speaker, along with two members of my caucus, I had the pleasure of taking part in the twelfth annual Teddy Bears' Picnic at Assiniboine Park. Held by the Children's Hospital Research Foundation, the Teddy Bears' Picnic raises funds for research, equipment and programs at the hospital. Along with the honourable members for Niakwa and River Heights, I took part in the festivities by making and serving pancakes to some of the nearly 30,000 Manitobans who did not let cooler than normal temperatures prevent them from attending. Hundreds of Manitobans also took part in the Teddy Bears' Picnic walkathon to help raise funds for the Children's Hospital Research Foundation. Events such as the annual Teddy Bears' Picnic serve as a reminder to all of us that children approach health difficulties very differently than adults do. Educating children about the role of hospitals is only one of the very important functions the Children's Hospital fulfills each

year at the Teddy Bears' Picnic. It also raised an estimated \$80,000 for research and equipment.

Along with all of my colleagues, I would like to thank all of the 2,500 volunteers who once again helped make the Teddy Bears' Picnic a tremendous success. Thank you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

House Business

Hon. James McCrae (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, I believe honourable members might agree to waive private members' hour today.

Madam Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to waive private members' hour? [agreed]

Mr. McCrae: Yes, Madam Speaker, I ask that because I think that we will probably waive another private members' hour between now and Thursday and then have two private members' hours on Thursday morning. That is why I raised that, but we needed to do that for today in any event.

Madam Speaker, I would like to obtain the unanimous consent of the House, notwithstanding the sequence for consideration of Estimates as outlined in Sessional Paper 142 tabled on March 24, 1998, and subsequently amended many times, to consider in the House the Estimates of the Department of Agriculture on completion of the Estimates of the Department of Natural Resources. These changes are to apply until further notice.

Madam Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to change the sequence for the consideration of Estimates in the House to consider the Estimates of the Department of Agriculture on completion of the Estimates of the Department of Natural Resources, these changes to apply until further notice? Is there unanimous consent to agree to the sequence change? [agreed]

Mr. McCrae: Madam Speaker, I wish to obtain the unanimous consent of the House, notwithstanding the sequence for consideration of Estimates as outlined in Sessional Paper 142 tabled on March 24, 1998, and subsequently amended, to consider in Room 255 the

Estimates of the Department of Industry, Trade and Tourism on completion of the Estimates of the Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship. These changes are to apply until further notice.

* (1430)

Madam Speaker: Is there unanimous consent of the House to alter the sequence of the Estimates in Room 255 to consider the Estimates of the Department of Industry, Trade and Tourism on completion of the Estimates of the Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, and these changes to apply until further notice? Is there unanimous consent? [agreed]

Mr. McCrae: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Minister of Rural Development (Mr. Derkach), that Madam Speaker do now leave the Chair and the House resolve itself into a committee to consider of the Supply to be granted to Her Majesty.

Motion agreed to.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

JUSTICE

Mr. Chairperson (Gerry McAlpine): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This afternoon this section of the Committee of Supply meeting in Room 254 will resume the consideration of the Estimates of the Department of Justice. When the committee last sat, unanimous consent had been granted to skip ahead to 4.2. Criminal Justice (b) Prosecutions.

Just for the clarification of the committee, we do not need unanimous consent to revert to line 1(b).

* (1440)

Mr. Gary Kowalski (The Maples): Yes, Mr. Chairperson, this is my first opportunity to speak on these Estimates other than a point of order I made earlier during this committee. As I said during that point of order, there are many, many important issues other than what has already been brought up in Justice. Unfortunately, being the second party in opposition

here, I have to wait my opportunity, and this could not have come at a worst time for me this afternoon. I have some important issues. I was helping our Maples Youth Justice Committee prepare for their AGM. I tried to arrange for another time, but I am going to try to stay as long as possible and cover as many of important items, that I had mentioned earlier, as I can.

Point of Order

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Just on a point of order, I am certainly willing to accommodate the member for The Maples, but I assume we have been unable to reach an accommodation between the House leaders? Is that correct?

Mr. Kowalski: On the same point of order, my understanding is that there was not any other department that was ready to come in here, and these are the Estimates hours. So we would be proceeding from this point on and proceed—it is either passed, this department has passed, or otherwise.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister does not have a point of order.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for The Maples, to continue.

Mr. Kowalski: Yes, I wonder if we could revert to 4.1.(b) Executive Support.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for The Maples, as I mentioned, the committee does not require unanimous consent to revert to 4.1.(b)(1) Executive Support (1) Salary and Employee Benefits.

Mr. Kowalski: Mr. Chair, because this is my first opportunity to speak on these Estimates, I will be bringing up to sort of give the minister forewarning so that he could prepare. One of the things I will like to discuss is about the possibility and what information, what statistics has been done about a possible provincial police college in Manitoba, following on the lines of the B.C. Criminal Justice Institute, Maritimes Police College, and exploring what are the impediments to doing that in Manitoba; what would be the

advantages, the disadvantages, and to get some cost figures and whatever we can from his department. I have a feeling that this would be an area that possibly would be of a great service to Manitoba.

Right now, as mentioned earlier, there are five Brandon police officers that are leaving the Brandon Police Service after the taxpayers of Brandon have invested the money to train them, and now they are losing that investment. I understand that the Winnipeg Police Service are looking at similar out-migration of trained staff. You have a different environment in the Maritimes where people who want to go into a police career go and pay a tuition. They go and they get a diploma from their college there in police—I am not sure what they call it—police science or whatever. They pay for their training, and it is part of their Police Act that in order to be on a municipal police force, you have to have such a degree in order to be a police officer.

I think the other example, the B.C. Criminal Justice Institute, does not only cover police officers but emergency workers, ambulance, firefighters, and, I believe it is on campus. So there is the benefit of the officers who are being trained there, taking courses with other university students. The ideal situation, the vision—I do not know if it is attainable, I do not even know if a Lloyd Axworthy could make it happen—is to have a police science program at one of our universities, make it a requirement that police officers in Manitoba have such a degree. It would add to the professionalism of police officers. I think some of the criticisms we have seen in the justice system, the police and some of their actions, I think there would be a second thought about making them. We expect a lot of our police officers, and yet we accept them with a Grade 12 education. It is not necessary to get on the police force to have anything higher than that. We give them limited training, and yet we expect them to have the wisdom of Solomon. We expect them to be able to deal with medical matters, banking matters, as accountants. We expect so much of them. So that is one of the areas that I will be talking about during this Estimates process.

The other area, and I think it might be in this here, is I received the news release from the federal Minister of Justice announcing the youth justice strategy. I know that this Minister of Justice, as the previous Minister of

Justice, has never hesitated to advise the federal Minister of Justice on any matters, and I have some specific questions about what has been said by the federal Minister of Justice about this youth justice strategy. There are some cost implications to Manitoba. Before I ask any specific question, I wonder if the minister would indicate his views on Canada's youth justice renewal strategy that has been put out by the federal Justice minister.

Mr. Toews: I thank the member for The Maples for his question. I will not deal with the issue on the provincial police college proposal right now, but I do want to comment very briefly on the youth justice strategy announced by the federal government. I know that this member has been very active not only as a police officer in respect of youth justice issues, I know that he has been involved with the community that he lives in as a member or a consultant to the youth justice committee there. So I know that his interests in this area are genuine and followed by a lot of action on his part.

One of the issues relating to the youth justice strategy by the federal government—in respect to this youth justice strategy, I want to say that we know, not just from polls but from our constituents, that the issue of youth justice is a particularly perplexing one. It is concerning many constituents. There is a real loss of confidence in the Young Offenders Act. I know that in the prairie provinces, for example, I saw some results of a poll that were shared with all ministers of Justice by the federal Minister of Justice, and I understand that the approval rating of the Young Offenders Act in western Canada, and I believe, particularly, the prairie provinces, was at about 12 percent. So there was a real lack of confidence in that particular act. So we as a government, and indeed some of my colleagues from Alberta, Ontario and Prince Edward Island, have asked the federal government to consider specific changes to the Young Offenders Act to ensure that the confidence of the people of Canada is retained in our justice system, and in those areas where it has fallen far below acceptable levels, that we in fact improve that.

* (1450)

One of the matters, because we were not all agreed on what steps should be taken to improve the Young

Offenders Act, one of the areas where we were I believe all unanimous was the issue of cost implications for programming under the Young Offenders Act and any youth justice strategy.

When the Young Offenders Act was passed in 1984, we had a working partnership with the federal government that saw the provinces pay 50-cent dollars and the federal government match that as well. The provinces paid those 50 cents, even though it was in fact a federal program. Traditionally, governments in this area have worked together by delegation or otherwise to ensure that criminal justice policy is carried out on a uniform basis across Canada. Unfortunately, what we have seen over the last number of years is a reduction of that federal contribution to the extent that last year the federal government advised us—and I might say that this was before this current Justice minister was appointed, that is, the current federal Justice minister was appointed—that the federal contribution was proposed to go down to about 30 percent from the current 33 which has fallen from the 50 percent. Not only that, the federal government, in fact, indicated to us that they would be stripping the funding out of our youth institutions, so that 100 percent of the funding essentially in our youth institutions would come from provincial dollars, even though we are carrying on that program on behalf of the federal government.

What they indicated is that they wanted to see more community programming occur. Now, I concur with more community programming; I think of some of our Justice initiatives in terms of the urban sports camps. The one that has been quite a success is the Turtle Island one. We have opened one up in west Broadway, and hopefully within the next year we will open up another one, which I think is a very important part of Manitoba's youth justice strategy. But, again, these all cost money. We are committed to going in that direction, but at the same time we cannot leave our citizens vulnerable to dangerous offenders who need to be incarcerated whether they are youth or not.

My belief is that when youth are incarcerated, suitable programming must be offered. It is simply not good enough for the federal government to say we are supporting community programming and turning a blind eye on the institutions such as Agassiz Youth Centre where I think the staff are doing a remarkably

good job under difficult circumstances and, again, the Manitoba Youth Centre as well.

So do I support some of the directions that the federal minister has indicated she is going in? Yes, I do support those directions. Do I think she has gone far enough in respect of legislation and funding? I think there could be much more improvement in the area of legislation, and whatever is done we know carries with it a dollar cost, and we want to see the federal government's commitment in that respect. The details are still fairly sketchy, so I do not want to be judgmental at too early a time, but given the past track record of the federal government in this area, I do have concerns.

Mr. Kowalski: This is an area where I have heard the minister talk about it a number of times, and I want to understand it so I can explain it to my constituents, this idea of what is a federal responsibility that they should be spending the dollars on. People find this confusing out in the public. There is only one taxpayer, and they do not understand which pocket it comes out of, which source of revenue, but I wonder if you could help me out and simplify it.

You say that this is a federal responsibility, the justice system, the corrections programs and that, yet you have said that at one point there is agreement on 50 percent dollars. How does it become a federal responsibility? Is that right from the Constitution, and yet, if that is true, then why did it become 50 percent dollars, and how is it becoming this? Is this by agreement? How did it come to be that way, that the federal money should be spent on certain things and provincial money on others? I know I am asking a very simple question here, but I will ask the patience of the minister to explain it, so I can explain it to my constituents.

Mr. Toews: It is a favourite area of mine, so I have a lot to say on that area. I will try to be concise and I think to the point.

Under our federal system of government, the federal Parliament has certain responsibilities on the one hand, and the provincial Legislature has responsibilities on the other. One of the specific assignments to the federal Parliament is criminal law and criminal procedure, so that any criminal laws that are passed, for

example under the Criminal Code, under the Young Offenders Act, which is criminal law, the Bail Reform Act, the Narcotics Control Act, and other similar acts—indeed their allegation is that Bill C-68 is passed under that same criminal law power. So they have the capacity, the legal capacity or the constitutional capacity, to pass criminal law, and under that basis, they passed the Young Offenders Act.

At the same time, the province has responsibility for the administration of justice, so they need to set up certain courts, but that does not give them authority over the substantive statutes that the courts would consider. That still remains with the federal Parliament.

* (1500)

The tradition has been in Canada that the federal Parliament has delegated the responsibility of prosecuting to the provincial attorneys general. In certain areas, they have chosen not to delegate that, and that is under the Narcotics Control Act, so even though the Narcotics Control Act is a federal statute, the federal government continues to prosecute that. We have no constitutional right as a province to insist we will prosecute that.

Similarly, the federal government could tomorrow say, in my opinion, we will now prosecute any offence under the Young Offenders Act; we will now prosecute any offence under the Criminal Code. Where it comes to the issue of the specific Young Offenders Act programming, what the federal government has purported to do, or the federal Parliament has purported to do, is to say to the province, you shall do this in terms of various responsibilities under the act.

The Constitution is clear that we have responsibilities for provincial jails, and traditionally that has been prisoners sentenced to two years less a day or less. Now, under the Young Offenders Act, prisoners can be sentenced for much greater time than two years. Indeed, the Young Offenders Act is really an exception to the criminal justice system that did not exist at the time of Confederation. But there was recognition that juvenile offenders, juvenile delinquents, young offenders, were an exceptional case. So I believe the first act that was passed, the Juvenile Delinquents Act,

would have been about 1907, and there was a sharing of responsibility, not constitutionally required, but I think it was done in the best interests of all Canadians, recognizing that local administration of statutes is sometimes a very good idea so that they can address local concerns.

That cost sharing and sharing of duties under that act continued right until 1984, when the Juvenile Delinquents Act was repealed and the Young Offenders Act came about. Again, I think, in a spirit of co-operative federalism, everybody said 50 cents-50 cents, so that the federal government would contribute 50 cents and we would as a province contribute 50 cents, not because, I think, it was constitutionally required, but because it was seen in the best interests of all parties concerned.

The Young Offenders Act is not simply a criminal justice statute. Perhaps that is where its constitutional basis is, but there are social aspects which the province has, I think, an interest in ensuring are addressed as well in the legislation. What better way to ensure that that input from a provincial point of view is continued than by having that kind of act of participation by provincial officials. So it is an exception that I do not think is constitutionally required, and I do not think I have seen it suggested anywhere that it is constitutionally required.

The same situation but mirrored is, we find, in the Health area, where we have Health being an area of provincial responsibility, but the federal government, through its taxing power, funded 50-cent dollars at the beginning of the implementation of medicare. But there we have a situation where the constitutional responsibility is the province and the feds simply kick in dollars. Now, the federal contribution has decreased to about, in actual dollar terms, 15 percent. We can argue about that number up and down, but it is nowhere near the 50-cent dollars that used to occur. So, again, there was seen in that case, because the federal government had the stronger taxing power and the access to money and the desire for national standards, that there was a vested social interest in federal participation.

Similarly, but, again, mirror image in this situation, where it is a federal program, the province believed that

there was a vested interest to participate in the delivery of this program, not that there is a constitutional responsibility but, I think, for very pragmatic, federal reasons. I hope that helps the member.

Mr. Kowalski: Yes, thanks. That helps a great deal. It raises some other questions, like when there was this agreement to go to 50-cent dollars, if it is going to be decreased any more, does it have to be a bilateral agreement? Or can the federal government arbitrarily—the minister tells me that when this went to 50-cent dollars, it was by agreement of all the provinces then. Now he is saying that the federal government, if I understand him correctly, is unilaterally reducing it to less than 50 percent. Is that correct?

Mr. Toews: I think that is correct that they are purporting to do it unilaterally. When I became minister back in January of 1997, that was one of the first issues that was brought to my attention, that it was sort of seen as a *fait accompli* that the federal government would continue to dictate the fact that their reductions would continue and that the province was powerless to do anything. I guess many of our officials in the provincial government took that point of view because that was also happening in Health.

It was happening in respect of First Nations people off reserves. I mean, what we have seen the federal government do with First Nations people off reserve is costing the taxpayers of Manitoba an additional \$20 million a year unilaterally that they cut off. They said, well, we might have the responsibility or the constitutional authority, but once they come into the urban areas, then we have now decided on a policy basis that you will now deal with the financial needs of those First Nations people. That is not something that is mandated by the constitution. The federal government still has a responsibility and constitutional authority to deal with First Nations people anywhere in Canada, whether they are on reserve lands or off reserve. They have simply exercised a policy decision saying: we will cut those people off.

I guess when the officials see these things happening in that context, it is quite discouraging, and perhaps people do not want to aggravate the federal government, because they do hold the bigger taxing power and the purse strings. When this was brought to

my attention, that the federal government was now continuing in this unilateral way—and I can only say that these were not negotiations between the provincial government and the federal government, the federal government simply announced that we are reducing it another 3 percent, plus we are stripping all the money out of youth institutions, and how do you want to see this occur? I mean, that was sort of the attitude.

What I said to my staff is, no, they cannot do that. This is their responsibility. We are working together with them to try and solve this problem, and for them to act in such an arbitrary and unilateral fashion is simply unacceptable. So we basically told them, I guess in about March of '97, that we will not accept any further reductions; that, indeed, we will consider a constitutional reference to clarify the fact that their liability under the Constitution is for 100 percent of this programming, plus that they could not force any provincial employee to carry out a federally mandated piece of legislation.

I might say this is not a unique kind of a situation in a federal state. For example, in the United States, just recently, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a statute that purported to require state officials to carry out the provisions of a federal act. The Supreme Court of the United States says that violated the separation of powers. In my opinion, the requirement of forcing a provincial government to expend monies without specific approval of that legislative mandate by that province is as basic as Magna Carta. One cannot simply unilaterally say to the House of Commons or any legislative body in the Commonwealth that you will carry out this responsibility.

* (1510)

These legislatures, the Parliament, are constitutionally independent of each other. That is the separation of powers that the federal government and federal Parliament appear to have forgotten. It is not that we do not want to work with the federal government. I would be very pleased to work with the federal government in their youth justice strategy, but it is one thing to announce a strategy, it is quite another thing then to say: oh, and by the way, the provinces will pay for it, not us.

Let me just finish very quickly. The same issue in Bill C-68. Exactly the same issue, where they said, this is our law, but you will carry it out. Our government, along with Saskatchewan, Alberta and the Territories, said: no, this is your law; you will carry it out and you will pay for it.

I just might indicate that Mr. Rob Finlayson, the assistant deputy minister responsible for Prosecutions, is with us as well, and Mr. Greg Graceffo, the assistant deputy minister of Corrections, is here as well. [interjection]

Mr. Kowalski: No, that was not a question. No. That was not the question on the record. My question is—I would like a commitment from this minister. You know, I will stand up for Manitoba. I will stand up that we get the money we need for these very worthwhile programs, but I will use an analogy here.

Mrs. Shirley Render, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

If two divorced parents are fighting over who should pay for the need of a child, the child should not go without that need fulfilled. When these initiatives start coming forward under this Canada's justice renewal strategy, I would like a commitment from the minister that if there are positive programs, if there are things that are going to be effective in dealing with youth justice, and you will notice I used the word "effective." I noticed throughout these news releases that they use words other than "effective." They talk about meaningful consequences; I am more concerned about effective consequences. But, if there are programs and issues being brought forward by the federal Justice minister, and the federal Justice minister is asking the province to pay, if this minister, our provincial Minister of Justice, sees the value in those programs, he will not let them lie just because of a dispute over the federal Justice minister.

I know he has to be responsible to the taxpayers of Manitoba; but, just as two divorced parents could stand up on the principle that they are not responsible, the need of a child and the need of the youth and the need of the community to deal with this youth justice issue have to be met. I hope there will be no posturing and that effective programs will not get undone because of that dispute.

Mr. Toews: Well, I think the analogy raised by the member for The Maples (Mr. Kowalski) is particularly appropriate. One of the things that is always a matter of concern in a divorce—and we are certainly not talking about divorce; we are talking about partners. I recognize the analogy. One of the things that the courts always look to is who can pay. So, if the father, let us say, is a millionaire and the mother is on social assistance, it would not be equitable, I would suggest, that if there was a question of child maintenance the mother pay the same amount as the father. I think that we recognize the issue of equity, and that needs to be addressed.

The taxing power of the federal Parliament, which is not limited to simply direct taxation, as is the case of the province, but also extends to indirect taxation, creates a huge, huge cash pool that the province simply has no access to. So, if the divorce analogy is appropriate, I think what we look at is equity. I prefer to look at the situation as one of partnerships where all partners benefit from working together. What I can tell the member is that I am committed to working together with the federal Justice minister who I think has many good ideas, and we need to work together.

But what I do not like to see is the unilateral federalism that we have seen over the past number of years and not simply limited to the current Liberal federal government but what we saw with the past Conservative government under Prime Minister Mulroney who unilaterally abrogated statutory and contractual rights relating to the Canada Assistance Plan, absolutely no regard for the financial commitments that provinces had to make on an ongoing basis, and I was very proud of representing the provincial government in that CAP reference before the Supreme Court of Canada. So, for me, it is not an issue of who the federal government is, whether they are Liberals, whether they are Conservatives or whether they are another party. I am committed to working with that federal government, but one has to recognize the realities of our Constitution and the taxing power.

So will I make commitments on behalf of the Legislature to expend monies? No, I will not. That is a matter that the Legislature will commit to. I am committed to working with the federal Justice minister, and I am committed to sharing the ideas that are

brought forward both by my department and the federal Justice minister, but, ultimately, it is the Legislature that I respect because that is the voice of the people who make the determination as to whether to spend money on programs.

Mr. Kowalski: I am part of the Legislature, and I am bringing my voice and the voice of my constituents here who are telling me they do not want two different levels of government arguing while children are in need, whether it is in social services or if there are beneficial programs that are out there or are going to be brought forward. Yes, the minister says he will listen to the Legislature, but the minister brings forward a budget, and the minister, along with the cabinet, can present Orders-in-Council that will expend money. So I think I am just trying to make a point here, that many of my constituents do not like to see levels of government fighting while there is an obvious need, and that is what I am addressing.

I will move on to another area in this Canada's youth justice renewal strategy, and I think this one, there will be no problem with getting agreement. One of the major problems with the Young Offenders Act that I have seen from different perspectives and I hear from the police community is voluntary statements and the complexities dealing with getting voluntary statements. It seems every time that the police develop a procedure, another decision is handed down in court, and, once again, the police are hampered from doing proper investigations.

* (1520)

I have always found it is so inconsistent with what we do as parents when we tell our six-year-old, always tell the truth; if you have done something wrong, admit it. Then our Justice system, what do we tell our young offenders? Do not say anything; talk to your lawyer. There is such an inconsistency, and now with the complexities involved with the Young Offenders, with getting statements admitted voluntarily, it has hampered police amazingly. I see that one of the bullets in this news release from the federal Minister of Justice is that one of the objectives of this new legislation will be to reduce the legal complexities and determine whether voluntary statements by youth can be admitted as evidence.

I would like an assurance from the minister—I do not think there will be any problem here—that he fully supports that and if his department has looked, even from a provincial level, at what we could do to assist the police to make our communities safer by helping them with this impediment to doing good police investigations, the complexities involved in taking voluntary statements from the youth of Manitoba.

Mr. Toews: Well, I am very pleased to see that the member for The Maples believes that that is, in fact, the federal Justice minister's intent on the basis of that new release. One of the things that my colleagues from Alberta, Ontario, P.E.I. and myself specifically raised with the federal Justice minister was—and this was raised with her in December of last year—that we wanted an amendment to permit the admission into evidence of a voluntary statement given to a person in authority at the discretion of the youth court notwithstanding certain technical breaches, provided that the administration of justice would not be brought into disrepute. I have spoken on many occasions to police officers. This is one of the most frustrating aspects of their police work.

Again, this is an example, not where the province has been fighting with the federal government but, in fact, has been making, I think, constructive suggestions. So I am pleased if that is what the federal Justice minister is going to do. I am not so certain that is going to happen in fact, but I am pleased that the member for The Maples (Mr. Kowalski) sees that as happening. I would certainly expect from him that he would meet with his Liberal colleagues—because I understand he still may be a Liberal—and raise that concern, because he probably has access to people with power that may not be available to me. So I certainly am very pleased to see that the member for The Maples takes that position, not just on behalf of our police forces, but for the betterment of the administration of justice in Canada.

One of the things that needs to be, I think, explored—and I do not want to go into too much detail—but the member has touched upon an issue that is central to the philosophy of the Young Offenders Act vis-a-vis the Juvenile Delinquents Act. The Juvenile Delinquents Act was never seen as an adversarial act in the same way that the Young Offenders Act is. There

was a fundamental change in philosophy from the Juvenile Delinquents Act to the Young Offenders Act where the idea was that young offenders under the new act would be treated more like criminally responsible adults. Yet the effect of many of the technical sections and, I think, the lack of responsiveness of certain of the other sections created the same problems that the Juvenile Delinquents Act did in another context.

Now I see a lot of value in more of a restorative justice philosophy in a statute dealing with young offenders, not the same adversarial approach that the Parliament has adopted in the Young Offenders Act and the courts have enforced through the application of the Charter of Rights. The Charter of Rights certainly lends itself to a much more legalistic application of the Young Offenders Act than perhaps even people back in 1984, 1985 envisaged.

One of the matters, again on a similar vein, was the Child Welfare Act. When one looks at the old child welfare acts, and perhaps similarly The Child and Family Services Act now, the intention was never to have a formal, adversarial process when children were the issue. What is the benefit of having an adversarial process when what we are talking about in the child welfare context is the life of a child? When I prosecuted child welfare cases on behalf of agencies, I took a much more conciliatory approach, because it was not an issue of winning the case, that is, getting a permanent order on behalf of the agency. I felt my responsibility was ensuring what the best interests of the child were. In many cases, that did not mean that I should rigorously cross-examine an uneducated, distraught parent who was not capable of often articulating his or her position very well on the stand. So I never took that position in child welfare cases.

Yet what we see over a period of years of that Child Welfare Act was a movement from what they called hearings, not trials, to in fact full-blown adversarial trials. I think that we lost something in that transition. What we keep on seeing is the Legislature amending this Child and Family Services Act to ensure that we keep having that kind of more conciliatory approach, and we see other influences at play that bring out the adversarial aspect of that. I do not always think the adversarial process is a healthy process when we are dealing with the future of children.

So the Juvenile Delinquents Act, we saw the same tendency moving from a nonadversarial, paternalistic—and I use that word in a positive sense—approach to an adversarial approach. I frankly do not think that has been in the best interests of youth over the years. So what I hear the federal government saying in terms of its youth strategy and the emphasis on reconciliation and community justice programs and being more inclusive of programming like the community justice committees or healing programs, I am in full agreement with that because I think that is a healthy, healthy development. But how we maintain that balance is always a difficult thing.

So I support the member's call for the reduction of the legal complexities, which, I think, are detrimental to many of our youth, and so, indeed, not only do I support it, we recommended that last year specifically to the federal Justice minister. Again, I look forward to the member's support on that type of legislation.

Mr. Kowalski: The minister prefaced his comments by talking about the amount of influence I have and the amount of influence he has. He cannot have it both ways. When the federal government does something positive, he is quick to say: yes, we told them about that six months ago. When they do something that is unpopular, he says, well, I do not have any influence over the federal government, maybe the member for The Maples has more influence. You cannot have it both ways.

There are ministers of Justice meetings. He has a great deal of influence, and that is why I am bringing these things forward, because, as a member of the Manitoba Legislature, I want my Minister of Justice, who represents this province, and I am bringing forward the viewpoints so that he will take some of these comments and suggestions forward when he is dealing with the federal Justice minister.

On that vein, one of the other things that came out of the Canada's justice renewal strategy press release was that one of the things—the new act will have a statement of principles and objectives. It quotes the proposal that amongst the principles of justice as stating that protecting society is the main goal of criminal law, including the new justice law. The statement will also make clear that prevention, meaningful consequences,

and rehabilitation are the essential components and complementary components of the youth justice system.

* (1530)

What I am bringing forward to this minister here is that “meaningful consequences” is not the term that should be used. The word “effective” has to be in there. Meaningful consequences is a political statement, dealing with the public perception that youth crime is out of control, that deals with a political agenda. Meaningful to whom? Meaningful to the public or to the youth or to the victim? I think in this statement of principles and, if our minister, provincial Minister of Justice, has input into this legislation at the next ministers of Justice meetings, I would like that changed in that legislation, that meaningful, effective consequences would be one of those three components in the principles of the new criminal justice act.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Toews: Well, I happen to like the word “effective” as well. In fact, many words such as “meaningful,” and the other one I find that way, the word “tough,” have political connotations that mean different things to different people. I think the word “effective” speaks of the implementation of certain policy goals. So, do certain measures bring about certain policy goals? Are they effective in doing that? I think that is a much more objective, neutral word that says much more than simply a political statement, so the member's suggestion is in fact a very good one.

Before we are accused here of simply dealing with words, sometimes words are very, very important in order to convey a message. I think a word like “effective” is a much more inclusive word than a word like “tough.” Just the word “tough” may alienate certain people who may believe exactly the same thing as people who say: I want tough measures.

I agree with the member for The Maples (Mr. Kowalski) that that is a good thing. The issue that he may have more influence in certain circles was certainly not an attempt by me to say that I will not exercise my influence wherever I can in respect of these issues, but I think that the member for The Maples does

himself a great injustice by simply referring to himself as only one person. He is a member of the Manitoba Legislature, elected by a number of people who have tremendous faith in his abilities to communicate their positions. I know that I think he was simply being modest when he stated his position. We know him to be a much more influential and capable person than he would perhaps even admit.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): I did have a number of questions that I was wanting to ask on this whole area. I am not too sure, in terms of how the minister is actually proceeding, if he is dealing with the entire department, whatever it is that we would like.

I wanted to address, then, some very specific questions that I have. It has been an interesting process over the last 10 years as a legislator as I try to get a better understanding of a wide variety of issues, and it seems more and more I am finding a lot of interest in the whole area of justice. I think I can attribute that to the dialogue and the correspondence that I have been receiving from constituents. It seems more and more that it is an issue that people want to talk about.

It really stirred me when, during the by-election out in Portage la Prairie, I met a senior lady. I was knocking on the door, and I was just about to walk away when the door just kind of opened up a little bit, by a crack, and this lady saw me. I introduced myself to her through the crack, and then she had opened up the door and asked me to come inside. It was amazing how she had that door so secured and other things that one would classify as safety measures were being taken for her home. I sat down on the couch, and then she went into this horrific story of what took place just two weeks prior, how her home was invaded.

Mr. Chairperson, the bottom line, because I do not need to go into every detail of it, was that this lady now sleeps during the day because she has a very difficult time sleeping at night as a result of her home invasion. Shortly after that, I tried to get a better assessment in terms of what actually happens to individuals that break into homes. I came to the conclusion that for me, personally, and I believe what a vast majority of Manitobans believe, that a home break-in is a basic violation of a person's right to feel safe in their own home, and every break-in has the potential to be a home

invasion because the thief, if you like, has no idea whether or not someone is in fact at home.

I see this senior lady and say to myself that this could have happened to anyone, whether it was one of my parents or anywhere else, and a home invasion knows no necessary age. There are young individuals that are caught in these compromised positions and so forth. What I tried to do was to get a better understanding of what sort of consequence was there for those individuals, and that is really where it started to get somewhat frustrating. As I tried to get some specific numbers, I could not get that. As an elected official, I would have liked to have seen some more hard numbers as to what actually happens to individuals that get caught breaking into homes. In fact, I had some discussions with individuals from different departments along with the Courts office, and one of the common theme seemed to be one of the lack of computerization and statistical information that, I think, would definitively have been most valuable in having.

Some of the questions, for example, would have been issues of how many individuals have been prosecuted for home break-ins. Do we have any idea of the numbers of individuals that were prosecuted successfully for home break-ins? I know there is an annual police report, and it does give some numbers of individuals that were charged. So would it not be nice to have an idea how many people were charged, how many people were successful in terms of those charges turning into a sentence at the court level? Most importantly for me, I was interested in what type of a disposition these offenders were being given. I did not know that I was going to be asking the questions today.

I was not too sure when the department was going to be passing, so the minister has to excuse me for not having some of the stats that I could have had that were provided, but there is a lot of questions that needed to be answered from that. From what I could tell a break-in, for example, for someone that is a repeat offender, they are probably looking at somewhere in the neighbourhood of an aggregate total of nine months of a jail sentence as an average. That was somewhat speculative. When you go and you knock on a door and someone says, well, geez, you know, my house was broken into, I had to wait this many hours in order for someone to come on the scene to check out the

situation—and then they have absolutely no follow-up. They have no idea whether or not someone was eventually charged with the crime, nor do they have any sort of an idea of what is the likely penalty for someone breaking into a home.

As I have indicated, I take this as a very serious crime, and what I was hoping is that I might be able to get some specific information from the minister, or whatever information that he might have available. Specifically, is the department aware of the number of individuals that are charged in any given year with break and entry? Residential break-ins, I am not necessarily as concerned about commercial as residential break-ins. Is the minister aware of how many go through the courts, whether it is successful prosecution? Maybe I can leave those two questions and no doubt those will lead to others.

* (1540)

Mr. Chairperson: Before the honourable minister responds to the question, I noticed that the committee has—we are on line 4.1.(b) of the Justice Estimates, and we have reverted back from Prosecutions. I noticed in the honourable member's comments to the minister in posing his question that there were references made to other areas.

So just to facilitate that we are staying in line with what we are doing here, the process of dealing with the Estimates of the Department of Justice, I would ask the committee if there is unanimous consent to consider the entire Estimates of the department at this point in time, so that questions can flow freely without worrying about the areas in terms of the line by line that we are dealing with? Is there unanimous consent of the committee to deal with the department of Estimates in its entirety? [agreed]

Mr. Toews: Yes, I in fact, I think I had indicated as much to the member that I was prepared to entertain questions. I know that he was caught on short notice with the proceedings here, and I wanted to ensure that he has an opportunity to answer the question. Similarly, I may not be able to respond perhaps as fully as I would have liked to, but I can through my staff, over the next little while, try to get some of the other information that I might not be able to provide him with immediately.

The member began his question with the by-election in Portage la Prairie. I too had occasion to be there for one reason or another during that time. One of the things that we have to understand about criminal justice and the enforcement of criminal justice policy is that in many ways communities can add so much in order to be effective. Portage la Prairie is truly blessed with a city council who is very concerned about this issue and deals with it in a very proactive way. I can speak about the mayor and I can speak about Mr. Dave Quinn who is a member of my department who, in fact, ran for the Liberals during that same by-election. They have come up with very unique, innovative programs, victims programming, where Portage la Prairie was part of a pilot project of seven communities right across Manitoba for the delivery of victims assistance program through the RCMP. Again, Mayor Carlson very instrumental in moving that along. They have unique community-based offices where all volunteer organizations get together to centrally deliver many of their crime prevention policies.

Indeed, there has been some controversy in the last little while about what Portage la Prairie council has done in respect of a curfew that they have enacted. You know, there might be many opinions on whether or not the curfew is a good thing to do. I certainly understand from some of the newspaper reports that we have seen a reduction in vandalism, in petty crimes and perhaps even other crimes. We will have to see what the statistics bear out by the end of the year, but again, that was an initiative by city council to address a particular problem.

So one of the things that we have to remember in all of these circumstances, no matter what laws the federal government passes or what laws the provincial government administers on behalf of that criminal justice system, an important component is the community, and city council in Portage la Prairie has been instrumental in mobilizing community members to work on the issue of crime. They should be very highly commended for what they have done over the past little while.

So in respect of the particular issue that the member raised with me, the conversation that he had with this poor, unfortunate woman who had been, I understand from the member, a victim of a break and enter or a

home invasion, well, that is certainly a very, very big concern of this department. Our department, almost from the beginning of the commencement of these kinds of actions, has taken a very vigorous and I believe effective mechanism in terms of the prosecutions. One of the first sentences that was handed out at the Queen's Bench level for home invasion here in Manitoba was 14 years. That was reduced, on appeal, by the Manitoba Court of Appeal to 10 years, and subsequently another decision was upheld by the Court of Appeal at 10 years. So it seems to be a benchmark that home invasions, according to the Court of Appeal, are worth at least 10 years. This is even in situations where there has not been particularly a great amount of physical injury to the person but that this sentence has been imposed because the community is horrified that these kinds of things would happen. I certainly support that vigorous prosecution of those matters.

The member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) is absolutely correct that break and enters are very, very different from almost any other crime. I do not consider break and enters into residential homes to be a property offence. They are not property offences. It is not the same thing as having your car vandalized. It is not the same thing as having someone break into a commercial premises at night when there is virtually no potential of someone being there. The real danger of a residential break and enter is exactly what the member pointed out. The potential for confrontation with an occupant of the house is always there, and therefore the potential for personal injury is always there.

So these cases, and we have seen it in the past, what one can call a simple break and enter—and by using that term I do not mean to in any way belittle or downgrade my concern—but a straightforward break and enter can result in fact in a murder. We have had very recently situations where people have broken into a house not knowing somebody was there, and suddenly the residents are confronted. The potential, especially among young offenders, for that situation to get out of hand and serious physical injury occur, cannot be underestimated. So break and enters, I agree with the member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), are not property offences. They are something much, much more significant and serious. So the issue of home invasions, which our department has specifically targeted as

warranting heavier sentences, is in fact something that we will continue on.

I do not consider break and enters to be a matter of the luck of the draw. That is not what we, as law enforcement officials, should consider a break and enter. This is an exceptional situation that needs very strong direction from both me, as the Minister of Justice, and other aspects of the justice system. Again, that issue is also tied up in our policy with regard to bail and the opposition of bail of serious and violent offenders or gang members. So we try to be reasonable in the sense that we want to work within the law, but let us look at what the law provides for a residential break and enter.

* (1550)

What is the maximum sentence authorized for a residential break and enter? I think Parliament early on recognized how different a residential break and enter was. It is not simply an issue of a man's castle, as the old expression is, or a person's castle, I guess, as we would say now. It deals with an issue of personal integrity, of personal safety, and so is much more a matter than just a piece of property.

So what does Parliament say in respect of residential break and enters? The maximum sentence is life imprisonment. The issue there is not: do we amend the criminal code to get harsher sentences? Because there is only one alternative to life imprisonment.

An Honourable Member: Death.

Mr. Toews: The member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) indicates death. I do not think he is advocating that there be executions for residential break and enters, but the point that the member raises has, in fact, received the consideration of Parliament, and Parliament said that there is a potential here of life imprisonment.

You know, the issue then of what are appropriate sentences for break and enters is, I think, a very important one. The member has raised this with me before, and I have raised this with my department very specifically as a consequence not just of the home invasion sentences, but in fact as a result of the member's questions.

What are we doing in that area? Can we determine with any certainty what the sentences are? In my opinion, we need to do a little more work in that area to ensure that the political and legislative message of Parliament is respected, because they are sending us a message saying that this is what the people of Canada want.

So how do we communicate that message to all aspects of the justice system to ensure that they realize how significant this is? I am not targeting one aspect of the justice system. I am talking about the justice system generally, including members of my department.

How do we do that? I think in the area of home invasions we have done that, but home invasions are simply, perhaps, on one part of the scale of break and enters because, essentially, that is what they are. They are break and enters.

So the member's concerns about numbers and who is doing it, we know, for example, that many of these home invasions are done by very few members of our society, very few. That is why I think it is very important in any specific case in home invasions to be as vigilant as we can in the area of prosecution, but that does not excuse us in the area of break and enters generally because of the potential of the danger that can arise from confrontation of residents in their own homes.

So I do not have those statistics available with me at this time, but whatever statistics I can share with the member, I will take a look for those statistics.

There was one other issue that the member has raised, and that was the issue of technology and computerization. I think that is a very good point. Our Department of Justice has, in fact, been addressing that particular issue.

We have a system that is being implemented now as we speak and over the past number of months called the Prosecutions Information Scheduling and Management System, or PRISM is the acronym. Prosecutions is currently undergoing a reorganization that will see a shift of resources from the trial component of prosecutions to the intake component. What this does is that these efficiencies that will result as a result of

concentrating more on the intake will allow us to focus more resources on matters that actually go to trial, proceed to trial.

The key component of the reorganization is the development of this PRISM system to ensure that adequate resources are placed at the appropriate pressure points, that the system can respond to a changing environment as those changes occur, so that staff are deployed in the most efficient and effective way and that the needs of victims and witnesses are addressed in a timely manner.

For example, the woman that the member referred to in Portage la Prairie, I hope that he gave her some direction in terms of assistance, perhaps, that she could find, because in Portage la Prairie, as I indicated, they have one of the most sophisticated Victim Assistance programs in Manitoba. So there is help, and if the member—I can appreciate the member does not want to give names like that, but certainly if he wants to share that information directly with that particular constituent from Portage la Prairie, give that information to the member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Faurichou) or, indeed, give it to the police or to members of my department, I would certainly try to ensure that those concerns of that woman are met.

But all of this, the core case management, the case scheduling, the financial management, the statistical reporting, all is predicated on an upgrade of technology that we will be seeing implemented over the next little while. The first module will be implemented early next year, and as one can appreciate, there is a lot of work that goes into developing an appropriate, technologically efficient system.

What the prison plan includes is a requirement to provide a work station to all Crown attorneys and support staff within Prosecutions. This includes personal computers, and I have the numbers but I do not necessarily want to provide them at this time, but it includes personal computer work stations. The funds have been approved by government, and so we are moving in that direction.

So the point, both that the member raises in respect of break and enters generally, the management of that

issue, and technology is something that my staff is very mindful of and we will continue to work on.

Mr. Lamoureux: I think that there is the potential for the computerization or PRISM—it is the acronym—that the minister makes reference to. I think that there could be many benefits derived from that. What I want to emphasize is that the stats I have been looking for, it has been frustrating because I have not been able to acquire them. I had the annual police report—now, this would have been the '95 statistical report, and I bring it up as an example, crimes against property. There were 2,445 reported, 242 were cleared, and I have not been able to find out for that same fiscal year, if you like, how many of those break and enters actually were successful in court, and, in particular, what sort of a disposition were we looking at.

It pleases me to hear that a home invasion—the message that the province seems to be sending out is that you are looking at—if you break into someone's home and there is someone there, you are looking at a good 10 years of incarceration. That is likely an aggregate total, so it might not necessarily work out to 10 years, but at least you have something that is somewhat tangible that you can talk to your constituents about, because I think there is a wide gap of what people really believe is happening to the criminal after that criminal gets caught.

* (1600)

The minister made reference to the criminal law, criminal law being maximum, of life. So if you break into someone's house, the courts have the opportunity, if they so choose, to send that person away for life. One of the questions that I put out in my most recent survey was asking if there should be some form of a minimum sentence for someone that is caught breaking into a home, and the overwhelming response to that has been, yes, that there should be some form of a minimum sentence to it.

The actual percentage—I have about 400 so far returned to me. I will be sure that the minister will get the actual percentage. I also left a little line in terms of what they would suggest in numbers of months would be an appropriate minimum. Again, this is just someone that could be, you know, a 19-year-old who

breaks into someone's home, takes just the TV and walks out. I was referring to a minimum incarceration period, and it will be interesting to get the results, and I will be sure to give the minister a copy of that when I do get them finalized. That will likely happen sometime in the next six weeks.

But to the minister, what I would like to see is the specific number. If John Doe breaks in and John Doe is 20 years old, breaks into the house, it is the very first time he has broken into a house and he gets caught, he goes through the court, what is John Doe looking at? The impression that the public, I believe, have—and my impression is not too far off from it; I must admit that—is it might be probation, and if there is any incarceration period of time, that they would be surprised, and, quite frankly, I would likely be surprised. That is why I think that if in fact there is an incarceration period that we have got to be able to communicate that, because you feed the belief that wrists or hands are being slapped when serious crimes are occurring.

What I believe has happened over the years, and I have made reference to this in the past, is that respecting judicial independence does not necessarily justify a politician from taking any responsibility to ensuring that there is some form of accountability within our judicial system.

Now, the minister could be in the hot seat by my making that statement and asking him to respond to it, but I really do believe as a result of that judicial independence that there has been a general lack of public confidence in the judicial system. Maybe it is because of the media, maybe it is because the communication has not been successful in what has actually been happening within the courts, but I believe I would be doing a disservice to my constituents if I did not raise that particular concern, because no one else is doing it. When I say no one else, I do not mean to say that I am the only member of the Legislative Assembly. I think we all try to do it in our own ways.

Mr. David Faurshou, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

What I see has happened is that there has been a growing gap between what people believe is

appropriate and what is actually happening. In other words, the will of the public and the feelings and the emotions and what they believe is right and just are not necessarily being reflected in our courts. If in fact it is being reflected in our courts, then we are doing a very poor job at demonstrating that, because I believe that there is a good percentage of the population, I would hazard a guess well over 50 percent of the population—if I was to really speculate, I would suggest it is probably as high as 85-90 percent—where they do not have the type of confidence in our judicial system which I believe should be there.

That is the reason why inside the Chamber I brought forward a resolution with the idea of an all-party task force. Given what has happened recently or since I introduced that particular resolution, I believe that there was more merit to seeing some sort of an independent review of our judicial system that goes beyond our courts, that goes beyond, if you like, our judges or our Crowns, the defence lawyers, the stakeholders, that we have to get some sort of a review in process so we can start narrowing that gap so that the public can feel that the justice system is there to serve them.

Do you know, it would be interesting to get from the Minister of Justice (Mr. Toews) how many people might have approached him where they said, well, it seems that the criminal has more rights and more advantages than the victim. I know that is something that constantly comes up with respect to me. I like to think that I am very liberally minded in my thoughts with respect to the justice system, that I am not a hard right, you know, throw the person into jail until they die. I would like to believe that is not my attitude towards justice, but I think the pendulum has gone too far in the other direction, and I think that now is the time in which we start taking some sort of action to ensure that there is more accountability where there has not been any accountability for far too long.

I use the example of break and enters primarily because of the frustration, and it would be interesting to find the answers to the question which I put to the minister. I hope to get that, because I think that is absolutely essential. If I am wrong—and I hope I am wrong. I hope that the types of information that can be provided to me demonstrate that my constituents would

be content with the types of dispositions that are being handed out through our judicial system.

I would be surprised, and I would be the first to apologize to those stakeholders that feel offended if in fact that were the case, but I have done what I can to try to get some sort of statistical information, given the limited resources that I have. Where I believe it is important, because the minister made reference to community groups, I could not agree with the minister more. I think the more we get the communities involved, the better we are going to be.

On a bit of a side note, if I may, I do not want to—well, maybe I will go out to that side note after I give the minister a chance to respond to this.

Mr. Toews: The member raises a number of issues that have been currently discussed in public and other areas, and I appreciate the frankness of the member and I think his genuine good faith in raising these issues. We were elected to serve our constituents to raise these types of concerns, and I believe each of us, no matter what political party we are from, are doing it in good faith, because these are the things we are hearing from our constituents. So I am very pleased that I am not the only member who has been hearing concerns raised by his constituents. So the fact that the member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) and others have the same concerns as a result of conversations that they have had with their constituents, at least makes me feel that I am somehow living in a isolated area. I think the concerns raised are legitimate concerns that our constituents elect us to discuss.

One of the further responsibilities of the Attorney General, one that has been clearly recognized by the Supreme Court of Canada, is that in the capacity of Attorney General, yes, we are respectful of the courts; yes, we are respectful of the other aspects of the justice system, but we are obligated to express our concerns in appropriate ways so that these issues are discussed and legislatively acted upon.

* (1610)

So, I sat here and I listened to the member, and I say I am glad that he is bringing forward his constituents' concern in such a frank and genuine way because I

think given his understanding, and the fact he has communicated that to me, allows me to proceed in certain directions which I think we need, not because we are in the business of knocking over sacred cows. We are in the business of ensuring that government serves the interests of people, all aspects of government. So the comments from the member are certainly worthy of discussion and consideration. We may not always agree on solutions, but the ideas raised are certainly worthy of discussion. That is why we are elected. That is why we are here.

In respect of some of the specific issues raised by the member is the issue of break and enters and what are the statistics. Well, I know that I have received statistics from somewhere and I am trying to track them down. But I know that over the past five years, for example, break and enters—and I believe it is residential break and enters—in Winnipeg have decreased by about 26 percent, so we are seeing a reduction in the number of break and enters. There is no question about that. Is that satisfactory? I do not think it is good enough.

There are a number of initiatives that we can still utilize in order to bring that rate down. I had occasion to speak to members of the community all over Manitoba. Through various community organizations like the Cottage Watch Program, and in certain areas I believe it was—well, maybe I will not say the area because I will be proven wrong tomorrow when a break and enter occurs—but in a cottage area here in Manitoba, the last year the break and enter rate went to zero because of the activities of a community organization working together with the police. So there are steps that we can take separate and apart from any steps that the courts or the Department of Justice could take. We have to remember that.

In respect of the actual management of cases and determination who is getting what for what kind of crime, that is part of the entire PRISM system. We will be able to provide those kinds of statistics and, I think, hold the Justice department accountable to looking at our statistics and saying what are you doing; why are things not going better?

So technology in some sense puts the department under a greater magnifying glass. I appreciate some of the concerns that members of my department have

expressed about the continuing scrutiny of people in the justice system, but that is part, I think, of our responsibilities being where we are, that we should not try to hide what we are doing. We should be prepared to justify what we are doing. In fact, I think by and large we are doing a good job and certainly the prosecutors in this area are doing a good job. We can improve, and I think there are ways that I as the Justice minister can help our Crowns in doing a better job.

I wanted to specifically point out to the member, I do have some statistics that are available in the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics that was published in 1996. I think that is the most recent edition. I do not believe we have any statistics more recent than that. But at page 27, at figure 2.16, they list breaking and entering incidents by province or territory, 1996. What they indicate is that the two jurisdictions—and this is done on a per 100,000 population rate—that have the highest break and enter rate are the Northwest Territories and the Yukon. Sometimes statistics can be misleading in areas where there are small population bases, so we have to be mindful of that. I think there are better statistics that we can rely upon.

The next highest are British Columbia and Saskatchewan. They have the next-highest rate. British Columbia is over 2,000 break and enters per 100,000 population. Next is Saskatchewan at, I would say, about 1,800 break and enters per 100,000 of population.

Next comes Manitoba and Quebec, which are basically tied at about, I would say, 1,400, which is just slightly above the national average. So Manitoba—I am not bragging because it is not good to be at the national average in this kind of a thing—but we are certainly nowhere near the British Columbia and Saskatchewan situation which are far more serious.

After that, in descending order after the Canada national average, we see Alberta at, I would say, about 1,150; Ontario at about 1,100 or 1,050; Nova Scotia at about 1,000; and then the other Maritime provinces under 1,000, with Newfoundland being the lowest at about 700.

That is an interesting comment, because it is not necessarily the wealthiest provinces that have the

lowest break and enter rates. Indeed, one could say that Newfoundland would be perhaps, in terms of taxing abilities and some of the programming, one of the poorest provinces in Canada. Yet they have the lowest rate of break and enter. What does that tell us? I think it speaks a lot to social conditions and issues of that nature. So I do not think that we can take any comfort in where we are. I think we can do better.

* (1620)

The study indicates that rates have remained stable in Manitoba and in Alberta and increased in the remaining provinces. P.E.I. reduced by 1.5 percent and Ontario by 3.6 percent, so the increases were in the remaining provinces. So British Columbia and Saskatchewan increased. Alberta increased and then some of the other ones. The only ones to show a decrease in fact were Ontario and P.E.I. The others increased, with Manitoba and Alberta remaining stable. Again, nothing to be proud of, but it shows that some of our policies are in fact being effective. I want to say that one of the policies is the policy of targeting home invasions. I think that is a very important aspect in reducing break and enters.

Now the member, before he speaks too loudly to his constituents about, if you do a break and enter, you are going to get 10 years, that is not the case. I know that not to be the case. I think when we talk about home invasions, we are talking about people specifically entering into a residential home where they know somebody is at home. So it is a very, very different kind of offence in respect of the intent. The result of a home invasion can be exactly the same as a break and enter, even where there is no such intent.

But I want to say that Manitoba recognized that particular problem early on. In 1997, at the Uniform Law Conference, Manitoba proposed the creation of a new offence, and that was the offence of home invasion. We suggested that this new offence be punishable by a maximum of life imprisonment—again, the same as break and enter—but it would be specifically used in order to bring home to the courts—and I make no apologies about legislators sending messages to the courts because that is the function of passing laws. Indeed, when I read the Chief Justice's recent report about the Queen's Bench, he, in fact, said as much. He

said: Don't blame the courts; blame the legislators for not passing tougher laws.

An Honourable Member: I read the article, too.

Mr. Toews: The member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) indicates he read the article. I not only read the article, I read the report. In the case of break and enters, what further message could the legislators send? I think the member for Inkster touched upon the issue, and I will get back to that because the member has been raising some very, very good points here.

Now we suggested that there be, in fact, that kind of an offence of home invasion which would bring home to the courts the condemnation that the public has for those who break into residences and physically harm the occupants. Although, the above-noted resolution that I have just mentioned was defeated at the Uniform Law Conference, Manitoba and its prosecutors will be continuing to stress the importance of this particular issue and look for strong sentences in terms of substantial periods of imprisonment.

So we have already suggested the issue of a separate offence, and we have specifically targeted home invasions. I think some of our other policies such as the COP Program, Citizens On Patrol and Cottage Watch and others have allowed the break and enter rate to not only stabilize but decrease in many of our communities, and we need to continue working with community groups like that.

The issue, though, of sentencing is a very important one, and the member raises the issue of minimum sentences. I am a firm believer in minimum sentences. I think there is great, social good in minimum sentences for establishing uniformity in the application of the law so that there are not these discrepancies. If one looks at the success of minimum sentences since the advent of the Charter of Rights, we have seen something that is of concern to legislators, or should be of concern to legislators. Even in situations where minimum sentences of seven days had been imposed for driving suspended, courts struck down those types of minimum sentences and other minimum sentences.

Perhaps the most important minimum sentence to be struck down was the importation of narcotics into

Canada. It used to be that you imported narcotics into Canada, there was a minimum sentence of seven years. The court struck that down as being unconstitutional, as cruel and unusual punishment. And so I think Parliament has been spooked, to a great extent, by some of these cases and may not feel that they have the firm constitutional basis that they need to proceed in that direction.

I think that we should revisit that whole area as legislators and parliamentarians, and we need to encourage people like the Justice minister who, I think, has some very good ideas but needs, I think, some more encouragement from her provincial counterparts to keep on moving in a certain direction. The issue of minimum sentences, I think, is an idea that needs to be discussed. If what the Chief Justice said is right that they welcome direction from Parliament in respect of, and I believe the words were his, "tougher sentences," well, in the area of break and enter, as I have said and the member noted, we cannot get any tougher other than announcing that we are going to, through legislation, execute people. Now, I do not think the people of Canada are prepared for that.

One of the members of my staff once pointed out to me in saying in a minimum sentence, there should be two questions in a survey: What would be the minimum sentence for a person who broke into your home and walked off with your television set? If that person had no prior record, what should the minimum sentence be? And what should be the minimum sentence if a person broke into a home and took the television set and walked out if that person was your son or daughter?

I think Canadians recognize that any measures in terms of minimum sentences also have to reflect other values, not purely punitive. I think in the area of home invasion, any other considerations other than punitive are very, very small, but in some of the other areas, I think we need to reconsider this. We know that there have been minimum sentences in the area of firearms and the use of firearms. We know that, for example, using a firearm in the context of another offence is punishable by an extra four years. We, in fact, have been very supportive of it, and the courts so far have been supportive of it.

One of the positions that we say in respect of Bill C-68 is not that we are against holding people accountable for their use of firearms. We are very much in favour of that. We are simply not in favour of setting up a system that, in our opinion, will be a huge drain on our police and other resources without any effective or consequential benefits in terms of reducing crime in our neighbourhoods and in our communities.

* (1630)

So the issue of minimum sentences is a very important topic. I believe it is a topic that the federal government should continue to address. In the area of break and enters, I think the member is right. It used to be that there used to be, I think, a minimum sentence in break and enters. I recall a situation where I prosecuted a break and enter into a post office. For me, I thought it was a serious crime. The person backed up a truck—it was a post office in Shilo—and loaded up his truck, had a load full and then came back for another load full. The person was caught, and we asked for a substantive period of jail because the guy was a youthful offender. He was an adult, but he was a young offender. So my position was, well, it is not a residential break and enter. It is a post office, and as serious an offence as interfering with the mail is, I did not think that a penitentiary was where the person should be. Well, the county court judge, who is since deceased, imposed a suspended sentence. I thought that was inappropriate. I referred that to Prosecutions here in Winnipeg and they appealed it. It went to Court of Appeal. Court of Appeal said that that kind of offence warranted penitentiary. The only reason they were not going to send that young man to penitentiary was because the prosecutor had only asked for jail time, and so they sentenced him to two years less a day.

Now, it turned out that the offender was also convicted of other offences unrelated that were consecutive time, and so he went to penitentiary anyway. That is now 20 years ago that particular case took place, but that is the way the court then viewed a break and enter into a post office where the person was, to some extent, inebriated and driving this motor vehicle, but there was never an issue of personal safety and somebody hurt as a result of that.

In the area of residential break and enters, we used to see a fairly standard application of sentences in

residential break and enters, for one reason or another. I think part of it is because break and enters are viewed as property offences and we do not send people to jail any more for property offences. Well, I think the message that needs to go out and that we are sending through our policy on home invasions and others is that break and enters are not property offences. They are very, very dangerous crimes that can lead to very serious personal consequences for victims, and secondly, it is not just an issue of the theft of property but the personal well-being of individuals such as the member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) mentioned that he met when he was knocking doors during the Portage by-election.

I say all these things, of course, with all due respect to judicial independence. I do it in the hope that we stimulate discussion here to in fact determine a position that we can send off to the federal government, because they are the ones who control what kind of legislation is passed. So the comments we make here—and I find the member's statements especially instructive, given that he is from an opposition party and a so-called Liberal. It is instructive that those kinds of comments would be coming from a Liberal. So I certainly intend to send some of those comments on to my federal colleagues in Ottawa to let them know what Liberals are thinking here in Manitoba, because I do not think that they are far off from what my thinking is and indeed the vast majority of Manitobans.

The last point that was raised by the member is the issue of a justice review, and I do want to get into that very, very quickly because it is an important one. But I want to also point out that, to members of the public who think that Manitoba's incarceration rates are low, I might indicate that there are only two provinces who have higher incarceration rates. Number one is Saskatchewan, and No. 2 is Alberta.

An Honourable Member: And that is a good thing?

Mr. Toews: So Manitoba is No. 3. The member for The Maples (Mr. Kowalski) says: is that a good thing or not? I am not saying it is good or bad. I am simply saying that our incarceration rates and lengths of sentences are among the highest in Canada. Now, members of the public or certainly my constituents would say to me: do we in fact take any pride from the

fact that everyone else might be doing a worse job than we are? So we need to balance policy issues and matters of personal safety and rehabilitation and all those factors. I think we can do a better job as a criminal justice system of focusing in on certain types of crimes that we find simply reprehensible.

I do not think the member for The Maples or the member for Inkster have any problem with diverting certain types of offences, because the diversion programs that we have used in this province relating to youth justice committees, who hear over 2,000 cases a year here in Manitoba—I believe that was the last figure for last year. The recidivism rate is very, very low. I hear that it is about 3 percent—the recidivism rate of people who go through youth justice committees. To me, it is not an issue of being tough; it is an issue of being effective. We have found an effective means of dealing with certain offenders. This sort of harks back to the comments that the member for The Maples was making.

I just want to put that into a context. We need to find effective dispositions for certain types of offenders. In my opinion, when we are talking about home invasions or break and enters, the effective disposition is a period of incarceration. Certainly home invasions, 10 years is not too light a sentence. I note that one Court of Queen's Bench Judge imposed 14 years, but that was reduced by the Court of Appeal to 10 years. So 10 years seems to be the standard.

I do not think I will have the time to get into the issue unless the member wants to ask another question about the review of the justice system, because that is an important one. I would be prepared to answer that if the member was, and I would be brief. I realize that I have gone on for some time, but I think in fairness to me, the member asked about three or four questions that I have been trying to address.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Chairperson, I have no problem with the length of answers from the minister as long as he does not have any problem with my diatribe of questions.

I agree that when I look at crimes, there are some crimes that I think that there is more of a need to put emphasis on than other crimes. The member for The

Maples (Mr. Kowalski) and I have had discussions in the past of starting to get tough on the causes of crime and do more in that area, and I try to be as sensitive as much as possible to those alternatives. Having said that, I do think that there are different areas in which the public expectations are very high, and I think that they are being let down.

The minister was going to comment on the need for some sort of an independent review. I am very much interested in his thoughts on that. But prior to his commenting on that, if he could, I understood exactly what he meant when he first answered the question about the 10 years for a home invasion. That I think seems, at least would appear to be somewhat reasonable.

The real question on the home break-ins is: is there any sort of or does the minister or the department have any idea—the example I used earlier is, John on a Sunday afternoon breaks into so-and-so's house, gets caught, what is going to happen to John? What would likely happen to John if he gets caught doing it, nothing more than just smashing a window, walking into the house, grabs the TV, puts it into a waiting vehicle. On the way back to the house to grab some more, he sees a car pull up into the driveway and then just takes off, gets caught. What is likely going to happen to John?

If the minister could answer that particular question, it would be appreciated, and then the more specific the detailed answers at some point in time if he could get back to me on that, that would be great.

Now to comment on the independent review. I, as I say, earlier or late last year was of the opinion that we needed to see some sort of an all-party task force, and that is something which the Liberal Party was in favour of seeing. Today, I look at it as trying to see it more independent of the political parties that would respond to filling that gap between the public and the courts and, to a certain degree, the elected politicians.

* (1640)

What I somewhat envision seeing would be representatives from the different stakeholders, whether one has to go outside of province or not, but you are looking at everything from the judges to Crowns, the

police, defence lawyer, and, most importantly, I believe, some lay people, individuals who are familiar with the process, with the idea of having some sort of public input and then coming back with some sort of recommendations, whether those recommendations go direct to our judicial system, or, I should say, they should go both to our judges and to the minister or the government of the day. I really believe that in the long term it is in our best interest.

When I posed the question in Question Period, the one day the minister responded that Alberta was having some sort of a task force that was ongoing currently, and I think that is good for the province of Alberta. We do not know in terms of when it is that they will come back, when the report would actually be released or anything of that nature. I think that there is merit for Manitoba to be doing something, at least start the ball rolling, and that might mean having just a formal discussion group. If you are talking about individuals who reside in the province of Manitoba, I would think that you would be looking at individuals who are, if not semiretired, are retired from different positions that reflect the stakeholders and, as I say, some individuals representing the public as a whole.

So I would be interested in just hearing the minister's comments on those two points.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Faurschou): The Chair has received a request from the honourable minister for a five-minute recess. Is it the unanimous consent of the committee members that this Committee of Supply recess for five minutes? [agreed]

This section of the Committee of Supply will resume sitting after a five-minute recess.

The committee recessed at 4:43 p.m.

After Recess

The committee resumed at 4:51 p.m.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Faurschou): This section of the Committee of Supply will resume with

the honourable minister responding to questions from the honourable member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux).

Mr. Toews: Thank you very much for that question. I want to indicate that one of the primary considerations of all Justice ministers in Canada at our last conference was the issue of public confidence in the justice system, and I think that is what the member is referring to, generally speaking, because I do not think he simply wants a review for the sake of a review. I think he is saying to me—and I do not want to put any words in his mouth, but I think what he is telling me is that members of his constituency are not as confident in the justice system, and I use that word very generally and broadly and loosely, and I am not targeting any specific aspect of the justice system, but there is an erosion of the confidence in that justice system.

So what, in fact, occurred as a result of that conference in December of last year—and I might say that there were very, very different points of view on that issue. One of them—and I do not attribute any fault personally to the federal Minister of Justice because I think that in many ways she is heading in the right direction; in others, she could be more forceful. But one of the things, and I have said this before in public, is that we were treated to a presentation by the federal Justice officials of what the real issue was in respect of the erosion of public confidence in the justice system.

They put on all kinds of slides and statistics and polls and said that because crime was dropping in Canada, the problem was not the justice system, it was people's perception with the justice system, and what we needed was some kind of a massive education program to re-educate the Canadian voter. That was not as directly said, but that was certainly the response that I took away from the meeting. I do not think that was necessarily the federal Justice minister's position, but it appeared to be the position of some of her staff. I think most Justice ministers treated to that presentation took some degree of insult from it, because we are hearing from our constituents that it is not a matter of their education; it is a matter of us dealing with what they consider fundamental problems, and I agree with my constituents.

What happened as a result of that conference was that a working group of deputy ministers was put together

in terms of dealing with that specific issue. We were unable to, I think, approach the topic in the detail that we thought it should be, and so we delegated it to our deputy ministers, not with a view to putting the responsibility on them but rather to come up with a working solution. Of course, Manitoba is one of the working group members. It includes British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Canada and Manitoba.

One of the deputy ministers, in particular the deputy minister from the Yukon, has recently sent out some correspondence on this particular issue. Now, this deputy minister is well known here in the Province of Manitoba. He was, of course, a former assistant deputy minister here, Mr. Stuart Whitley, who, in fact, was my boss in Constitutional Law before he moved on to become the director of Prosecutions and then to become the assistant deputy minister of Prosecutions, and he, as I think others, feels very strongly about this issue.

I want to say that the minister from the Yukon is one who feels very, very strongly about this issue, Lois Moorcroft. She is not a lawyer and sometimes I think because of that brings a breath of fresh air into a closed room, because in many respects people consider lawyers as operating in closed rooms. I do not necessarily agree with that proposition in every case, but I think it is very important, and it gets back to the member's point about being inclusive when we look at reviewing the system, because you cannot change the system by having the same old people there talking about the system.

You know, we did a review of the Small Claims Court, for example—which again, a very important aspect of the justice system, very important aspect—and some of the recommendations, and indeed the majority of the recommendations this government has indicated we are very supportive of. But one of the recommendations that was made was that essentially we get rid of hearing officers who are not legally trained lawyers. I do not agree with that. I do not believe that simply legal training guarantees a good disposition or a good temperament towards decision making of that type, especially in Small Claims Court.

We have got clerks and other people in our justice system who have seen and observed the system for

many, many years. They may not have a law degree, but they have a wealth of experience that enables them to make very important decisions about people's lives in the small claims context. But it was not surprising that the recommendation coming from a group of lawyers and judges would make that kind of recommendation that they should all be lawyers with at least five years of experience. I think that before we take those kinds of steps, let us make sure that the system stays in touch with the ordinary person.

One of the points again that I think the member raised is that the court system is a very formal process, and sometimes a law degree and a call to the bar gives us the key to access that legal system, forgetting that the system was not created for lawyers. It was created in order for people to resolve their differences in a positive way. So I think that the importance of having laypeople, that is, nonlawyers, participating in these kinds of decision-making process including reviews of our legal system is an element that is not simply a courtesy to the public but indeed is an essential element of any review. So I think I would like my position very clearly made in that respect.

* (1700)

One of the things that has been proposed in respect of this working group on public confidence in the justice system is a call to answer certain questions. I do not think I am telling any tales out of school here because the circulation of this document was quite widespread, but some of the things that Mr. Whitley suggested are things—I mean, central questions like why there are problems in public confidence, and I note that he did not say are there problems in public confidence. I think we recognize why there are problems in public confidence is the question, rather than are there. I think we have gone one step beyond asking are there problems. We know that there are issues. He asks again: what are the critical real issues to be addressed? Another question: what are the linkages with work being done on integrated justice initiatives? We cannot look at the court system as being separate and apart from other kinds of community initiatives, such as youth justice committees or healing circles or alternative resolution of disputes. What kinds of things can be done to improve public confidence? So this is

clearly something that the working group is looking at.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

I do not think—and I certainly as minister do not think—that a group of deputy ministers is going to provide us with the substantive answers. I think a group of deputy ministers might be able to identify a process that stretches beyond any particular jurisdiction, and that is, in my opinion, what I am looking primarily for from this group of deputy ministers. What is the process? How do we address these problems? What Mr. Whitley has suggested, and I certainly support, is that there be a ministers' meeting following the Calgary summit on justice initiatives in February of 1999. I want to be there, not just at the summit but to meet with the other ministers afterwards because I think that will be an excellent way of integrating a justice ministers' conference with input from the community as to what the issues are. So the member indicated, well, it is all well and good for Alberta to do this. I see this as a much bigger thing than simply Alberta. It is also all Justice ministers that I would like to see participate in that, and then we can bring home ideas or indeed specific calls.

Now, I think it is important for the member to know what the format is in Alberta, and why I put a great deal of faith into that process. I might say that the Attorney General, the Minister of Justice, of Alberta has not been immune from some degree of controversy in statements that he has made. I believe that all the statements that he has made were made in good faith, with a genuine interest in representing his constituents and also in fulfilling his constitutional role recognized by the Supreme Court of Canada as expressing the concerns of the citizens. That is a role of the Attorney General as well, in respect of the justice system.

In a case that my deputy pointed out to me, I believe it was the Power case in 1994, the Supreme Court of Canada specifically acknowledged the role of the Attorney General in making public statements about public concerns. That is not an issue of interference with judicial independence. An independent organization or operation can only continue to be relevant provided that it receives input, input in an appropriate way but input nevertheless.

Again, you cannot reform a system or change a system when a system needs changed by simply relying on the people who are part of that closed room. [interjection] That is right. So I think I agree with the member—I am getting back to that point again. I agree with the member that it must be more inclusive than perhaps matters have been in the past.

Again, the point that I mention about the review of our civil justice system and the recommendation that we only appoint lawyers to hear cases, again sometimes I have concern that traditional elements of our legal system forget or sometimes have not heard the other voices that require, I think, more careful thought of where that kind of recommendation leads us to—and again, no reflection on the legal community, no reflection on judges in terms of negative. It is simply that our systems need to be responsive to public concerns. That is why these institutions were made in the beginning.

Now, what they did in Alberta is put out a press release. Justice Minister Havelock in this press release announces that an Alberta justice summit to restore public confidence in the legal system was announced today. That is January 30, 1998. I mean, he is very clear about it; this is what the purpose is. It is to restore public confidence. He indicated at the Alberta branch of the Canadian Bar Association in Calgary that the purpose was to provide a forum for frank discussion and an opportunity to share ideas and debate solutions on a wide range of justice issues of concern to all Albertans.

Why is it taboo to raise questions about alternative mechanisms or alternative solutions to the issue of tenure for judges? Why is that taboo? Why can we not talk about that? And yet it has been suggested by some that maybe we should not address that. So I think Justice Minister Havelock is basically saying what people are saying all across Canada. As the Attorney General, why should he not be able to say that kind of thing?

So what he goes on to say is that studies show clearly that the public's perception, attitude and understanding about the justice system is at a low point, and we want to take whatever steps are necessary to restore their confidence. We must understand how the public

perceives the system to be working and empower the public to assist us in changing the system to address the concerns regularly expressed.

Again, I think he is fulfilling the duty that the Supreme Court of Canada clearly assigned to him or recognized in him as an Attorney General. So in that context, then, in the healthy context of democratic debate, he has said that they will examine issues of public confidence in the system, victims' rights and involvement in the system. I think that is a very crucial examination because many people do not understand, for example, the role of a Crown attorney. Is the role of the Crown attorney to represent victims? In part. But the role of the Crown attorney as an independent law officer is there to represent not just the rights of a victim but indeed the rights of an accused.

The Crown attorney, he or she, is simply not the mouthpiece for a particular facet or a particular person, because if that were the case then he would simply be another lawyer, and a Crown attorney is simply not just another lawyer. He is an independent law officer with a broad duty to ensure that fairness in the justice system is done. So the issue of victims' rights and the extent of their involvement in the system is a very important one, because it impacts then on the role of someone like a Crown attorney. Issues of youth crime, of policing, of aboriginal justice and barriers to justice.

* (1710)

So what he has said is: we want to build a blueprint to guide us in making decisions on these matters. Justice Minister Havelock has not been exclusive in that sense. He has asked me to attend; he has asked others to attend and to participate in the actual justice forum. So part of this also involves the Justice minister chairing a steering committee and has invited representatives from the judiciary, the Law Society, the Alberta branch of the Canadian Bar Association, the RCMP, the Alberta association of chiefs of police, First Nation treaty area 6, 7 and 8, the Metis Nation of Alberta association, the Metis Settlements General Council, Justice Canada, federal department of the Solicitor General, Victim Services and special interest groups to participate in the committee, and indeed there are a number of MLAs. I do not know whether these MLAs are all government MLAs, but I think that

there are at least six or so MLAs, six or seven plus him, and then outlines the steering committee's terms of reference and the objectives. I do not want to repeat those; I can just give that document to the member.

But this is a tremendous undertaking which the Minister of Justice in Alberta feels that that province is ready to undertake. I think that we need to be supportive of that process because the ramifications of that process are not simply limited to Albertans, but I think what occurs there in February of 1999 will indeed have ramifications right across Canada, especially if we are successful in coupling a ministerial conference together with that conference. I think they are far ahead of us in terms of that organizational issue and discussion of the issue.

Now, having said that, I do not think that we need to say, well, we will not take any steps here in terms of that kind of a far-reaching justice review. I think there are a number of things that we can do and we will look at doing those, but some of the issues relate to what the member has raised in his questions and the department is taking a look at those. The question is: how do we come up with a Manitoba solution that can build on some of the structure that has already been established in Alberta which I think will benefit all of Canada?

So I am not ruling that out. I am willing to sit down with the member. I think the member knows that. In dealing with the under 12s of the Young Offenders Act, the member has been very proactive, in fact, showed me a brochure that I had not seen yet but that he and other people of this group working to deal with under 12s. I think it is a very good brochure. I think it will address a problem that will not simply create a bureaucracy but in fact deal with an oversight in the law that presently exists. So I am willing to work with him further and develop ideas as they arise.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Chairperson, I just made a few points as the minister was speaking. The one question that I had asked and the minister did not get a chance to respond to and that was the home break-in, just the straight individual that walks in on a Sunday afternoon and gets caught, what can he anticipate? Can the minister quickly respond to that now?

Mr. Toews: In fact, I am sorry I neglected to answer that. The sentences could range quite dramatically

because of different judges, different Crowns and that is why the idea of some kind of a minimum sentence appeals to me, or at least a sentencing guideline. If we do not bring about minimum sentences, what about sentencing guidelines? And those guidelines have been the discussion between the judiciary and government for a long period of time. Some would view that as interference with judicial independence. I think that the idea merits more discussion, rather than simply dismissing that as interference with judicial independence.

What I can say is that probably with no prior record, and that I always find difficult to believe because we know this is probably the first time the person got caught, but one would say, I do not know, but we have to assume that this is the first offence that the person actually did, because in my opinion to break into somebody else's house has got to be—I mean, one just does not go in cold off the street and determine I am going to break into somebody's house. So there are other issues that I do not know and I do not understand. The court, of course, has to look at it because the presumption of innocence says that this is a person coming up with a first offence.

So it can range from anything from a suspended sentence because conditional discharges are not available for break and enters because of the maximum life imprisonment. I think conditional discharges are only available for sentences where the penalty is under 14 years. So sentences, the minimum would have to be a suspended sentence, which means that there would be a criminal record. A conditional discharge, of course, means that if the person performs the conditions of that sentence, the record is in fact wiped out. That is not available on a break and enter, and I think that at least is a good thing in view of the other comments that I have made and the concerns expressed by the member.

The other issue then is that a jail sentence under the federal Criminal Code now, the possibility of a jail sentence is more remote, given the implementation of conditional sentences. What has happened—and virtually unilaterally by the federal government—they one day decided that conditional sentences would be a great idea. So anyone who would otherwise be sentenced to two years less a day or less, the judge must consider a conditional sentence.

* (1720)

As I understand the process, and I never appear in a court while the conditional sentence process is under consideration, what happens is that the judge considers the appropriate sentence. If the appropriate sentence prior to conditional sentences being imposed would have been, let us say, 15 months or one year, they would impose that 15 months or one year but then determine whether or not that sentence could be served in the community. And, you know, in my opinion, for what it is worth, that is the kind of thing that brings the administration of justice into disrepute. Who are we kidding? The person is not serving the jail sentence in the community. The person is getting a suspended sentence. That is exactly what they are doing. But, in order to avoid bringing that issue to a head with constituents, federal Parliament has said, oh, but we are sending them to jail. It is just that the judge decided to send them to serve the sentence in the community. Well, that is bafflegab. That is the kind of process, as I have indicated, that brings the administration of justice into disrepute. In my opinion, if the Alberta justice summit wants to look at one issue, that is one of the issues that they can look at. Because we are saying one thing and doing quite another. That is what bothers me the most, the absolute most, about conditional sentences. Because it is not truth in advertising. That is really what it boils down to.

The issue about monitoring conditional sentences, I mean, we have the same monitoring process available as any suspended sentence with probation officers and the like. The fact is Manitoba, I understand, has one of the highest rates of breaches for conditional sentences, which means that Manitobans are well served by their probation officers because they are in fact monitoring these sentences closely. I understand in other provinces it is reaching a crisis point. They cannot continue to work the way they have been. I believe it is British Columbia that is in very serious trouble with all of their conditional sentences. The most troubling aspect about conditional sentences, apart from the lack of truth in advertising, as I have sort of facetiously put it, is the fact that, well, a person is not—I will leave that issue for now. I will move on to something else because I am getting off track. I think my basic concern about conditional sentence has been made.

The other—and I just want to touch on it very slightly—is the fact that if somebody is on a conditional sentence and they breach it and then leave the jurisdiction, the conditional sentence keeps on running and does not stop. The clock does not stop even though the person is in breach, and so they can avoid the responsibilities of the conditional sentence. I mean, again, a tremendous fault in the law which the federal government has not yet addressed. Then if, for example, the court then says, all right, a suspended sentence is not appropriate, a jail sentence is appropriate, but I am going to give a conditional sentence, if we get past that and say, well, a conditional sentence is not appropriate, I would say that in terms of that kind of an offence, if we look at the offences, it would be about three to six months that these people would be sentenced to.

Now the issue of multiple break and enters, which many of these people are caught on, or tremendous damage done, one could see a sentence in the range of up to three to four years. That could well happen, and it is not unusual, but in the situation where you have stated now what is the sentence, the answer has been very much complicated by the advent of conditional sentencing. Whereas before there would be at least three to six months and probably 20 years ago it would have been more in the range of two years less a day, now they are serving their sentences in the community, and I think that is a concern as far as I am concerned. That is one of the reasons we have opposed conditional sentences in this province. It is not an issue of resources; it is an issue of whether that is an appropriate sentence.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Chairperson, I appreciate the response from the minister. In an earlier response he made reference to a conference which he was at where the federal bureaucrats, if you like, made presentation in what they seemed to try to say is that the public perception was inaccurate. I take that into consideration, that statement into consideration along with how he just responded to that particular question that I had posed, where he talked about the conditional sentencing or the suspended sentence for the individual, the first time offender that breaks into someone's house. I think that the reality of the situation will reinforce the public's lack of confidence.

What the bureaucrats were telling the minister in Ottawa, or wherever that meeting was, I believe they are talking about perception, and I believe that the bureaucrats are in fact wrong on this point unless they can demonstrate otherwise, and that is, and I made reference to it earlier; put simply, that if in fact the public is wrong, they have to be communicated that message through the department, yet the department does not necessarily have the ability to be able to do that. I say that because what one would expect that they could get for information, or what I would have expected a year ago, if I posed a question, break and enters—what sort of dispositions have we had for break and enters? Well, the minister could have said, well, we have had 150 cases; 45 of those cases were suspended sentences. We had five cases that were more than a year of incarceration, or some sort of a summary so I can then reflect that to my constituents which then it allows me to evaluate whether or not that is meeting public expectations, if that makes sense.

The minister made reference then to Alberta and the Alberta task force, and I went through the terms of references and the types of things in which that task force is going to be doing and that they might be leading the way. Well, when I look at the perception and the reality of what is happening within the judicial system, I believe very firmly that we need to be taking some sort of action. If we are not going to be taking it independently because we have to face that what is happening in Alberta is going to be addressing the current situation here in Manitoba, then there might be merit, for example, of having representatives from Manitoba to participate in some of the dialogue that is occurring with respect to the Alberta task force. Maybe that participation would then also be mandated, for example, to conduct some public sort of input for Manitobans so that maybe what we can come up with is, by using some of the expertise from the Alberta situation and bringing to the table some of the maybe unique characteristics that Manitoba might have to be able to contribute, or at the very least to be listening in as to what is happening, that we will be better able to take actions on some of the things that are coming out from Alberta.

I would suggest, yes, it would be wonderful if we had the national government take the lead role, had a national royal commission, it went right from one coast

to the other, address the issues head on, sought for provincial co-operation and involvement so that everyone as much as possible was singing the same song, I think there would be tremendous benefit by that. But because that might not necessarily be happening to the degree in which we want to see it happen inside Manitoba, I do not believe we should then be ignoring the need for change.

Alberta seems to be taking action, or at least it appears to be taking action on that change. Manitoba seems to be open to it, but I have not seen the tangible action other than the odd directive that goes out, such as the minister's press statement on bail, for example, for hard offenders or harsh offenders. But seeing some sort of a commitment to whether it is getting more directly involved in what is happening in Alberta with their task force or coming up with something that is going to be happening addressing the issues within the province I think are very important, because I will go right back to the way in which I started it in my response by saying that the perception often turns into reality.

* (1730)

If the reality is wrong, according to the federal bureaucrats, then we are doing a terrible job in communicating what reality actually is. It is not a question of: let us see how hard we can be on the criminals. I think there are areas in which we need to look at more alternatives than our courts. I think at this point that is where I will move on to where we can get communities more involved in coming up with dispositions.

I had an interesting discussion with an RCMP officer where he had talked, for example, about the possibility if RCMP officers instead of having to go through the courts directly that they can actually refer a case to a youth justice committee. I think that that can be a very positive thing, because the sooner that you can get, let us say, the offender, whether it is a young offender or it is someone above the age of 18, before a committee of his or her peers or before some sort of quasi-judicial board, I think there is great benefit, because then they are going to realize the consequence that much better to the action that they in fact have taken.

On a very personal note, I can talk about the youth justice committee that I am involved in, and I can recall in the early years where we would be hearing a case that the individual youth might have committed the crime over a year ago and, as a justice committee, we are hearing it now. For someone who is 12 or 13 or 14 years old, it is hard for them to relate that the action I did a year ago, now I am going to have to do maybe community service or write an essay or whatever it might be.

So I think that there are many things which we can do within the judicial system to lighten the responsibility on the bureaucracy, if you like, and get the communities more involved.

For an adult, whether you are 25 years old and you go into a local Zellers and you shoplift and it is your first-time offence, maybe there should be, and the minister can likely tell me whether or not there currently is, but maybe they should have the opportunity to go before, again, some sort of a quasi-judicial group of individuals, again, that is based on the communities, from within the communities.

The minister made reference to Newfoundland on break-ins: Newfoundland 700 and Manitoba I believe it was 1,400. Well, I would attribute it to two things, two reasons why it would be that way. In Newfoundland, maybe it is the smaller communities. In smaller communities people know each other a little bit more, maybe there is a little bit more community involvement and so forth. [interjection] The member for The Maples (Mr. Kowalski) says Liberal government. Well, that might have had something to do with it too. You never know.

But on a more serious note, Mr. Chairperson, there is no doubt some correlation to the sizes of the different communities and the lifestyles and so forth, but I also believe that there has to be some consideration to the types of dispositions that are actually being handed out. I would love to get that information, but you will never get it. At least to the best of my knowledge, I do not think you are going to be able to get that type of information, because you would need to have other provinces participating in being computerized and providing that information.

Well, having said that, well, then it reinforces that if Newfoundland has been more successful in certain areas because of more of that community involvement, to what degree have we as a government or as legislators gone out to promote that community development.

The member for The Maples has often talked about getting tough on the causes of crime. Well, Mr. Chairperson, when I look at that I think the best way in which you can get tough on those causes is by getting the communities involved. You are talking about your community clubs, you are talking about parent councils, you are talking about a wide assortment of different groups that are out there.

I would suggest to you that you probably have somewhere in the neighbourhood of 300 to 600 people in any community depending on the size of the community. When I say 300 to 600 I am talking in my area, in the area that I represent, somewhere in that ballpark of individuals who are sincerely interested and would be interested in getting involved. What we have to do is not only provide the vehicle in which they can get involved, we also have to be prepared to provide the support services.

I think, for example, with the youth justice committees, it is an excellent vehicle. I think that if you look at youth justice committees, the concept is wonderful. It can work, but we also have to ensure that the support system is there below it. Then, if we do that, we will have healthier justice committees. By having healthier justice committees, we can look at possible expansions of the roles that they are currently playing because, after all, they are volunteer-based, and as well they should remain volunteer-based.

I would welcome the opportunity to be able to see something established in the communities that would deal with individuals over the age of 18 and bringing those individuals before some sort of a quasi-judicial body that is based from within the constituency. If in fact there are things that are available, I would ask for the minister to comment on those, because it is something on which I would take immediate action in trying to make it more reality within the area which I represent, because I know that it can make a difference.

Programs like Citizens for Crime Awareness group—the member for The Maples (Mr. Kowalski) and Doug Simpson I know have done wonders out in The Maples and surrounding area as a result of that particular program. The need to expand programs such as that—in fact, that might be some sort of a potential quasi-judicial body in the future that could be dealing with individuals over the age of 18.

Mr. Chairperson, I think the most valuable resource that an elected politician has is indeed the constituents which they represent. If they can tap into their minds on the many different issues facing Manitobans, we will come up with many different solutions to the problems that we face today. Having said that, I would suggest that the best way in which we can tap into those minds on the broader scale of justice is that we take some tangible action to demonstrate that there is a need to review the broader picture, the general judicial system that we have today, with the idea of coming up with recommendations that I believe can make a significant difference here in the province of Manitoba.

I will say one thing about this particular minister. I would suggest to you, Mr. Chairperson, in my 10 years, at least this minister, more than others that were there before him, is prepared to take, or at least prepared to say things which other ministers have not been as bold, if I can put it that way. As a result of that, some might argue he has gotten himself into a little bit of hot water in different areas, but I respect the fact that the minister is at least talking in many different areas which I believe warrant discussion. That discussion has not been taking place, and I would not want to see the minister stop at least talking about it.

It does not necessarily mean that I agree with everything. I know when he made reference to the elected judges, well, that is only a reference. He was not saying that he supported elected judges. I can tell him I do not support elected judges. I think that would be a move in the wrong direction. But I recognize that there is a need at least for some sort of a discussion to occur. When we talk about terms for judges, Mr. Chairperson, I, as an individual, do not have any problem with terms. I would like to see the Liberal Party have more dialogue and discussion about some of those judicial reforms that could be taking place. Terms for provincial appointees, I do not see any sort

of a problem with that. They can still advance afterwards, especially if it is a fixed term, a one-time term appointment. I think there is some merit to that.

* (1740)

I would encourage the Minister of Justice (Mr. Toews) to continue on in terms of his frankness and his willingness to be able to address different issues, because I think that has really been lacking in certain areas with respect to the Department of Justice.

In the past, there is the one minister we had, the only thing that he or she talked about was the Young Offenders Act. You know, we would ask questions in QP—the Young Offenders Act. Everything was to blame the feds; there are things which the feds could be doing. I do not dispute that, and we will continue to lobby in our own different ways to try to get those changes. But I think what is important is that we do what we can within the province of Manitoba.

The minister made reference to the young offenders under the age of 12. There have been members from all parties—I know the member for St. Johns (Mr. Mackintosh) was critical in the establishment, I believe, of the youth justice committee out in that area. My ideas came from the member for The Maples (Mr. Kowalski). I know the member for River Heights (Mr. Radcliffe) has seen some of the benefits of it and is critical in the establishment out in that area.

I applaud those types of actions. This is a minister who saw a good idea with young offenders under the age of 12 and has provided no money but the support, and who knows, the money might be coming, you know, Mr. Chairperson, if, in fact, it is warranted. The minister has not been approached for money on that particular issue, and I do not know if he will ever be approached at least at this point in time. I think that what we see is a pilot project. It deals with young offenders and this is the reason why I bring it up. It deals with young offenders under the age of 12.

The Young Offenders Act which is a federal responsibility—it would be easy for the minister to say that that is federal responsibility; we do not have anything to do with it. It would be very easy for the minister to say that but here clearly demonstrates that

the province can make a difference. I think that we need to apply that to other areas, that even though the federal government might play the lead role, that does not necessarily mean that we should advocate or say that we do not have any responsibility for that, because it is wrong.

We do have a responsibility, and, Mr. Chairperson, in particular, I look at this particular initiative, and I very much appreciate the efforts from some of the staff individuals and from the minister who have been most co-operative in making this happen, and the biggest reason why, if this gets off the ground, will be because of the local police force. It is the local police force, in particular Chief Cassels, that warrants virtually a good portion of the credit because it cannot work—and, of course, Greg Graceffo—the pronunciation, Hansard can get in touch with the minister for the proper spelling of it because I will get a phone call asking for the spelling, no doubt.

Mr. Chairperson, there was a discussion that took place in which there was a very high sense of co-operation in the board and the board members from this particular justice committee. I do believe that there are many good ideas that are out there, so if the minister is saying that, look, at this stage in the game what we want to do is to see what is going to happen in Alberta, well, then, I would suggest to the minister that he has a responsibility to at least become better informed as to what is happening in Alberta, in the Alberta task force.

When I say better informed, what I am talking about is to include individuals from Manitoba in some sort of a fashion in the process. Part of that has to include public feedback from Manitobans. It has to include representation from different stakeholders, in particular individuals whom I would classify as the laypeople. It has to include those individuals, the average person in the street, and that group, if you like, then can be mandated some sort of opportunity to participate with what is happening in Alberta.

If the minister believes that Alberta is, in fact, going to be leading the way, well, then, I would suggest that we should at least participate in some fashion, and, who knows, as a result you might see other provinces wanting to do otherwise, but, Mr. Chairperson, I would ultimately argue that there is a responsibility today for

us to take tangible actions in trying to see the need for change being addressed in our judicial system.

We have seen change occur, whether it is in health care, and the government has been soundly criticized, justifiably so in many of the things that are happening in health care, but change has been happening. We have seen the significant changes in education, Mr. Chairperson, and some might argue great changes; others might argue not so great changes. Some might argue not enough changes, especially on the whole school divisions part, but that is another hour of discussion that I could probably enter into.

But the bottom line is everything needs to change, that one should not resist change, and I think what has been happening is perception and reality is just not—I believe is not very far off. Unless, of course, this minister's civil servants can prove to me otherwise, I would suggest to you that very few of my constituents would support someone, for example, who breaks into someone's home, no matter what circumstances it might have been, given a complete discharge or suspended sentence, not a discharge which is nothing more than a slap on the wrist. I use that as an example, and it is not, as I say—and I want to emphasize it is not to say that I am taking a stand that on every crime you have to start getting harsher because I think there are alternative ways of dealing with many different crimes that maybe are before our courts today that could be dealt with through our communities and in all likelihood would be far more successful.

On a side note because I would be remiss if I did not at least mention it, in one of the discussions I had with a chap over at the courthouse, he had indicated that one of the things that frustrated him was—and it was one of our more senior police officers who had indicated this to me—the whole issue of remands, how often. The question that he had posed was he often wondered what is the actual cost to our judicial system because of the number of remands that take place. It is not to say that remands are not necessarily warranted, but he definitely called into question, amongst other things such as the bail, also the remand. I think that there is a wide variety of issues that need to be dealt with in Justice. I would look to this particular minister, who has been bolder than most, and suggest to this particular minister that he take strong action on behalf of the public of

Manitoba and take the next step in not only recognizing the need for that change but to look at some form of independent group of individuals that will at least start the ball rolling. It does not have to be a costly venture.

On that note, I am done asking questions. The member for The Maples (Mr. Kowalski) has been most patient with me in asking questions. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

* (1750)

Mr. Toews: If I could respond to some of those things because, by and large, I think they are all good issues that are being raised. I want to, first of all, emphasize that I am not satisfied with simply Alberta taking independent action and that we will not be taking action in this province on some aspects. I think there are aspects of our justice system that we can address, and we are on a continuous basis.

For example, the member made reference to it, the initiatives which are broadly supported in the Department of Justice, the opposition of bail on certain types of offences. It is not necessarily a ministerial directive, certainly one that I supported, but indeed was formulated by members within the department. Certainly I had discussions with my deputy in that respect, but their position was essentially formulated within the department. The issue of the home invasion and the sentencing on home invasions, again, a very clear initiative of this government and the department and prosecutors specifically. I would venture to guess that Manitoba sentences in that area are probably the heaviest in the nation. Again, I will not make any apologies in that respect.

So it is not that we are standing still. There are issues, though, in terms of the broader review that do need to take place. We have had a review of our civil justice system in this province, and a number of recommendations came out of that. Again, there was broad participation in that of the civil justice. The issue, when we get into the criminal justice area, is slightly different because we, of course, do not have the control over the making of changes to laws and things like that. One aspect, which I think has been somewhat problematic in Alberta, which we have to be, of course,

very cautious about here as well, is the extent to which judges are willing to participate in that kind of review. I understand from the news release that the judges, in fact, are a direct participant in that review process. I understand that, over the last little while, the actual status of the judges' participation in that review has been somewhat more withdrawn. They are not as fully participating in that process as perhaps the news release indicated back in January 1998.

So the issue of, if we are going to make changes in the justice system, how do we have the judges participate, and I think it is necessary for them to participate, but participate in a way that preserves their independence—[interjection] Well, the member indicates retired justices. If we are going to make changes, we have to deal with the people who are working in the system. So, in one way or another, that is an important issue.

At the same time, the Supreme Court of Canada has been very clear about not mixing the role of the executive and the judiciary. They have stated that in a number of cases, especially the recent provincial judges' pay case. They have been very clear—the judiciary not to be involved in certain aspects. It is an issue that I have talked about here in this capacity. One of the things that they certainly indicate in the Alberta—and I do not know whether this was actually in January. I believe it was later on that this revision came about that, in order to preserve the traditional independence of the judiciary, the members of the judiciary will serve in an advisory capacity to the steering committee.

So what does that mean? I think it may well have something to do with the Chief Justice's recent pronouncements in the Supreme Court of Canada about his position that judges, superior court judges, no longer participate in fact-finding missions, those kinds of things, and I think some concern raised in that context with the Krever inquiry and the political issues that arise when you have a judge performing essentially an executive function because that is what they are doing. So we are being more and more mindful of that role, but at the same time I am faced with the problem, if we are going to make changes in that regard, how do we do it in a positive way, involve the judiciary and yet protect their independence? So the Alberta experiment

here is a very, very crucial one because what they have said at the beginning and what they are doing now has been evolving. I believe that by the time this process is over, there will be other changes. It is inevitable because of the constitutional responsibilities of the executive on the one hand and the judiciary on the other.

The aspect that we have not yet addressed here in Manitoba is how do we involve the public in that discussion? Aside from the judiciary, how do we involve the public? That is something that I want to see how the Alberta experiment proceeds because I classify it as an experiment. It is one thing for me as the minister to make statements and the member indicates bold statements. I did not realize that they were bold until after I had made them and realized that some people would consider them bold. I simply thought I was expressing some of the concerns that had been raised by my constituents, and when my constituents raise these concerns with me, I listen to them and I say, you know, these people make a lot of sense. I have been elected to represent their interests, not mine, their interests.

I think they are calling on me to exercise judgment in respect of what possible solution, but to stand up and say, no, we have been doing business this way for the last 125 years and therefore no sense changing now. For a politician it is very, very easy in some sense to avoid raising these issues because we are here for one term or we are here for two terms, then we go on with other aspects of our lives, and so it is very easy to avoid it, but I think we as politicians, if we are really concerned about making changes, have to take our constituents seriously.

When they raise these issues, we have to realize that many of these people have thought about these ideas for a long, long time, and they may not understand every aspect of the judicial system or the justice system, but they can see what is happening to their communities, and they can see what is happening in the streets. They realize that not everything is the way it should be. They recognize good programs when they are implemented. They are supportive of good programs when they are implemented, but I think that, whenever we approach the issue of change, the real problem is this—and it was commented on by a political

commentator about 500 years ago; he talked about it specifically in the area of constitutional change. Five hundred years ago he said this: The problem with constitutional change, and I would equate this with any change, is that the people who benefit from that change are not yet identified and do not realize the benefit that they may be getting. The people who are presently in the system and see their interest being affected will raise the opposition to that. So where do you find your support then for making the change: the people who do not know yet of the benefits that could come of that change or the people who are opposing change? So for a politician, in many respects, it is easy to sit back and say, well, I know I will not ruffle any feathers if I just sort of keep the boat floating in a certain direction, but I do not think that is good enough. So that political commentator, what he said 500 years ago or 400 years ago, it is as true today. So we need to bear that in mind.

The member says the same thing about our health care reforms. You know, there are certain vested interests that would say, do not make the changes because we are comfortable with the way things are and even those types of issues. Where do you find your support? The mass of people out there, they are more interested in earning their living on a day-to-day basis and so are not always following some of these issues, but I think the area of justice now, in the same way that we recognize that health care needed to be reformed, many people are coming to the conclusion that this needs to be looked at and new ideas need to be discussed.

I would love to continue my answer, but I understand that the clock is running out on me. I will continue if I still have some time.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. The hour being 6 p.m., committee rise.

CULTURE, HERITAGE AND CITIZENSHIP

Mr. Chairperson (Ben Sveinson): Order, please. Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This afternoon, this section of the Committee of Supply meeting in Room 255 will resume consideration of the Estimates of the Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship. When the committee last sat, it had been

considering item 14.3. Information Resources (a) Client Services (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits on page 31 of the Estimates book. Shall the item pass?

14.3.(a)(1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$2,014,600—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$288,500—pass; (3) Public Sector Advertising \$2,384,100—pass; (4) Less: Recoverable from other appropriations (\$2,759,500)—pass.

14.3.(b) Business Services (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$965,500—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$881,200—pass; (3) Less: Recoverable from other appropriations (\$260,300)—pass.

14.3.(c) Translation Services (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$974,400—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$396,100—pass.

14.3.(d) Provincial Archives (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$1,945,000—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$1,533,700—pass.

14.3.(e) Legislative Library (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$707,200—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$604,300—pass.

Resolution 14.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$9,674,800 for Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, Information Resources, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 1999.

14.4. Citizenship and Multiculturalism (a) Citizenship (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits.

Ms. Diane McGifford (Osborne): Mr. Chair, I think that the minister agreed that at this point we could move to Capital Appropriations and that my colleague from Point Douglas and the member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) would then, I believe, address certain questions on Citizenship and Multiculturalism.

Hon. Rosemary Vodrey (Minister of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship): Yes, that is agreed.

Ms. McGifford: I had one or two questions on the Community Places Program. In reading the annual report, I noticed that the annual report for '96-97 says in

regard to the Community Places Program that eligible projects include recreational facilities, libraries, museums, cultural facilities, community parks, child day care centres, seniors activity centres, facilities for the disabled and community resource centres. In perusing the grants for '96-97, I read that, for example, the Boissevain and Area Veterinary Service Board received a grant of \$40,000. I am unclear as to how that fits into the eligible projects.

Mrs. Vodrey: Perhaps we have to find out a little more information, but in a general sense, there would have to have been community support for this particular request then to have it be considered. Also, we do not generally support the commercial side of an operation, but it obviously or should have been then funds or a project proposed which the money did not involve then the commercial side.

Ms. McGifford: Would the same explanation then also apply to the Minnedosa area veterinary services district? The Minnedosa new small animal vet clinic, I notice, received a grant for \$20,000.

Mrs. Vodrey: I am advised that the same answer would likely apply then, but without the benefit of the proposal it is a little bit difficult to say anything further.

* (1440)

Ms. McGifford: I wonder if the minister would agree then to get back to me with a fuller explanation as to why these two—I assume that they are veterinary clinics—have received grants from Community Places, when according at least to what I read in the annual general report, this kind of project is not included in the eligible project list.

Mrs. Vodrey: Yes, I will find out more for the member.

Ms. McGifford: I would like to ask the minister if Community Places grants are approved by cabinet, or are they approved at a different level? Could she please tell me what that level is, if that is the case?

Mrs. Vodrey: The information is tabled at cabinet, and it is received in cabinet as information.

Ms. McGifford: So it is not approved at that level? It is received as information, or does cabinet at the time that cabinet receives the information give it a final approval?

Mrs. Vodrey: I have to say that I do not know what the cabinet minute reads at this moment. I would have to check if there is anything further, but I can say that that information is brought forward by the minister to cabinet, and it is generally received as information by cabinet.

Ms. McGifford: I would appreciate it if the minister would check the minute. I wanted to ask the minister if it is common, or does it happen at all that MLAs write letters of support for grants that relate to projects in their constituencies?

Mrs. Vodrey: Yes, it is common for MLAs of all parties to write in support of their project. It is also common for other municipal governments or community groups to also write in favour of a project.

Ms. McGifford: I appreciate that information, because I know some of my constituents will be requesting money from Community Places, and I certainly appreciate the opportunity to support them.

I just wanted to read some information into the record, because one of our caucus researchers has done some work on Community Places grants. I wanted to point out that last year there were 191 Community Places grants. Three of them went to projects in Liberal ridings, 55 were granted to projects in NDP ridings, and 133 were granted to projects in Tory ridings. That is, 1.6 percent of the grants went to Liberal ridings, 28.8 to NDP ridings, and 69.6 to Tory ridings. The total grant to Liberal ridings was \$23,705, to NDP \$621,628, and to Tory ridings \$1,766,102, for a total grant of \$2,411,435.

I put this information on the record, because I noticed last year that the overwhelming majority of Community Places grants also went to Tory ridings. I see a pattern here, and I wanted to make sure that it was on the record.

Mrs. Vodrey: First of all, let me just say that I think Community Places is a great program. It is a great opportunity for communities to look for a way in which

to have their funds matched and a way to get some support for projects within their community.

Now I do not have the numbers in front of me from when the NDP were in. However, my memory is that somehow I think when they lost the election, just before they lost it they sent out a whole bunch of letters agreeing to projects which they wanted to support. So I would suggest that we have in fact, under this government, an extremely fair process which does see money allocated across the province to worthy projects.

Certainly, MLAs are often very interested in making sure that when those Community Places grants applications come out, that those grant applications are available to projects within their communities, so they can be filled out, submitted, and be considered. If in fact some people are not as interested in doing that, then that may account in fact for the fewer number which come from some constituencies or some areas, maybe that those particular constituencies received a grant last year and are not proposing to have a grant this year.

The dollar amount, I would also say, is some money flowed, so that there may have been money which flowed to a project, which in fact had been started, and then finally the receipts received and the amount contributed from the Community Places.

So I would also not want to leave on the record any misunderstanding, which I think the member may be trying to put forward, that somehow there is some level of unfairness here. I would remind her that communities propose, MLAs do, if they wish to support it, and also that MLAs do work in their communities to assist their communities in understanding how this process works, to see if there is community support for a Community Places project. Then they are considered in the mix of projects.

Again, I would certainly challenge the member to perhaps go back and look at, in fact, if there was that kind of even-handed spread when the NDP were in government. Admittedly, it was quite a long time ago.

Ms. McGifford: Mr. Chair, I merely put some information on the record. I am sorry that the minister seems to be offended by it.

I understand from reading in the annual report that there is a Community Facilities Integrated Planning and Development Guide and that it includes three modules: Define and Measure Your Needs, Planning Your Project, and Construction and Management. I wonder if it would be possible for me to receive a copy of this guide.

Mrs. Vodrey: I just cannot help but go back to say again, any upset is probably in the mind of the listener, because my role is simply to put on the record really some correct facts of point of view that probably or is often not covered, and that it is important that the whole picture be out for someone who may want to read this at a later time.

In answer to her question, yes, I am happy to provide her with that guide.

* (1450)

Mr. Chairperson: Had the member for Osborne mentioned that others would want to ask questions in this area or no?

Ms. McGifford: Mr. Chair, my understanding is that both the member for Point Douglas (Mr. Hickes) and the member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) want to ask questions on Citizenship and Multiculturalism.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay. Very good.

Item 14.5. Expenditures Related to Capital - Grant Assistance (a) Cultural Organizations \$2,152,100—pass.

14.5.(b) Heritage Buildings \$300,000—pass.

14.5.(c) Community Places Program \$2,525,000—pass.

Resolution 14.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,977,100 for Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, Expenditures Related to Capital - Grant Assistance, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 1999.

Item 14.4. Citizenship and Multiculturalism (a) Citizenship (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$1,372,600.

Mr. George Hickes (Point Douglas): I would just like to—instead of going line by line, if it is agreeable that we just cover everything, and then we would just pass the whole Estimates after, if that is agreeable.

Mrs. Vodrey: Yes, that is how we have done it in the past, a general discussion which I think has been helpful. If other members are in agreement, I am certainly in agreement to continue that process.

Mr. Chairperson: Yes, I am sure that, indeed, it was agreed to earlier in the committee.

Mr. Hickes: Before I start, I would just like to pass the mike over to the member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) who has a few questions he would like to ask.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): I appreciate that. Mr. Chairperson, I had a question that actually, no doubt, I will be asked because it was in print today, earlier today in the Free Press, and it is dealing with Culture and Heritage in respect, if you like, of heritage, other ethnic groups' backgrounds, and there was an article with respect to mandatory helmets on bicycles. It is an issue which I have dealt with in the past, and it is being talked about again.

Now, the reason I bring it up in Culture and Heritage is, as the minister might be aware—if she is not, it is a good place for me to make her aware of it. Whether or not the mandatory bicycle helmets becomes law or not, one of the biggest concerns that has been raised is the issue dealing within the Sikh community where there is an obligation to wear a turban, a turban as a part of their identity, and whenever there seems to be any story on this particular issue, there is always some feedback that I get from within the Sikh community asking if, in fact, they would be exempt from a potential law, if, in fact, it ever became law.

Given the minister is responsible for Culture and Heritage, I am sure she sees the value of that, and I would ask if, in fact, she would share with the committee what her thoughts are with respect to an exemption, something which I personally believe would, in fact, be warranted because no doubt it is an issue that could come up in cabinet if, in fact, sometime in the future the discussion for mandatory helmets were brought up. I think this is an important piece which

members of that particular community I know would be interested in knowing what this particular minister's position is on that issue. Also, I know the member for Point Douglas (Mr. Hickes) and I had touched very briefly on it to hear that perspective also. I know it would definitely be beneficial.

Mrs. Vodrey: Well, the member and I had the pleasure to participate with the community. Not that long ago I had an opportunity to—well, we were actually both robed at that community event. So I have had an opportunity to meet with some of the leadership in the Sikh community. Obviously, this issue was not raised, but certainly I would be willing to meet with them or to make sure that they had access to ministers who might be responsible in this area if they were enacting this legislation, so that their point of view could be made.

At the moment, the member knows it is a hypothetical issue. I actually did not see the article in the newspaper today, and so it is obviously kind of a new issue which would have to be brought forward. I do not know that government has any position on it at the moment either.

I think the best thing that I can do is to say that I am certainly available for the community, as I know other ministers are, but I would be more than willing to play a part, if required. Again, it is hypothetical, but if this were to be considered to make sure that the leadership had an opportunity to present their point of view and their concern under any proposed legislation which may come forward, I think that I would do my best to be helpful for them.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Chairperson, I appreciate the response, and I guess the emphasis would be is that there are many individuals from within the community, young and old, that are very strong believers in their faith that do wear the turban. It is something that I know would cause concern if in fact it were to happen. Realizing that it has been hypothetical, I respect the minister's answer. I will ensure that that message is in fact conveyed to them, but for me personally, what I wanted to do was just to get on the record as suggesting that there should be an exemption because I am very much aware of the importance of the turban.

Mr. Chairperson, I do have other questions, but I did have to leave the committee and hopefully I will get an

opportunity a little bit later; otherwise, no doubt there will be other forums for me to pursue other questions regarding culture and heritage. Thank you.

Mrs. Vodrey: I will just say I appreciate the member's question, and he has raised other issues with me at other times where I have endeavoured to get him an answer back, so we will either deal with him in the time that we have, otherwise we can deal with him as well in the way where there has simply been a direct consultation with me.

* (1500)

Mr. Hickes: Mr. Chair, I have a series of issues that I would like to just put on record. A lot of the concerns I have deal with the federal government with their new policies or new proposals that are out, and I hope that they will never be adopted. For instance, the criterion for the ability to speak English and French to immigrate to Canada concerns me greatly. I am sure that it concerns all members of the Legislative Assembly because what will happen is that we will lose the potential of immigration of people from various countries, especially the Asian countries, and it will only stimulate, and probably most of our new immigrants coming to Manitoba would only be from the European countries because the ability to speak English is already there. If you look at France and other countries where French is the first language, I do not think it is very well thought out. I have heard some comments that the federal minister was reviewing it and probably would not be supporting that, and I hope that is the case.

The other thing that really I feel should be totally abolished is the whole process of a landing fee. I think that is a discouragement to individuals who want to come to Manitoba to start up their new life and new challenges, that \$975, you know in some cases is even more than an individual's yearly salary. So that is a real detriment for people that want to make their homes in Manitoba, and in a lot of cases would make a great contribution to our province and would be hardworking individuals that just wish for a new opportunity. On top of that, you have the processing fee of \$500 per adult, \$100 per child, and most new immigrants who are coming to Canada or to Manitoba are usually with a family. So you just tally that up, and just for a

married couple, you are looking at \$1,950 right there, just for the landing fee alone. The whole process of it having to be up front, I think it hurts a lot of people. Just the fee alone for me would be a setback to individuals wanting to come here.

Now, on top of that, you hear under the proposals that are out there, or I guess it is just a report that is out there—and the minister has held hearings and stuff, the federal minister—the whole process of individuals paying for English language classes. How are we going to get ordinary-class citizens into Manitoba if all we are really turning to in order to judge individuals' ability to come to our province is the ability of dollars? I do not think that was the intent, I hope that is not the intent, of our immigration process for Canada, let alone Manitoba, because if you check back in recent history and you look at a lot of individuals who immigrated to Canada and then eventually made Manitoba their homes, did not have a lot of money in their pockets, but are outstanding citizens, and their children are outstanding citizens.

You just look at our own Premier of the day. He will tell you the same thing. I am sure when his parents came over, if the only way they could come here is if they had those kinds of landing fees, processing fees and money, money, money, I do not know if we would have the Premier we have today, because I do not know if his parents would even have been able to afford to come here. I do not know him on a personal basis, but just what I hear in the media, that sort of was the case that he was bringing forward. So I hope that the government of the day agrees with me and that we will keep trying to convince the federal government to rescind some of the policies they have for immigration, because we need to be fair.

The other thing that I would like to hear about from the minister later is the whole family reunification family class. We hear in the Chamber over and over from all parties, and we stress, the importance of family. We talk about the support systems that are within families. We talk about resources needed or individuals that could get help when they are in difficulties if they turn to families. Yet why are we in Canada making it harder and harder for family reunification? That just does not make any sense. We have said it many times. Most of my family is in the

Northwest Territories, and it is not that far away, yet you miss them dearly. Even a lot of times it is difficult to visit back and forth because of the airfare costs. So you imagine that, when we encourage an individual to come to our province, our country, and say: yes, but we do not encourage you to bring family members along with you. I think that is defeating the whole purpose of family as we describe it. I just do not understand how we could be saying one thing and meaning something else. But, if your family has a lot of dollars then, sure, bring them over. You know, we welcome your dollars and come on over.

I do not think we as a country need to depend on only the wealth of an individual, because we also have to judge, to my way of thinking, the tremendous wealth an individual brings, not in dollars and cents but in work ethics and in bringing up strong families. You see that in different cultures, where, for example, a family will come to Manitoba and lots of times will have to take low-paying employment opportunities until they can further their training and their education to meet our Canadian standards.

In order to accomplish that, there is a lot of dependence on family to help raise the younger children in that immediate family. A lot of times that is done by grandparents. Thankfully we should encourage that, because I believe very strongly that an individual, no matter what their background, what their culture, what their language, that is who they are. Every individual should be encouraged to speak their language, whether it is Saulteaux, Cree, Inuit, Chinese, Filipino, and learn about your culture.

Sure you are coming to Canada to be Canadian, but you should never forget who you are because that is the foundation that is built within us. The foundation we start to build our lives on is usually built with assistance of our immediate families. That will always identify who we are and what we are. So when I say that, we have to encourage and do what we can to make sure that the federal government rethinks the whole process of family reunification and to encourage them to open the doors for more—to me anyway—to more family reunification when we invite individuals to join us.

The other aspect that I hope the minister will address is the whole certification and training for new

immigrants. You know, I mentioned it many times. I have heard you mention it in some of your reports, about one's ability to make the greatest contribution one can give; that is the career of their own choosing, where an individual will be happy doing what they are doing and not feel like they are forced to have to do either what they would perceive to be less meaningful employment opportunities, because we do not give the opportunity to meet the standards that we set in Canada.

* (1510)

When I say that, I think we really have to make sure that we look at reviewing one's certification, diplomas from other countries and trying to set up training programs to meet that need, where you have some individuals that are very highly skilled in their countries, they bring those high skills here, but are stuck at dead-end service industry jobs or driving a taxi. Yet, for a lot of individuals, that is not their first choice of a career. There is nothing wrong with the service industry or driving taxi, if that is what you choose to do. But some of the individuals have high skills that they would like to practise in Canada, but I think we put false barriers or we do not have strong enough programs to meet those needs. I think it has to be a joint effort, federal and provincially, to try and assist individuals to meet their chosen careers.

So I just wanted to make those few statements. I know that the minister has had a meeting with her federal counterpart. I heard your comments, when I raised some questions in the House, that you were going to be meeting with her and will be encouraging her to changing some of her so-called proposed policies that they are introducing. I was very happy and very encouraged with your response to my questions in the House. So, if you could just touch on some of the things that I raised, I would really appreciate that. Thanks.

Mrs. Vodrey: Mr. Chair, I appreciate the comments of the member for Point Douglas (Mr. Hickes). He is right that we have spoken about these issues a number of times in a formal way on the record in the Legislature, during Estimates, but often we have met each other in the hall or at events where we have together talked about the commitment to increase Manitoba's proportionate share of immigration and to make sure

that we, in fact, increase the number of immigrants which come to Manitoba from the number of people who generally come to Canada.

Just starting there, then, I would like to cover some of the issues that the member has raised. First of all, I did meet with the federal minister and made it clear to the federal minister that Manitoba wants to at least have its proportionate share. In fact, we need to be very aggressive then in terms of our marketing of our province to make sure that people do consider Manitoba.

The position that our government has taken on a regular basis is that Manitoba is open and encouraging to immigration and that we do not support anything which has been put forward by the federal government which may have the effect of discouraging immigration to our province. That is the starting place by which we are measuring each of the initiatives which have been put forward by the federal government. I made that point again to the federal Minister of Immigration so that she would know right away where Manitoba stands, which I agree is somewhat different than perhaps some of the other provinces. I think the federal government needs to know what our province's goals are in no uncertain terms.

So personally I have raised that with her, and I also raise it in letters which I write to her to continually remind her in writing of Manitoba's efforts and goals to, in fact, have our proportionate share. I probably said: raise our proportionate share. We are asking at this point even to reach our proportionate share. That is what we want to do right now.

In the area of the language requirement, both our Premier (Mr. Filmon) and I as minister have been vocal on that issue where we believe that the language requirement, which was put forward by a committee studying changes which might be made to the act, gave to the federal minister. I believe that people across the country were very clear to the federal minister that in any consideration of any changes to the act that that language requirement would be unacceptable. Manitoba's position is also clear and on the record. We could not support a language requirement. The effect of the language requirement would be to discourage

certain immigration to our province. We do not want that to happen.

In the right-of-landing fee, Manitoba has also been very clear on the record to the federal government raising our concerns that this right-of-landing fee and when it is imposed, when the charge is imposed, has the effect of being a discouragement, and that Manitoba-Canada wants to be considered-Manitoba, in particular, wants to be considered for immigration as people are looking at where they would like to live around the world and that we are not in support of steps which have been taken that, again, have the effect of discouraging immigration, particularly to Manitoba. I have written the federal minister. I think my most recent letter on that was in February of this year, again reminding her of our position on that.

On the matter of family reunification, I can also say that our position is one which says that family reunification is one of the most important types of immigration that we can have to our province and that people be able to come with their families where they come and raise children, they have the support of parents, and that some of the dollar amounts, particularly for grandparents right now-in fact, they might even be considered penalties for wanting to bring parents and grandparents-are unacceptable because it provides a discouragement.

We have concerns about some of the federal government's positions because they have been developed based on a system in Ontario or British Columbia, and Manitoba simply does not have the same kinds of difficulties in terms of people being able to support family members or in terms of finding work, in terms of default and going on welfare. So Manitoba has asked the federal government to consider their policies in the light of all of the country, not just in the light of two provinces, and, again, very specifically, to consider in Manitoba our goals of family reunification as being one type of immigration which we are very supportive of.

In the area of certification and credentials, my most recent letter to the federal minister was actually about April 30 of this year. It is quite a recent one, and it follows on my meeting with her. In that meeting, I again reminded her of our Canada-Manitoba Immigration Agreement and the fact that we are very

interested and anxious in making sure that we have the greatest benefit possible under that agreement. Also in that same letter, I spoke with her, as I did in person, about the credentialing and certification issue, and I have asked the federal minister to consider what part Canada might play in some areas of certification and credentialing. Much of that credentialing does have to be done by virtue of provincial groups which, in fact, have control over who can work in certain professions in each province. However, I think that it really is very important for us to be able to look at the credentialing process and also, as I believe we are doing in Manitoba, to make every attempt to encourage and assist people in the credentialing process.

During my opening remarks, I did take some time to speak about what we have done in Manitoba, what our process of assisting people is, and we are certainly believing that that is an important part. I understand that it is a complex matter, but it is also very important for some leadership to be shown. It is also important for the educational or professional organizations to participate with the province and with the federal government in recognizing the importance of immigration and in looking at ways that some of that credentialing process can occur.

So I would be raising that each time I speak with the federal minister about the role that the Government of Canada can play, in addition to making sure that as people decide to choose Canada there is the greatest amount of support for them and that, in fact, we are encouraging people to come.

I just would say I have mentioned a communication I had about April 30, discussing the credentialing, and I also had, well, a communication which I believe I have spoken with the member about before in relation to the low-income cutoff guidelines which we are concerned about in Manitoba as being more representational of Ontario than a requirement in Manitoba.

So I, again, would end my comments. Hopefully, I have touched on the issues that the member is interested in and made clear our government's position. I would end with the same position I make clear every time I have the opportunity to speak about the immigration side of my department, and this is

Manitoba is interested in immigration. We want to work with the federal government to ensure our proportionate share, and we are actively marketing ourselves to have people consider Manitoba as their home.

* (1520)

Mr. Hickes: I thank the minister for her comments. I know that your support for immigration has always been there. I am not doubting that because of some of the statements that you have made publicly and your response to various questions and your government's commitment to immigration. But what I feel is that we have to find a way of addressing the problems with immigration through the federal government.

You know, when you mentioned about some of the proposed changes, discouraging grandparents from accompanying families or joining families, one of the individuals that works closely with immigrants or new immigrants is Tom Denton, who is executive director of the International Centre. I am sure you know who the individual is because he is very well known in the community. One of his first comments pertaining to the proposed changes in the hearings that were going around was he called it antigranny rule. So that is recognized out in the community, and I am sure that message has been passed on to the federal minister loudly and very, very clearly.

What bothered me at that time was that when they had the so-called public hearings, it really was not public hearings, it was just who was invited. A lot of individuals wanted to express their concerns, especially dealing with the inability with getting their family members over and then the criteria with the English and the French, but she only would hear from select individuals.

I know our member of Parliament, Judy Wasylycia-Leis, was not even able to present a brief there, so she did it in writing, which I also did. I sent one in, in writing, because I think it is important that we get that message across. You know, like, our population—and you understand it very clearly as I do—when we were children it was nothing for families to have five, six, seven children, some 12. That is what is in my family, but now it is different. Now, the families are much

smaller. A lot of families are only two, three children and that is it.

So our population will be decreasing quite rapidly if we do not get more immigrants into Canada. You know, and that myth where immigration, like a lot of people will use that myth, immigration hurts the economy, immigrants take away employment opportunities. You know that is not true, because more immigration stimulates the economy. You have more people purchasing goods and more people in our schools and on and on. I do not have to explain that to you because I am sure you have a very good understanding of that. So I am very encouraged with your discussion with the federal minister.

The other areas that bothered me under the so-called proposed changes was the inability of siblings—and here we go again where we talk about families—to pool their resources to sponsor their parents, their grandparents into Canada and, hopefully, into Manitoba. Where now they only look at one individual's income, you know that in a lot of the ethnic communities the culture is family together. That is the way it is and always was and, hopefully, always will be, where family members assist one another. So, when those proposed changes came, some of them were very alarmed and rightfully so, plus not only the hardship of that, but they increased the amount of earnings per individual. Now, if you have a family of five or six children and you are the grandparents waiting to join your children in Canada, it would have to almost be which individual had the highest earnings, or even if one individual had the earnings to meet that criterion.

So here we go again. Talk about importance of families, and here is another barrier thrown by the federal government. It is so discouraging when you talk to individuals, and you see where the families are so strong and so united. You know they work so hard to help one another, and they want to be with their parents. There is nothing wrong with that. I am sure you would agree with that. Yet we see these kinds of—to me, anyway—false barriers to try and get away or stop the immigration of individuals, unless they are very wealthy, into our country. I do not think we are heading in the right way. We need both. We need wealthy immigration, but we also need strong families, whether they are rich or poor. If we can assist someone

to come to Canada because they seek a better life for themselves and their families, I think that it is very honourable. That is something that we have to make sure that we never lose sight of, and we always work towards that.

But I hope that you raised those concerns with the federal minister when you met with her. I would just like to hear your response.

Mrs. Vodrey: Yes, these are the issues that I raised with the federal minister. We had the opportunity to discuss the different classes of immigration. Obviously our government and many would support an entrepreneurial class of immigration in which people do come, are able to start certain businesses and anxious to make investments. But in looking at that particular class, I made it clear to her that in Manitoba we still continue to strongly support the family class, and for many of the reasons that the member has discussed and put on the record, in that families are good to have in our province. They are good to have; it is good for our schools, and it is good for our communities to have people come as families. That is why our position has always been that we do not support steps which have been taken by the federal government that in any way continue to put up barriers for family class immigration in particular. Many of the steps appear to have had the greatest effect on the family class which is the concern and has been a concern to our government.

I did write to the federal minister as well, and I think I spoke to the member about this last year, have put in writing to the federal minister our concerns about some of those barriers. Again, as I said in my last answer, my concerns are that some of the decisions appear to be based on a certain default rate which takes place in Ontario or British Columbia. I believe Ontario may have the highest. So, as a result of that, certain decisions have been made that if you have a population over a certain level, you fall into this net. That has affected us in Manitoba, but we do not have that same default rate. We do not have the same difficulty as Ontario is experiencing. So it has really been an important opportunity each time to raise this with the federal minister that our province is in a different position, and our province has a different experience.

I can just say to the member again that, yes, I have done that in person; yes, I do it in writing—and we have

talked about this—my colleague before me as minister in this position signed the Canada-Manitoba Immigration Agreement. That is intended to give us more influence over immigration to our province and, in the end, also to give us influence towards the federal government in terms of immigration that we would like to have, and initiatives. So many of the positions that I take with the federal government as well, I like to reflect back on the fact that we have signed that agreement. It is an important agreement in Manitoba and that, if that agreement assures us some influence, then I would like that influence now to be considered on behalf of the issues that we have been talking about today.

* (1530)

Mr. Hickes: I thank the minister for her response. Another area that was raised a little bit earlier that I would like to touch a bit on is—I heard your response to the member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) about the helmets—apparently, it is in the paper, because I received a phone call on that too—to look at an exemption for helmets for bicycles.

But also I think it would be worthwhile almost to meet with the Sikh community because the wearing of a turban is not for fashion; it is based on their faith. I think if meeting with the Sikh community and looking at some of the opportunities that are out there in workplaces where some individuals will not take employment if they have to wear, say, a hard hat, because they will not remove their turbans—look at maybe designing a different hard hat, I do not know, but I know that has been raised with me quite a few times in the past. It would be interesting if the government could meet with the leaders in the Sikh community and see if there is a way of addressing that. I do not know what the answer is because the answer would have to come from within the community, but that was raised

I know we have the labour standards and labour codes and stuff. I know we also have waiver clauses where individuals sign waivers, and if they are injured or hurt, we do not cover those. I do not know. I am just wondering if the minister would be interested in meeting and discussing further the possibility within the Sikh community.

Mrs. Vodrey: Certainly I am always happy to meet with Manitobans on any issues that are important to them and, in fact, in particular where government may develop a policy. So I always leave that door open.

I understand a little bit, however, in using the example of the hard hat on a construction site. I have to say personally I do not know what the requirements and liability issues are in relation to that industry. So I am not sure how much my efforts could influence what may happen in that case.

But certainly in terms of any prospective legislation, which is what we were speaking about earlier, their views would be considered in the development of any prospective legislation, and I have to be honest—make sure it is on the record—I do not know that there is any legislation even being developed. I did not see the newspaper article today, and I have not had that raised with me. So it is very, very hypothetical, the issue.

But the question itself is: would I be willing, on a matter of importance such as that, to meet with the community? Yes, of course, and leave that door open where the community would like to do that.

I was very honoured, as I said earlier, to attend with the community at the temple to be robbed, to receive a very high honour, the highest honour from the Sikh community. I have taken that very seriously and from that day received a number of questions from them as well and have answered those questions or have had ministers directly responsible answer to the community.

So I look forward to that communication continuing, and I look forward to making—you know, now we know each other. I think this is the important part: we now know each other. I would certainly be contacted by them if there was a concern, and I would be more than happy to help them as I hope I have helped them in the past.

Mr. Hickes: Yes, I think that, when you say you know them better, it is a matter of building a trust, and trust goes a long way, where people feel more open and more willing to approach individuals. If that trust is not there, they would shy away from it. So I am glad to see that trust is there, because we do not have all the answers, meeting within the community and hearing

about their concerns and opening the doors to find that sometimes nothing can be done. You know, we have laws and rules and regulations that cannot be changed, but I think the openness or the willingness to meet with the community, I will convey that. Because they raised it with me, I will convey that to them that you would be.

I just want to get back to the trend that we are almost going into or the federal government is going into, it seems like it is all geared to business-class immigration, and I have said it over and over: it bothers me, because we cannot have every individual per se as a business-person. We still need our mechanics, our painters, our plumbers, and on and on and on and on. Our population is declining, we are having smaller families and, if we do not, if we only look at gearing our immigration policies to the business class, who is going to fill the other roles? I do not know.

I am sure some of our children would like to be in business too and not being forced to be the mechanics, painters, and plumbers. There is nothing wrong with that but, if they choose to be in business, what is wrong with that? We also need people from other countries that have skills in the trades areas. I think we have to encourage them to come here too.

I do not have too many more questions. I just wanted to raise some of those issues, and I just wanted to pass on to the minister that I agree with a lot of the things that are happening and what you are trying to do. I give you my encouragement and support because I know that in Manitoba we need to increase our numbers and without barriers being put in place. Because people want it we should be very honoured and proud when people choose Manitoba as their home and just reflect back.

A lot of the parents and grandparents of people in this room came from other countries, and I just wanted to finish off because of my disagreement with the proposed new federal proposals that are coming out. I was reading a press release that was put out by a former Manitoban, Gordon Earle, who is a member now federally for the NDP. He is the critic for immigration and multiculturalism. When they proposed that, he said: I wonder how many members of Chretien's cabinet would be sitting so comfortably today if their

ancestors were allowed to immigrate to Canada only if they were wealthy and had to follow these same criteria. I thought that was a really well-put question, because I do not think too many of his cabinet would be here, you know, if they had to follow the same criteria that they are proposing to others.

I just wanted to end on that. I do not have any more questions, and I propose that we pass the Estimates.

Mrs. Vodrey: Mr. Chair, I appreciate the comments of the member for Point Douglas (Mr. Hickes) and the position that he has raised, especially because much of it touches on the family side, which is a particular interest of mine. Also, I think our government has attempted to continue to make that clear that the family class of immigration is important to our province.

With that, Mr. Chair, I would just say that I have appreciated his comments and also the comments that we have shared when we have met at other times, and so I will look forward to continued communication with him. Thank you.

* (1540)

Mr. Chairperson: Item 14.4. Citizenship and Multiculturalism (a) Citizenship (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$1,372,600—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$420,200—pass; (3) Grant Assistance \$1,391,600—pass.

14.4.(b) Multiculturalism Secretariat (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$87,500—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$47,500—pass; (c) Multicultural Grants Advisory Council \$286,700—pass

Resolution 14.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$3,606,100 for Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, Citizenship and Multiculturalism, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 1999.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of the Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship is item 1.(a) Minister's Salary \$26,300. At this point we request the minister's staff leave the table for the consideration of this item.

Item 14.1.(a) Minister's Salary \$26,300—pass.

Resolution 14.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,350,100 for Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 1999—pass.

This ends the Estimates for the Department of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship.

Shall we briefly recess to allow the minister and the critics for the next department to set up their Estimates? [agreed]

INDUSTRY, TRADE AND TOURISM

Mr. Chairperson (Ben Sveinson): Order, please. We will now be resuming the Estimates for the Department of Industry, Trade and Tourism. When this section of the Committee of Supply last sat to consider these Estimates, we had been considering item 3. Tourism and Small Business (a) Tourism Services and Special Projects (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$619,200, on page 92 of the Estimates book. Shall the item pass?

Hon. James Downey (Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism): I have a correction to make. I put some numbers on the record last week which I read them as dollars dedicated to certain areas, and it should have been quantities of products.

So, if one were to go to page 3575 of the Hansard, in the paragraph which says: "I can just give a little bit more of an idea here on specific amounts of money," when I said money, it should have been pieces of information that were available. So we take the dollar sign off of it, and that is quantity of product which has been provided, rather than dollars.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman, for allowing me to make that correction.

Mr. Tim Sale (Crescentwood): Mr. Chairperson, I believe the minister was asked a number of questions at the end of Estimates debate, and there have been a number of items we have requested. I wonder if he can provide answers to some or most of them today.

Mr. Downey: I would ask him if he would highlight again some of those questions, so that I can make sure I deal with them in a priority area, or does he want me to go to Hansard and deal with them from there?

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, there were several items regarding the Tourism Estimates specifically which the minister was asked to respond to. He was also asked to give the department's understanding, or his understanding, of how Manitoba's \$600-million trade deficit is dealt with. There were a number of other questions that he agreed that he would provide information on in Estimates. I do not have Hansard with me and so I cannot give him the list, but they are readily available in Hansard, pertaining to earlier parts of our Estimates debate.

Mr. Downey: Well, Mr. Chairman, we are dealing with the Tourism section at this particular time, so it was my intention to give the answers dealing with tourism at this particular time rather than going back to do the other questions that had been asked previously. So I will deal with tourism at this particular time.

As I understood it, one of the questions as it relates to tourism is there are very different statistics used by the department from Statistics Canada and Tourist Scope statistics. There seems to be a continuing divergence between these two sources. I will just go over the reply that I have had prepared for me, and that is the Tourist Scope report includes only overnight trips. Statistics Canada, Canada Customs reports, include same-day entry, as Manitoba has a significant number of same-day activity related to festivals and events, shopping and entertainment, due to the close proximity with the U.S. Travel Manitoba purchases both same-day and overnight trips to Manitoba, thereby utilizing the complete border statistics. So basically what I am saying is we are using all sources that are available to us.

Some of the other information which I will put on the record, Mr. Chairman, is using both the Stats Canada but also the Tourist Scope which has been referred to. The numbers are comparable.

For example, when we look at—first of all, the first quarter results from the U.S. were up by 7 percent for the first quarter. In the Tourist Scope, the number is,

overall, 6.7, so it is very close to the same thing. The foreign visitors as it relates to, which we use, was from Stats Canada, foreign was 34 percent. It is actually 39.9 percent out of Tourist Scope. Overall, we said 5.7 percent, and Tourist Scope is actually 7.9. So the numbers in both sets of statistics are pretty comparable.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, I am interested to hear that because we have generally used Tourist Scope on the basis that the real value of tourism is obviously enhanced substantially by people staying overnight. One-day shopping provides less value to the country, but if indeed the numbers are proportionate, then the questions we have raised over the years obviously still stand.

I do not have the most recent numbers for the first quarter with me, I do not think, unless I am mistaken. No, I do not, but for last year, January to December, total visitors were down 1.2 percent in Manitoba. That continues a long-term trend which in the 10-year period, 1987 to 1996, Canada was up 15.7 percent, Manitoba down 14.6 percent, a 30 percent swing in overall travel. If the minister is now saying that Tourist Scope is proportionally showing the same trends as cross-border tracking in total, then comments we have made many times in the House and in Estimates would seem to be still applicable that our experience vis-a-vis Canada is quite negative.

I note that there are some other provinces that last year fell. Quebec fell 1.3 percent. P.E.I. is too small really to measure, but only Quebec and Saskatchewan had declines. The rest of the provinces had increases, albeit relatively small, except for B.C. which was up 4.4 percent in total. So I wonder why the minister has always suggested that tourism is increasing in Manitoba when in fact the reverse is true, that over the period that we have measured of the last 10 years, in fact, our total numbers are substantially down.

* (1600)

Mr. Downey: I do not agree, Mr. Chairman. Our tourism is in a growth pattern, and if he is measuring using last year as an example, we did see in fact a minimal increase last year, even with the devastating flood that people had to deal with. That in itself did nothing to help the numbers, but we in fact still came

up with a positive increase as a percentage with our tourism growth last year.

So the numbers I have put on the record are a more complete picture and are overall. It includes the over-night trips. So I do not agree with the member in his comments that we are seeing a reduction in tourism. That is not the case at all.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, I am not asking the minister to agree with my comments. I am asking him to comment on the fact that Tourist Scope over 10 years shows a 14.8 percent decline in our total number of one night or more visits from all sources—United States plus all others. His numbers seem continually to reference an increase. I do not know how he can say on the one hand that both sets of statistics are comparable, on the other hand that somehow a 10-year trend is not significant.

Canada was growing at an average, simple arithmetic average of 1.5 percent a year. We were going down at 1.5 percent a year in total. We peaked in tourism in the 1980s, and it has been a downhill pattern ever since. That, of course, was why last year the government presumably saw a problem and decided that it would change its approach to marketing. If everything was as rosy as the minister seems to think it was, there is no earthly reason why they should have changed their strategy, if it was working. The reason they changed it, presumably, was because it is not working.

So I stand by the numbers from Tourist Scope. While I accept that it does not include same-day travel, but the minister has just finished telling us that it is proportionate and very similar. So I take him at his word and tell him that the trend has not changed over this last year. He still lost visitors year over year, 1.2 percent to be exact, whereas Canada was growing 1.6 percent. Those numbers exactly mirror the 10-year trend. I would invite the minister to take a look at 10 years worth of Tourist Scope numbers, and if he wishes, I would be glad to share a copy of this chart, although I do not have the requisite three numbers. I had not intended to table it, but I would certainly be glad to let him have it if he would like to see it.

Mr. Downey: I still disagree. The first quarter, which I made reference to, shows an increase from the U.S.

In fact, we look at overall: U.S. was up by 6.7 percent for the first quarter of 1998 over 1997.

An Honourable Member: One-quarter does not a decade make.

Mr. Downey: The point I would continue to make is that other areas of which the overall increase was 7.9 percent. So I guess we will have to agree to disagree that the numbers, the overall expenditures in Manitoba in the tourism sector are continually growing. So the numbers of visitors are going up, the numbers of dollars that are being expended. The occupancy in our hotels continue to be at extremely satisfactory levels. Of course, looking at the next year with this year building into the Pan American Games, the pre-Pan American Games activities, plus the Pan American Games next year, I think will augur extremely well for the benefits for Manitoba's tourism industry. So again we will have to agree to disagree. I think the numbers that I am presenting here today actually are showing positive growth.

The other point I would make—and he keeps wanting to say that the program was not working. Mr. Chairman, I will go back to it again and say there is a process that has been put in place by the Department of Tourism to make sure that we are reflecting tourists who have come and who have left. We have interviewed them and asked them what they would like for holidays and activities. We have, in fact, been able to respond to that type of advertising and product that they are looking for.

So, again, I would have to say that I think the numbers that we have demonstrate as much of growth as there is, and he is again trying to paint the picture that things are not doing as well. Again, we will have to agree to disagree.

Mr. Sale: For the record, we are not disagreeing. Statistics Canada's data, which the minister says is proportional, are the data sources. So I am not disagreeing with the minister. Statistics Canada is. They are saying that overnight and longer travel and stays to this province have declined significantly over the last decade. Their data show last year to the end of December, 12 months, the decline continued.

I am glad that there has been turnaround, if there has been, in the Tourist Scope numbers for the first quarter of the year. I have not seen those numbers as yet. I will be glad to see them. But that turnaround would have to go on for a long, long time before we would catch up to the peak tourism years that we had when people were coming here for longer periods of time and staying here.

Mr. Chairperson, I asked on Thursday whether the department could provide us with an example of how they were marketing into niche areas. There are any number of those areas. I wonder if the minister is able to supply that information.

Mr. Downey: Mr. Chairman, I do have a package prepared. It is specially done; it is done up in a nice, blue cover for the member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale), which I am sure he will appreciate, the colour, but I can go through it individually if he likes, and I will just give him a brief outline as to how we do it.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairman, I would be happy just to receive the material. We have a lot of questions to go through, and I am sure the minister does not want to spend any more time in Estimates than necessary. I would be really glad to review the material.

Mr. Downey: I will take him up on his offer, Mr. Chairman, and provide the information to the member.

Mr. Sale: Manitoba Tourism wants to promote ecotourism. I do not know whether this is about ecotourism or not, but it has said it wanted to promote ecotourism. Many tourists go to Oak Hammock Marsh and to Churchill and, although they may wish to see other aspects of Manitoba's interesting ecological regions, there does not seem to be much availability of knowledge about many other interesting destinations that we have in our province. I am wondering what Manitoba Tourism is doing specifically to broaden the awareness of ecotourism opportunities.

Mr. Downey: One thing that we are doing through the Department of Tourism is to do some regional tourism forums that work with the different regions of the province that will help them identify what product they have as it relates to some of the activities that they have within those different regions, more or less a regional

process. We could talk about the desert at Carberry as one of them; the swinging bridge at Souris, to identify some of these area activities which can be brought together under the overall global tourism advertising for the province. So it is a matter of the communities identifying themselves what is available and then proceeding to bring that into the provincial campaign as part of the overall advertising package that is put out.

But the first thing that we have done was to make sure that they clearly identified their region or their product within their region to do that. We also have the tourism industry. The people who sell product are very much involved in a lot of the workshops that are being carried out. Again, he clearly identified Churchill as being one of the main, traditionally one of the main areas, particularly as it relates to international traffic, the Japanese in particular, whether it is the polar bears or the beluga whales and/or the tundra and birders. That is a major, major area for birders from international communities to come to.

* (1610)

Again, I have referred to some similar examples. Another area, when it comes to ecotourism, is the native cultures, which I believe have a tremendous opportunity for growth and development, particularly in the German market and other international markets as it relates to how well that is being accepted by those communities. Again, it is a matter of bringing the different regions together so that we can take that package of material that they have or the locations that they have and advertise them as part of the overall provincial activity.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, I am glad the minister referenced aboriginal tourism. I had an opportunity to review the Guide to the Aboriginal Experience: Live the Legacy in Canada. It is a very glossy full-colour presentation. Manitoba's section in it is depressingly bleak.

We have any number of First Nations powwows. The biggest days in the province, of course, are the Peguis Days, and they are not even listed here. I am wondering whether the province, or whoever was responsible for this, was charging people to be listed in this publication. It is a publication that is put out by the

Canadian Tourism Commission, CTC, or whether Manitoba had any involvement in actually seeing what was listed in here, but I am wondering if the minister is aware that the total number of events to do with Manitoba aboriginal tourism listed in this guide which goes all over the world is three: one in May, the Paul Hunting Hawk [phonetic] Memorial Traditional Powwow at Rolling River; in August, Pine Fort Days at Spruce Woods Provincial Park, which, I guess in a way, is an aboriginal event, not entirely though; Opaskwayak Indian Days in The Pas, no dates listed, just in August. The biggest ones, of course, are not even here, as I said, Peguis, and there are any number of other aboriginal opportunities for specific things that could be done.

For example, in terms of the actual places, there is no listing at all of the Clear Lake programs that are within Riding Mountain National Park. There is just nothing about powwow days in Winnipeg. There are some very large and very exciting festivals in Winnipeg that are sponsored by our First Nations people. I mean, this is an abysmal record of what is going on in Manitoba, one event in May, two events in August. Certainly I would not call that promoting aboriginal tourism.

Mr. Downey: Maybe the member may want to reflect that it is aboriginal people from Manitoba that sit as part of the CTC committee from Manitoba, so he can target his comments and his criticisms to those aboriginals directly. They are the ones that are responsible for making sure aboriginal events are part of that advertising that he put on there. As a province, and that is who we are dealing with now, all the aboriginal or the majority of aboriginal events are part of the Events Guide in the provincial advertising. So we will make sure his comments go to the committee of CTC, of which there are First Nations people from the province of Manitoba sitting on that committee, and we will make sure they get his comments.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, are there any provincial representatives sitting on this committee?

Mr. Downey: Not on the subcommittee of the CTC. Not on the aboriginal tourism committee.

Mr. Sale: Are there any members of Manitoba's department sitting on CTC strategy or publications development?

Mr. Downey: Just to further elaborate, we are there on some committees by invitation of the CTC overall board as to our involvement, but we are not, in fact—it is the First Nations people of Manitoba that have been invited to participate in this particular committee that he is referring to.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, the minister tries to play politics by implying a threat that he will pass on comments that are critical of aboriginal people. My comments are critical of Manitoba that says it wants to be promoting aboriginal tourism when it allows a publication to go forward in which it has at least some ability to influence what is in there, that is so incomplete in terms of what Manitoba does have to offer in regard to aboriginal people. If the minister is telling us that he really has no influence at all over what goes into this publication from the Canadian Tourism Commission, why would that be, why would Manitoba sit by and allow this kind of incomplete picture of our province to be put forward by Canada?

Mr. Downey: Again, Mr. Chairman, we do not have direct input as to the publication that is provided. We can provide all the information and have been asked to do so. It is their choice whether it is part of the overall package that he is referring to. I am not trying to be negative about it. I think it is constructive criticism that the member is raising, and I would hope he does not take exception to the fact that I am going to pass on his comments as it relates to how they in fact have Manitoba represented.

I will reiterate again, the native, the majority of the native activities are part of the Events Guide. We have spent money and will continue to do so to try and promote the aboriginal tourism package in the province of Manitoba. I believe strongly that it is a very marketable product which the world will want to come and participate in, so it is a matter of taking a positive attitude, not a political narrow-minded approach, just giving us a hard time because we have not emphasized it enough. There is a process in place. If he is not happy with that process, we shall review it and take it to the board of the CTC to make sure that we do have in fact more aboriginal presence in the package.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, I thank the minister for that commitment. Rural operators of tourism

opportunities have claimed for some years that they need an integrated and much more effective signage program. A signage program has been delayed since 1996. When will a new signage program be fully implemented?

Mr. Downey: Again, I have to say, Mr. Chairman, that there have been frustrations from other areas, particularly within Tourism. We have been anxious to get it put in place. We now are going to see some of the signage going up this spring along our highways and our byways that are going to be advertising the tourism product of the province of Manitoba. So you can anticipate over the next few months seeing a considerable amount of signage. We would like to have it fully implemented before next year's Pan American Games activities. So the Signage Program is in fact in the process of being put in place.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, at one of their recent major conferences, which our party had a staffperson as a delegate, some ecotourism and adventure tourist operators reported having serious difficulties getting liability insurance. I think, for the small operators, this is a great difficulty. What can the province do to assist in this regard that will maintain high safety standards but also make liability insurance, in particular, affordable?

* (1620)

Mr. Downey: Mr. Chairman, I am fully aware of that, and I appreciate him raising it. Again it is an issue, particularly in dealing on some of the riding stables. Some of the people that are providing tourism activities for people that—there can be for people who are not familiar with a certain kind of activity, there has to be some liability. We are looking at some areas of the United States. I know that it was raised recently. Some areas of the United States have legislation that in fact does provide some protection to the operators of these activities. That is part of a review that is being done by the department, and, quite frankly, I would like to see a little more aggressive approach taken because I think it is a deterrent for some people to further expand and grow the product that is out there. Again, it is a matter of that work being done on it, but I do know of particularly two states that have had reference made

that they have put in legislation that gives a greater protection to the operators of those facilities.

I note the concern and also the Canadian Tourism Council—I am sorry, the Tourism Commission is working on the issue as well to try and protect or make a product available to protect these operators.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, the minister is, I am sure, aware that Manitoba Health pays the liability insurance or a large share of it for many doctors, and I think the quid pro quo is that doctors are licensed by a competent authority. So the implication here is that, if there is going to be some involvement, there also has to be some kind of standard of safety in terms of guide training, equipment maintenance, equipment standards, et cetera. We have had tragedies on the west coast with whale-watching expeditions where operators intensely competing for dollars have gone out in unsafe weather conditions, or they have gone out in crafts that perhaps were not suited for the weather conditions.

When might the industry expect to hear some progress, substantive progress on this issue from the government?

Mr. Downey: Appreciating that there are a lot of jobs that have to be done and the Tourism portfolio is a major area of responsibility, I would personally like to have some results on it sooner rather than later. I would not want to put a time frame, but I would hope that we could have something for particularly next summer season. We are into this summer season at this particular time. I would hope we would have something for next summer season. At least, is there some legislative requirements that may have to be done, regulatory, or what would be necessary to further give the consuming public some assurance that they have coverage, but on the other hand, make it affordable to the operator. So I am going to put a time frame on within the year, that we could have something more definitive and any action that may need to be taken, that we could in fact move by that time.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, is the minister or his staff working with a committee or a group or association in regard to this particular issue at the present time?

Mr. Downey: The answer is yes. They are working both with the CTC and the association that is working to develop the trails, that have particularly some of these people who are working to develop the former rail lines that have unfortunately been abandoned, but some communities see that as a potential opportunity for trails and also with the farm vacation groups as well.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, some people who have reviewed our Tourism web site have made the comment that it is very plain in comparison with many others that are up, that it seems to be out of date. It does not appear to have been substantially changed since it was first set up in 1995. What is happening here to make this site more exciting, more accessible, more interesting?

Mr. Downey: Always room for improvement, Mr. Chairman, and of course I can assure the member that we are now working to develop a new web site, and hopefully by July or August of this year we will have it in place.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, will that site be much more interactive in terms of access to many of the links that could at least be used to explore Manitoba more effectively? There is a range of educational links, for example, as well as specific offerings by various tourism operators that would substantially enhance families in particular, interest in the province, and I think particularly of the exciting program that River East School Division has launched to allow Manitoba children and any others that are interested to experience our local history and to interact with real people who are playing the roles of some of the historical figures in Manitoba. It is a very exciting curriculum. It has been designed by a number of younger Manitobans working with River East School Division, and I would commend that particular site to the province as, I think, a model of how you can engage kids, probably in the eight to 15-year-old range in really having an opportunity to explore history in an exciting way because they have an opportunity through the Net to actually correspond with historical figures and find out what was really happening to them through volunteers that have agreed to be part of this program.

Mr. Downey: I do not disagree with the member in that we will have a considerably greater capability than

before. So, basically, the start of his question, I would say yes to it.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, it does not appear from at least my scan of things that our winter tourism opportunities are being very significantly advertised in the media. They are listed in a seasonal Events Guide, but there does not appear to be much active promotion, other than the passive promotion of the guide. Is that a policy issue or is that simply my misunderstanding of what is happening?

Mr. Downey: Well, Mr. Chairman, that will be part of our new overall campaign which we will be launching. Winter tourism is a major part of it, and it is special events, i.e., the Festival du Voyageur, which, we believe, is a major draw for the midwinter time.

To make it short, with the snowmobiling and all of the activities that are going along with that—unfortunately with the numbers of losses, one has to make sure that the safety factor is continually emphasized because it has, in fact, been a very serious situation this last year with the numbers of people that were lost, but I think the record of properly groomed trails, properly managed trails and people trained properly as to driving properly and a whole host of things can well be a major additive to our overall winter sporting activities.

So it is an area which we are going to certainly focus on. In fact, the winter adventure will be Snow Wonder: the clear, blue skies, exhilarating fresh air, glistening snow. Winter adventure: we have ski trails, the festival I talked about, ice-fishing, snowmobiling, lodge and holiday resorts, basically a whole lot of the ongoing world-class dining that we have in our province, and it is a major product which we will be putting a lot more emphasis on.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, I hope profoundly that next winter is not like last winter, in terms of clear skies and the kind of northern lights that we have enjoyed in this province up until El Nino struck last year.

Mr. Chairperson, Manitoba apparently has decided not to participate in Canadian Tourism Council television ads to the U.S.A., Europe and Asia because of the expense, the cost of these, and the perception that

the bulk of the ads seem to feature the eastern provinces. I will not quarrel with that decision. There is not much sense spending money to bring people to Ontario or Quebec, although the minister may wish to say that that is still a good thing because they are coming to Canada, and maybe they will come on to Manitoba.

I am wondering whether Manitoba has considered partnering with Saskatchewan and Alberta as the Maritime provinces did to run ads that were focused on the Maritimes and defray the costs somewhat of this kind of program.

Mr. Downey: Mr. Chairman, we are doing a considerable amount more with Saskatchewan. We believe it is a region which we have to work co-operatively with, and we are. I do not believe we have done any television ads yet, but we are doing a considerable amount of print activity and other promotional activity working in co-operation with Saskatchewan.

I can also say that not too long ago there was a major co-operative program with North Dakota which I think, again, it is a region of North America that if we can attract people to this region for certain events, the United States border is something that can be crossed. It changes. Sometimes it is easier; sometimes it is not.

The member has had his share of activities trying to help in that regard to try and take away some of the criticisms that have taken place and some of the problems some border crossings have had, but to make a long story short is, yes, we are working particularly with Saskatchewan. To more complete the answer, we do some as well with Saskatchewan, Alberta and B.C. The four provinces do a considerable amount as it relates to trying to attract some of the bus tours into the northern region.

We are also now working with the Northwest Territories to further enhance in a co-operative way how we can all benefit from bringing tourists into this northwest region of the country.

* (1630)

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, we are told that CTC focuses largely on mostly eastern centres, that their buys are along that central and eastern corridor down the seaboard because that is where the bulk of the tourists come to—Ontario, Quebec, and the Maritimes. Has the question been raised with CTC about marketing into places like Kansas City, Dallas, the midwestern corridor that we have begun and, I think, effectively begun to make a major focus of our linkage with the United States, the midwest corridor?

Mr. Downey: I am told by the department we are working to influence them to target regions such as the member has referred to. I think it is important. It is an area which we believe there can be considerable traffic encouraged to come to the province, and again it supports some of the work that has been done previously, particularly by some of our lodgers, lodges, and outfitters that go into that market.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, could the minister share with us some of the examples of the shared- strategy ads that have already taken place? I have not been aware of them. I would be interested in seeing them.

Mr. Downey: Well, I can see if I can find the generosity in my soul to find that information for him, but I will in fact try and find out some information and provide it to him. It may even be in the document which I tabled to him, some of the shared advertising, at the very back of the document. If not, I will make sure that we get a complete list of shared advertising that we do.

Mr. Sale: A quick glance through, I did not see shared ads, but there may be other material.

A number of Manitoba operators, particularly in rural Manitoba, lodge operators in specific terms, have expressed to us their belief that Manitoba's promotions at trade and sports shows in the United States are weak and dull in comparison to other participants at those conferences. I do not expect the minister to criticize his staff or his department, but that is the feedback that we have been given that, in comparison, we do not shine at these shows. Has anything been done in recent days or in this year to spruce up or sharpen up our presentations at trade shows where tourism is being promoted?

Mr. Downey: I am getting a different impression from the industry than what the member is leaving on the record. I would not accept that, because I have to say that we have been getting some very positive comments. I guess the other is the proof is in the results that these lodges and outfitters are getting for business. I do not know too many of them that are not booked to capacity. In fact, very much they are booked well into the future. So, I guess the end of the day is, if the product is working and we are filling the lodges and people are doing well, that is what the objective, I think, is. I will also take note of his criticisms of what he is saying, so we can follow up and make corrections, if in fact there are some corrections. Possibly he could give us the names of some of those people who have been putting the criticisms to him, so we could in fact follow up and work to improve it, if we can in fact know who to deal with.

Mr. Sale: I will check with my colleague in particular who gave me this specific information about this, the honourable member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk). The comment also came from workshops at the large conference that our staff attended. I cannot tell him who was at those workshops, but I am sure that he knows who was there, because he would have a list of participants and it was in the workshop in regard to trade show presentations.

I have a couple of questions about historical material. A question has been raised by a member of the historical community, the sort of volunteer community, that the booklets which the minister has probably seen in the past—Manitoba's First Explorers, the Beginning of Jewish Community in Manitoba—there are many different titles in this series. These were put out, these particular ones in 1992. We have been told that these are no longer available. We also have an example of a somewhat older publication, The Honourable Joseph Dubuc, KCMG, part of Our Heritage series that goes back many years. Mr. Chair, 1981, Honourable Norma Price, a former Conservative Speaker, I think, was she as well?

An Honourable Member: No, Minister of Labour.

Mr. Sale: Just the Minister of Labour. Well, not just the Minister of Labour. Also, obviously, Cultural

Affairs and Historic Resources minister because her name is in the pamphlet.

Concern has been raised that the quality of our publications on particular issues has declined sharply, and the availability of them is down to very little, at least apparently are not available at The Forks anymore, at least not on display, so people do not get to see them. I understand that they are probably expensive, but there are also ways in which we engage people in our own history. I wonder what the policy of the government is in regard to such publications now.

Mr. Downey: I will try and be helpful. Those same questions were asked in the appropriate department: Culture, Heritage and Citizenship. I think the member going over Hansard will find out what the minister indicated at that particular time. I know I was not here for the whole questioning on it, but I know that it was raised during Culture, Heritage and Citizenship. We will get the answers that the member asked. If they are not in Hansard, we will further communicate with Culture, Heritage, and Citizenship, of which these come under.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, I know they were being raised in that area as well, but the point here is that they are of interest to tourists. It is part of the resource that we make available to people who come here. So we were interested in both departments' answers to the availability of these kinds of historic materials.

Mr. Downey: Anything that can be helpful to tourism to satisfy the demand, we will take a look at. If in fact there were some policy changes or some product that is not in fact available and we see it as a need, we will discuss with the department how that should be in fact considered. But again, we will take it under advisement at this particular time, so we can follow up on it.

Mr. Sale: I want to turn now to the Prairie Dog Central. The minister may recall—I hope he will recall—that from 1995 onwards I have raised this issue in Estimates. I believe in the first year that I raised it, I made some fairly strong comments about the unique resource that the Prairie Dog represents.

I had the opportunity to attend one of the large community gatherings at the Hitch'n Post Restaurant in

the late part of last year I believe it was, enjoyed a wonderful dinner at that somewhat unique establishment, and listened to the concerns of, I think, probably in the order of 300 people. I am not sure entirely how many were there, but I believe it was about 300. I think the deputy minister attended that meeting, if I am not mistaken, as well as some representatives from the Department of Rural Development and the assistant deputy minister for Tourism.

* (1640)

The gist of that meeting, if I could attempt to summarize it—I am sure the minister is aware of it—but the gist of it, as far as I could see, was that there was considerable local enthusiasm to see the Prairie Dog operate on this stretch of track that would be about the same length as the old trip but just moved slightly further northwest with a gap in the rails to Winnipeg, in effect isolating the train on this piece of track. But there was also, from a number of people, quite a number, skepticism about the business plan that had been put forward by the operators or the proposed operators. Those questions were not answered at all in the meeting by the proponents. Perhaps it would not have been fair to expect them to be ready to answer the questions at that particular meeting.

I left that meeting with the distinct impression that the current volunteer association, which has done amazing work over the approximately 26 years or 27 years that the train has been operating, has done an astounding job to maintain the enthusiasm of their members and to keep this unique resource running in Winnipeg, out of Winnipeg, I got the distinct impression from their senior members who spoke that they were at the limit of their volunteer resources. I think they made the point a number of times that they were simply not able to commit to putting out more volunteer time than they already had done, that they were stretched to the very limit. So they were asking for people to come forward and take on some of the burden both of raising funds and ultimately of operating the resource, at least in the form of a board and corps of volunteers.

There was very serious doubt I think expressed by a number of spokespersons—and I did not speak at the meeting. I listened and made lots of notes—but there

was very serious doubt expressed about whether, in the longer term, sufficient people would go out of the city, even though it is not a long way out, but out to Inkster to avail themselves of a ride on the train that essentially was the same ride year after year after year, that there was not much doubt that people would come in the initial period, but there was some substantial doubt that this pattern would necessarily continue.

There was also concern about whether the train itself could run as often as was being required under the new work plan, the proposed business plan, which would more than double the number of runs per year and, therefore, presumably more than double the volunteer workload in terms of operating the train. So those are some of the concerns. There were others raised and I can refer to them.

In the interim since that meeting, I understand that the volunteer association has raised more than its target of dollars, but that it still is substantially short of the total that it needs, in part because the city of Winnipeg appears reluctant to commit funds to an operation which is not any longer based clearly within the city, and of course the city is the owner of the locomotive and one of the historic coaches, also in part I think because perhaps, while wanting to be enthusiastic, the province shares some of the concerns that were raised about the viability of the business plan.

I think this is an absolutely critical resource that Manitoba has that is quite unique. There are very few historic steam trains operating that are anywhere near the vintage of the Prairie Dog. There are a couple, but there are not very many across North America. As I have said in other years, I think that Ms. Clarke can probably confirm that there are actually more members of rail fan clubs in North America than there are Manitobans, that rail fan clubs' membership exceeds a million members in North America, and so it is an absolutely unique resource.

I have for years, long before I became elected—I guess I grew up as a train buff in a train town where there was nothing I enjoyed more than spending time at the rail yards. I think, like many Canadian kids who grew up with steam trains, there is something compelling about them. It just has never made sense to me that we did

not move heaven and earth to have this train running out of Union Station.

I know that the major railways have said we do not want old puffers running on our main lines—liability and difficulty in scheduling and all the excuses that are raised—but the government is not without leverage on the railroads. It seems to me that it is giving up too much to strand this train permanently. No matter how much that local community wants, this is a resource that belongs at least to all Winnipeggers and I think to all Manitobans.

We have festivals the length and breadth of this province, at least some of which are on rail lines, and the minister will recall it runs to the Corn and Apple Festival. It runs to Selkirk. I think there have been runs out toward Niverville. There have been runs to Lac du Bonnet. I just cannot see why we would not be building a whole strategy around this train and around the development of tourism, family tourism, history tourism, fur trade tourism, buffalo hunt tourism. There are all kinds of historical opportunities to build a strategy upon, the centre piece of which is this historic train.

I believe that in the longer term it is probably possible to attract other locomotives. B.C., of course, runs the Royal Nelson on its B.C. rail line up Howe Sound. CN and CP both have a stable of fully restored locomotives in eastern Canada. The museum in Ottawa has a number of fully operating restored locomotives. Jasper traded its old locomotive some years ago, and it has been restored. The one that is there now, of course, is not in running condition, but the one that was there has been restored. I believe it was a Northern, if I am not mistaken.

So I am wondering where the government is going on this. I do not think there is any resource we have that is more potentially positive for family tourism into Winnipeg in the summertime than this locomotive and its historic cars. I do believe that the volunteer association has contributed a great deal, but it may need resources it does not now have in order to continue to play the kind of part that it has been playing.

So I would appreciate an indication of where the government is going on this and what it sees as the opportunity in regard to this historic train.

Mr. Downey: I thank the member for his comments, Mr. Chairman. It gives me the opportunity to make a few brief remarks as it relates to the overall future of the Prairie Dog and the fact that we, the government of Manitoba, also want to acknowledge the Vintage Locomotive Society for their continued ongoing interest and hard work in maintaining what is a piece of Manitoba heritage and their commitment financially and in time to try and make sure that it is, in fact, preserved.

Mr. Chairman, this goes back even a little further than the member takes it back. This comes about because with the federal government, with the allowance of rail line abandonment to the magnitude of which it has taken place, and the loss of the Steep Rock line, which this Prairie Dog locomotive found to be quite conducive to using part of it, to go as far as it did and then return with the passengers that it had, and it actually was working quite well. Again, the unfortunate thing is that we saw the loss of that line, not only because for the use of the Prairie Dog, but we also saw the loss of the line for the movement of limestone out of Steep Rock, which has, again, other implications financially to the province. So the loss of the rail line has to be acknowledged as well.

I would also, though, acknowledge the fact that, when this came to a crunch time, the Premier (Mr. Filmon) was able to get a delay in the abandonment of the piece of line that this runs on for a little longer, to try and get some decisions made as to what would the future of that line or that part of the activity be, so that some options could be looked at. Again, the city and the province and the federal government have been looking at as to how support could be put in place. There was a request for \$1.2 million, of which we were invited to be a third of it. The Locomotive Society was prepared to put a third in, and has raised more than its share. Of course, the federal government was being asked to participate as well, but there was some reluctance.

* (1650)

One can appreciate the city's approach because they, quite frankly saw it as not as direct a benefit to the city when it did not come inside the city. As politicians, I guess one can understand why they had some

reservations, but that does not mean to say that there still is not a future for it. I think it calls upon us and we are seeing that take place, that the Lotteries Corporation is, in fact, doing a review as to how that may fit in with their overall activities, keeping it separate from the connotation of being strictly done for gambling. How can it fit into the overall McPhillips Street Station and casino, as basically a separate tourism attraction, but still being part of the overall bringing more people to that site—not for gambling in particular, but to tie into an overall tourism package? That work is currently being carried out.

One also has to appreciate the fact that we are dealing with a piece of heritage equipment that is not youthful any longer, and there are limitations as to how many trips it could make. In fact, if one were to give it a heavy tourism schedule, whether it would be to go to Winnipeg Beach, whether it would be to go to Lower Fort Garry, where it could in fact be part of a steamship or a paddle wheel or a boat trip back, or one way or the other—an all-inclusive-type package that some people see as a potential, but there may have to be some fill-in with some diesel locomotive power that would give the older engine a rest for part of the week. So one has to take all of these things into consideration. That, in fact, is being done.

I am waiting, hopefully, to have a report very shortly from the department as it relates to the outcome of the work that is being done by Lotteries. Quite frankly, I see this as a more complete package for the tourism side, but one never wants to underestimate—it would in fact cause some difficulties for the community that it has traditionally run into—that whole Warren-Grosse Isle area. Again, it is not doing anything much for them, but if the rail line goes, what are the alternatives? It is obvious that the rail line has been taken out to a particular point.

Could the province carry the whole responsibility of doing that financial package? I do not believe so. Again, I think that the right people are involved. I understand that the Vintage Locomotive Society has, in fact, been working with the Lotteries Corporation in the study that they are doing. Hopefully, before long, we can get some kind of a successful report as to all parties agreeing to the capability and the work that can be done to enhance the overall tourism package.

The member opposite is not going to get disagreement from me that it is not a good piece of Canadian and Manitoba heritage to preserve and to use, to maximize, because I can as well remember as a young person living in rural Manitoba, a considerable distance from the city of Winnipeg, every week when the steam locomotive pulled into a little community with whatever it had on it, particularly the mail, everybody gathered around the station. It had some romance to it. Quite frankly, when the winter struck, particularly in the early '50s, when there were so many snowstorms, it had to come through the Souris River, which was usually plugged with snow, and it was quite often that all the local people were called down to shovel the steamers out of the river flat because they got stuck and they had to go and help move it through—snow plows, the whole business.

It was a major part of opening up the Prairies, steam power. Quite frankly, it was really a piece of our history that we do not want to let slide away from us. We will do what we can within our power to make sure it is maintained and added to the overall tourism package so that his grandchildren, all those people that want their children and grandchildren to be a part of it have an option of doing that.

I am not sure whether there is anything more that I can add at this particular time, but we are supportive of it. At this point, I am not sure how much resources we would have to put into it but are prepared to consider what the report brings forward.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, I appreciate the minister's comments, and I had no idea he was that old, that he would remember all these things. I thought he was a much younger person than he is indicating. But, clearly, he and I both had the same kind of childhoods, because I have the same kind of stories. I do look forward to when my grandchild and the one that hopefully will be born in July can ride on this train again.

I would like to ask the minister if he is in a position to make a commitment that whatever decisions are made, wherever the train is to run, it will not be stranded on a dead-end piece of rail that is not connected at least in some—even if it is not a highly

used connection, that nevertheless the train will not be stranded.

Mr. Downey: I am having a hard time understanding what he is talking about, Mr. Chairman. We will do what we can to make sure it is an operational activity within the province. I do not know what he refers to as a dead-end track or rail line.

Mr. Sale: I would be glad to clarify.

Mr. Downey: Yes, I would like a clarification, please.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, the proposal that was being advanced over the wintertime was to operate on a stretch of track from somewhere out on Inkster up to Warren. There would not be a connection between the Inkster station and the main CN rail system. So the train would not be able to move—for example, to be towed to an American movie location in the midwestern United States, to give one example, would not be able to be used for historic special events because it would not be able to get off that piece of rail. That is what I was referring to.

Mr. Downey: He does not want it stranded, is really what he is saying, so that it is not available to be moved into other capacities. I appreciate what he is saying, and I do not know what capacity or power I would have, but we will do what we can to make sure that it is accessible to other activities that would be beneficial for the promotion of the Locomotive Society, the province of Manitoba and tourism.

Mr. Sale: Would the minister be able to undertake to revisit the discussions with, I suppose it is primarily CN, although CP is also involved, in regard to access to Union Station? I just ask him, and I am sure that this is not a new idea to him. I have promoted it for many years to anybody that would listen, and I am sure I am not the only one who has thought of this, but the sight of that train sitting at and leaving from and returning to Union Station is simply something that would excite both local and tourism comment, I am sure. It would feature in all kinds of TV coverage, and to me it is the kind of unique magnet that we need to make family tourism take off.

I agree with him that given the age of the equipment, we could not run two daily trips, but we could probably

run three or four times a week to Selkirk with a stop at the Lower Fort. I know there has to be water and coaling provided, but the cost of doing that is relatively modest by comparison with what the province has spent on other destination-tourism programs by comparison.

The minister made the reference to the round trip possibility. I shared that vision with a committee in 1995. I have certainly talked about it before that. I am sure that many others had, too, so I am not claiming any ownership of that. It is not a new idea, but what I think is needed is new political energy to really brace the railways with the possibility for their own goodwill and their own advertising as the kind of positive commitment to their own heritage and the goodwill of the communities in which they do business.

* (1700)

There was a time when CP and CN simply did not want to be reminded that they were ever in the passenger business. They were embarrassed about the public anger over their departure from that business, and they did not want to be reminded of it at all. We know that they have not been the easiest of landlords for VIA Rail to run on their trackage, and they have not always made it easy for VIA to succeed either. I think that probably they would now be sufficiently over that period in their history that they might be willing to think about the good citizenship, the good corporate citizenship, involved in making that history live again for anybody, and that they might see there was value for them. Certainly, it would be within the province's capacity to confer some value through some recognition of the contribution that CN and CP might make.

So would the minister be prepared to commit to vigorously revisiting this issue with Canada's two major railways, to see whether an accommodation could not be reached at least for some time in the four or five summer months to run out of Union Station?

Mr. Downey: First of all, I am going to wait until I get the report back that is being compiled by the Lotteries Commission to see how they have made reference to any additional activities. Again, time and capability of the piece of machinery we are talking about has to be taken into consideration, so I want to see what that plan is. If there are further meetings or discussions to take

place with either the two major companies that would benefit what we are trying to accomplish, I would consider it, but I will not commit to it till after I see what the Lotteries Corporation, in conjunction with the Vintage Locomotive Society, has planned for them.

Again, I can appreciate what the member is trying to get at. I think he is trying to get at greater exposure, bringing it down closer to where more activity is at the Union Station, and that in fact raises the profile of us being a transportation centre. I have lots of ideas as well. I think what he is saying is not—I am not disagreeing with it. It is a matter of how does it fit in with what is in fact doable.

Mr. Sale: I thank the minister for that answer. I am disappointed that he is not able to make a commitment that the train will not be stranded. In other words, that at the very least, the province would see to the maintenance of a rail link between Inkster and the CN lines, and that that train, that short piece of track—it is not very many kilometres. I think in total it is less than six kilometres from the proposed southeast terminus of this line—that the minister would undertake to see that that link was maintained at the very least, so that the train was not stranded.

Mr. Downey: Mr. Chairman, again, I do not want, at this particular time, to be premature as to what we are asking for until we see what the report comes back from people that are prepared to invest in it, people who have invested their time on a volunteer basis into it, to intrude and say this has to be part of—my department is sitting here listening to what the member is saying. I do not want to make a commitment of leading someone to a fact that there may be a false expectation. We will look at it. We will take into consideration what the member has referred to.

I, too, do not want to see it stranded. I would hate to see it limited so that it could not be taken on to the part of the line or another area of the province for a special, whether it is a centennial, a bicentennial or whatever, to celebrate a particular event. I would hope that the railroads would be generous enough to allow that to take place. So I agree with him in principle. I do not want to see it stranded; on the other hand, if we expect something to be kept and put in place, how much

money is it going to cost us to do that? I do not want to be premature with that kind of a decision.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, I do not have any further questions on the tourism area of the department, but I would like to ask the minister what the small business situation is. We raised the question last year as to the advisability of having small business linked into this whole area. I am wondering whether there are any changes contemplated in regard to this.

Mr. Downey: Well, Mr. Chairman, one of the pieces of good news is that a lot of our small businesses are turning into big business. Of course, that is the reversal of a few years ago.

I do want to compliment particularly the head of the department, Loretta Clarke, who is with us, and the work that she has done in conjunction with the federal government in the establishment of the joint Business Resource Centre that has been recently established and officially opened last week. The numbers of activities that are going on there, particularly as it relates to small business and services provided, information, I have had nothing but positive feedback, particularly from clients, potential clients, legal representatives for companies that are developing and planning to start. The joint effort, a federal-provincial initiative, is extremely positive. So I can report to this committee really good news as it relates to the initiative. It has been a long time in the making. I understand Manitoba is one of the last provinces to become part of it, but, again, I think that is what the public expect.

Some of the programs that we have developed for small business are being very well received. The Business Start Program, the Manitoba Business Expansion Fund is one which provides support to companies not only for investing in capital but a first time for us to get involved in support for operating monies for companies. All in all, the whole area of small business development has been very, very busy and plays a continuing important role in supporting new businesses, particularly young entrepreneurs, old entrepreneurs, entrepreneurs in general, with information that is important to them in helping get them established. It is also important to have the information through small business development where companies may need some equity investment with the

capital pools that are available. Again, that is important to small and beginning companies, that they work with them, whether it is the labour-sponsored funds, whether it is the Manitoba Capital Fund, or whether it is Vision or whoever, that they are worked with to help find the kinds of resources that they need to start their businesses.

Again, we have a major emphasis on developing companies so they are internationally capable, that their growth will not only be for Manitoba businesses to sell to Manitobans but other parts of Canada and international markets that are opening up to us. With the new location, I can give the member some additional information. Inquiries, walk-ins and consulting, in April, has basically doubled what the requests were a year ago when we were on our own and not in the location we are. So it is extremely encouraging that many more people are using the services that are available to them. I think it is the location; certainly the co-operative effort put forward by the province and the federal government. Again, I can report that the majority of people, in fact all the people, who have mentioned it to me have had nothing but compliments for the new establishment.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, I may have missed it. What is the address of the new location?

Mr. Downey: Mr. Chair, 244 Graham. It is actually in the Cargill building, in the walkway of the Cargill building between the Winnipeg Library and the Cargill building.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, over the last year I had a number of younger entrepreneurs contact my office asking for help, and I have passed them on, I hope effectively and efficiently, to the province. I hope they have gotten help. I suppose it is probably a good sign that most of them did not then call me back saying I did not get help, so one can assume that they did. It is confusing to a lot of them to have programs that are targeted to particular groups out of different departments.

I am wondering, for example, if—federal programs targeted to young aboriginal entrepreneurs is one example—there are programs targeted to young entrepreneurs, and presumably it is not racially targeted

but just to young entrepreneurs. Is the minister satisfied now that in the one location all of the programs are appropriately catalogued and available and that we do not send people on wild goose chases around the community to find the right door?

* (1710)

Mr. Downey: Mr. Chairman, I am satisfied that there is now a single shop as it relates to anyone, regardless of what group or organization they come or what ethnic background, that is available to them. We also have the program under aboriginal business centre, which is on Higgins, which is available to them as well. So as it relates directly to the aboriginal people, there is an alternative service available to them of which we work with them to try and make sure that they are accommodated, and that is working successfully, I believe. But again, we encourage the use of this business service centre, which encompasses all federal and provincial programs and information as it relates to them right at the one stop.

Again, I made some comments the other day at the opening. What the public I do not think wants is when they go into a provincial office to be told: well, that is a federal program and you have to go across the city, or: here is a number, and you get frustrated. You go into a federal agency and the federal agency says: well, that is a provincial program, and gives you the runaround.

Quite frankly, this is truly one-stop shopping, and again, the reports that I am getting are people are not leaving frustrated at not getting information. They are able to sit down with the guidance counsellors that are there and effectively get the answers and the direction they need. Again, I can appreciate what the member is saying. We hopefully can do exactly that. But on the aboriginal component, we still have the other centre on Higgins Avenue.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, I will look forward to visiting that centre when Estimates are over and I have some time to do that. I would like to visit and see what they have to do.

An Honourable Member: I think they are calling you right now, and they would like you to get over there soon.

Mr. Sale: I think they are closed probably. It is 4:30; it is likely closing hour.

An Honourable Member: They are open till five.

Mr. Sale: Well, we missed it by 13 minutes. Okay. I appreciate those responses.

There are a number of programs in high schools, particularly in the regional technical schools such as southwest Winnipeg, Kildonan East, Selkirk, Steinbach, a variety around the province, where young adults who are not going to go on to post-secondary education are taking, broadly speaking, entrepreneurship programs where they are learning the skills of starting their own businesses. I am wondering whether the province makes any active outreach to those programs.

I have spoken to some of those groups. I used to teach organizational behaviour, and so I have some real interest in the whole business of planning new businesses and new services that might be offered to people. I am not clear whether the province is actively outreaching to that group, which is not going to go on to Red River, for the most part, but they have—I have been very impressed with many of their business ideas and plans, and I have certainly been impressed with their attitude. These are young people who are prepared to make their own successes, but they are also first-time entrepreneurs. I am wondering what we are doing to reach this population.

Mr. Downey: I know, Mr. Chairman, first of all, we are working aggressively with those groups. In fact, I was out and spoke to a group—oh, it is about two months ago—and what they had were about—they set themselves up in different groups and they had business leaders from different businesses throughout the communities to work with them. They had special projects. This is a particular day that the high school sponsored for that whole region.

An Honourable Member: Junior Achievement.

Mr. Downey: No, it was not Junior Achievement, and I will get to Junior Achievement. That, of course, has been very much emphasized by Rural Development, who are working very closely with the high schools with Junior Achievement. In fact, they play a major

role and are involved with the Rural Development Forum as part of the overall exercise which they are involved in.

No, this program is put on in the different divisions of which they have special programs, projects, which they start in the morning as to what particular business, and they go through the whole process of setting it up, marketing and then work on a point system. I was extremely encouraged to see the kinds of activities that are going on with the development of young entrepreneurs. They are scored on particular proposals. I was particularly pleased to be invited to be part of it as well. As a politician, one likes to get out and try and encourage these young entrepreneurs, and cheer them on in their work as it relates to the free enterprise market system. It is always encouraging. In fact, I would be open to go to more of them, just try and get a little time to do—

An Honourable Member: Never resist an opportunity to score.

Mr. Downey: If we could get these Estimates cleaned up, I could probably get out and influence some more of them.

I appreciate the question because the department is actively involved. I can tell you that, from the federal side, they were also there as part of that event that day. I think there is room for more of them.

Mr. Sale: Could the minister tell us more specifically what the linkages are between the regional high schools that are teaching business programs and particularly entrepreneurship programs? How are they linked and what are the mechanisms?

Mr. Downey: Mr. Chairman, I understand that the resource teachers work very closely with the Business Resource Centre in getting information, and the resource centre provides people from the resource centre to go to their schools to talk to the students. Also, there is an annual meeting, a workshop annually which I, T and T organizes with the—they call it the youth entrepreneurial workshop. There are partners involved, such as South Winnipeg Tech, and Red River high school has a participation. So there are direct

linkages between the staff of the Small Business unit, the Business Resource Centre and the instructors from the schools which have these programs in their system.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, are these linkages—I do not know what the right term is—mandated by the department to cover all regional schools, or are they more or less on a sort of catch-as-catch-can basis? If someone shows an interest, then there is an informal liaison, but is there a formal mechanism linking these programs, because many of our youngest entrepreneurs are these young people coming out of these programs? I am not always sure that they get the benefit of the advice that the province has available.

Mr. Downey: Particularly dealing with our rural communities. There is a more structured relationship, I understand, between rural development and the schools that have the junior achievement. We provide services to those schools that identify themselves as needing support and working directly with them. Again, the person who is involved for a small business development is available, and I guess these types of programs that are offered in the different schools. As one particular school is aware of it, as their major advertising campaign. Are their structured agreements? No, there are not. You used the word “catch-as-catch-can,” I think it is a little bit more than that, but again not by official agreement that we will provide certain services under a program, but certainly are available to them. We will do what we can to support both the programs that are provided and delivered by the school divisions and/or supportive of the junior achievement which again comes under the Department of Rural Development, which are doing an excellent job in their overall activities with the school divisions.

* (1720)

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, I do not want to relieve the schools of their responsibility to initiate this contact and to suggest it is all the government's responsibility, but I am wondering if the minister would undertake to ask his staff to suggest formal ways in which all of the schools that have such programs would be regularly contacted. They would make sure, for example, that their Internet sites are listed and linked with each other, that mailing lists were comprehensive.

I appreciate that the rural areas are being supported particularly through the Department of Rural Development, but what about our urban schools where by far the majority of students in these programs are located? Will the minister undertake to have his department investigate how to make these linkages more structured and more effective?

Mr. Downey: I appreciate the comments made. I want to make sure as well that all schools have the access. I understand that through the Internet connections that all schools, urban and rural, are in fact very much in use of the services that are provided, and there are direct linkages. I can assure the member that if there is a more formal way of encouraging participation and involvement, and I agree it is not to take the responsibility off of the school divisions, but if we can be of greater service to provide the information, backup and some options as it relates to looking at how we can better enhance and develop the business, an entrepreneurial spirit within our education system, we will be there.

I may even consider doing a direct ministerial letter to these different schools and getting more directly involved. I would not want to be accused of doing it politically, but it would certainly be for the overall development and enhancement of the opportunities for the youth in those schools, but seriously I think he is right. There may be some things that we can do to better make ourselves more available to all the schools. Although through Internet, I am told by the department that they are aggressively connecting and doing the kinds of informational workshops if requested to do so.

We will continue to expand and grow that, because I truly believe there are a lot of people, particularly young entrepreneurs, with the capabilities of new technology. It does not need to necessarily have a daily workshop or something like that. It can all be done through the electronic media or some of it can be done more through the electronic media at a very cost-saving way. So how we can do things more aggressively and better, certainly I will look at those options and have the department make some recommendations how better we can do it.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, I appreciate the minister's commitment to look at structuring those relationships

more in the urban areas as they probably seem to be in the rural areas. I think he is right about young people and their comfort level, but young people are still taught by old geezers like us. We do not always have the same level of comfort or awareness that some of our students do. So it may still be the kind of thing where an in-person visit from time to time to offer seminars or particular components of the curriculum that that small business centre could do might be a very, very useful way of making sure that there was a direct avenue for the young adults who are heading out, they hope, into exciting careers and they will know then exactly where they can go and will already have had some exposure to that centre. So I put that forward as a suggestion. I think the minister is responsive, and I hope that it has some modest usefulness. I think we could pass the Tourism section, Mr. Chairperson, down to the end of (e) on page 92.

Mr. Chairperson: Item 10.3. Tourism and Small Business (a) Tourism Services and Special Projects (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$619,200—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$1,046,500—pass.

10.3.(b) Tourism Marketing and Promotions (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$638,600—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$3,967,800—pass; (3) Grants \$75,000—pass.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, could the minister identify the grants in question here?

Mr. Downey: The money that is referred to is to help organizations with their marketing promotions, particularly national events, hospitality exposure for Manitoba's tourism products, and that is the granting for that particular program.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, there were some questions raised about the criteria. I thought the criteria for this program were international, that is, American as opposed to Canadian events.

Mr. Downey: No, Mr. Chairman, national and international, but basically it is open to national as well as international.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, is there another section of the grants that is limited to international trade shows in the United States?

Mr. Downey: Yes, Mr. Chairman, that falls under Manitoba Trade.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, I guess we are way past that section, but the concern had been raised that there were national trade opportunities, that the small companies that make use of the trade shows in Minneapolis, for example, would appreciate the opportunity to make use of the same thing in Vancouver or Toronto or Montreal where the cost may even in fact be greater than going to some of the destinations in the United States where they are receiving assistance. I wonder whether that same program should not have the same kind of criteria of national or international, as opposed to the international restriction.

Mr. Downey: I will note the member's comments and see if there is anything that could be done to improve it.

Mr. Sale: We could just dispose of the other grants in the other two sections (c) and (e). There are grants in each of those areas. Could the minister just indicate briefly how those are different from the Marketing and Promotions Grants?

Mr. Downey: Mr. Chairman, basically with the regional focus that we are putting in place, we have put some capability to support regions where they are gathering together to look at some types of research and activities that may have to be carried out as it relates to the development of the product. It is basically to support the forum activity and to bring all of the province into more of the mainstream of what we are doing with tourism. So it is a general support for the different regional organizations.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, where in the annual report would these grants be detailed?

Mr. Downey: It is in the annual report under Tourism Development. This would be the first year for this particular expenditure. Basically, this will be the first year that this would be—it will not show up in the report until next year, at this year's Estimates, and it is basically to give more regional support to the tourism industry.

Mr. Sale: So, Mr. Chairperson, the latest annual report of the department I think is '96-97; '97-98 has not been

released. Is '97-98 the first year of it, or has there been some restatement of the Estimates to pull something together that was separated? There is an amount shown in each of the last two years, the year we are debating now and '97-98, in each of these grant categories.

Mr. Downey: There will be some of it stated in this year's because we did some of the forums last year, which we had to provide the resources to carry them out. There is a growth in that area which we will see a greater amount in this year's report when it is provided, but it is an area which we have placed some greater emphasis on to make sure that all the regions of the province as it relates to tourism can participate in a greater way as it relates to the overall growth of our tourism industry. We needed a capability to do that, whether it is holding forums, whether it is holding special sessions on ecotourism, having a conference on it in a particular area, and there now is a capability of supporting those regions to in fact carry that out.

Mr. Sale: Is the grant in (e) still the Small Business and Entrepreneurial Development grant for the Manitoba Marketing Network Inc.? Is it still the same recipient?

Mr. Downey: The answer would be positive, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, I welcome the regional tourism strategy. I think that will be—obviously, probably is being welcomed by the recipients. I think it is a very good move on the department's part, and I appreciate the answers.

* (1730)

Mr. Chairperson: 10.3. Tourism and Small Business (b) Tourism Marketing and Promotions (3) Grants \$75,000—pass.

10.3.(c) Tourism Development (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$324,100—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$623,300—pass; (3) Grants \$368,700—pass; (4) Less: Recoverable from Rural and Urban Economic Development Initiatives (\$314,000)—pass.

10.3.(d) Capital Grant Assistance-Canada-Manitoba Partnership Agreement in Tourism \$500,000—pass.

10.3.(e) Small Business and Entrepreneurial Development (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$1,239,600—pass; Other Expenditures \$954,200—pass.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, just a slight reversion back. The Canada-Manitoba partnership has grown sharply this year. I may just not be recalling. Have we signed a new agreement here, or is there something that is hanging over from previous years? Is this related to Pan Am?

Mr. Downey: No, it is one of the last projects. It is the support for the Asessippi project.

Mr. Chairperson: Item 10.3.(e) Small Business and Entrepreneurial Development (3) Grants \$30,000—pass.

Resolution 10.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$10,073,000 for Industry, Trade and Tourism, Tourism and Small Business, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 1999.

10.4. Economic Development (a) Economic Development Board Secretariat (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$566,500.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, this is the last item prior to the Minister's Salary, which we will be spending days and days on, I am sure. We will get the minister alone, without his staff, and see what we can do here.

One of the criticisms that I thought was a very important criticism and a constructive one in the Price Waterhouse report of a couple of years ago now was around the focus of the economic development analysis, the expertise that is being provided not just to the government but to the private sector and the public sector in terms of economic development strategies. The criticisms, I am sure, I do not need to detail them. The minister, I am sure, remembers them and the deputy probably remembers them even better, although that is not a reflection on the minister's memory but on the deputy's preoccupation, I think, with these issues because he has to live with them in more detail than perhaps the minister does.

The particular criticisms were around the lack of strategic information as opposed to just volumes of

data, but information that was strategic to particular areas of economic development. As I recall, the study looked at some of the best practices in Oregon and Quebec and other locations that appeared to have a more focused strategy. Could the minister review for the committee what has been done in this area to address the weaknesses that were identified 18 or so months ago?

Mr. Downey: Well, again, if the member wants to take days and days and days in dealing with my salary, then I may take days and days and days to answer this question.

The serious response is, I think, Mr. Chairperson, first of all, I can indicate that all the positions in our reorganization have now been filled with people who are very capable and competent as it relates to the delivery of the programs and the policies which are in place, for example, the work that has been recommended by the capital markets task force in the areas in which we have been working very aggressively to provide sources of capital through the market, the capital funds of which labour-sponsored are two of them, the Manitoba Capital Fund, the target of going to some \$60 million by the year 2000, and we have gone from \$4 million, I think it is four years ago, to \$30 million today. Again, that is a key area which a strategy was developed around, and we have moved very aggressively in that direction. Again, the continued growth in the manufacturing sector, particularly as it relates to transportation and some of the high-tech areas, and we can deal specifically with some of the software developments and the companies that are there to make sure that we are getting our department fully supportive.

Mr. Mervin Tweed, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

There are several key areas, transportation, manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, tourism, and again, one of the major things that we have been able to do is complete the filling of the positions that have been available so those strategies, in fact, can be carried out.

I think it is important to note as well that through the deputy minister—who, by the way, was not here as it relates to the time that the member refers to when that report was brought down, that Mr. Cormack has been

in the capacity of deputy minister now since a year ago in February. So, he has, in fact, been moving to implement at a considerable, at a very progressive rate some of the things that had to be done.

I think if a review were done today, it would be a totally different review from the department. I think the attitude, the morale, the feelings within the department in delivering the programs are coming on very well. I think some of the questioning that the member has gone into, he should be satisfied that there have been some positive results which were not so positive some time ago when he asked them. I could go on and on, but maybe there are some more specific questions or a more detailed area that he would like me to deal with.

Mr. Sale: I am always impressed that the passage of time mellows the minister's memory in regard to a difficult period in his department, which, of course, at the time he denied strenuously was a problem at all. Now he acknowledges what everybody else knew and what the report had obviously made plain, and I am glad that he feels that his deputy and others are making the strides that need to be made. I appreciate that. I also want to be clear that I was not suggesting that the current deputy was here when the report was done, but he came shortly after it floated onto the scene and was largely responsible for having to deal with the implementation of the issues that flowed from that report. Not working for the department, I cannot comment on that, but I was very happy, let me say, with the responses to the tourism questions. I thought they were helpful responses today, and I appreciated that. So that is one sign of good things.

Specifically, the issue the Price Waterhouse report raised was not related to an absence of strategic sectors. In fact, the report suggested that we perhaps had too many sectors identified, that we were trying to spread ourselves too thin, and in particular I remember the report suggested that perhaps the focus on environmental industries was misplaced in terms of the environmental industry sector in the province as a strategic sector.

The report seemed to be suggesting that we needed to develop better information that was more—the only word to use is strategic to both the attracting of companies and the supporting of existing companies to

expand and build on their business here in Manitoba. It was critical of the previous department's ability to provide that strategic information which is information about potential future markets, about competitive advantage, about logistical issues. All kinds of information is strategic, and I do not want to get into some academic discussion with strategic information, but I would like a sense of what has the department done concretely that has changed the way it goes about the development of information that would support our infrastructure in Manitoba of business and industry in a way that is different from the way it was when the Price Waterhouse study was completed.

* (1740)

Mr. Downey: Mr. Chairman, without being critical, overly critical of past decisions and past ministers and/or the way we had in fact the department structured, we were broadly focused with managing partners in about 13 categories which quite frankly in theory, with the system as it was established, probably was not all bad, but we have found that the functioning and the reporting and the way in which we could focus on some of the areas under that system quite frankly was very, very difficult to do and there were some frustrations of getting to get some decisions made, whether it was particularly—and I can use an example of some major developments that took a combination of our department and other departments to focus on it, whether it is the Maple Leaf development, as an example, which came in conjunction with EDB. So we have changed it to focus on trade, of which Manitoba Trade is a single entity; Tourism and small business, again, which is a single entity; Financial Services, which is a resource and a backup to all the program deliveries, which, whether it comes from small business, whether it comes from MIOP, whatever, is a support system; and Industry Development, which comes under one particular ADM. So I think we were more focused and selected the areas in which, quite frankly, we can work more effectively.

In this system, I think we have a more concentrated information system at management meetings, and to have a meeting of 13 managing partners every month or every two weeks or every week was virtually pretty difficult to accomplish, and at the end of that meeting what did you have? So the system that is developed

today, although the other one I think in theory had a lot of potential, today it appears that it is working. There is a little more focus, and, quite frankly, we are not trying to be all things to all people in areas which, quite frankly, we can probably find that service in another way. So I guess we are more concentrated in areas, that we feel that we can do some things better.

Call centre is another area in which we have focused and in which we have spent a considerable amount of time, and, again, it is working very well within the system. There is a group of people who are working on that on a full-time basis, and it has shown results. So I may not be as definitive as the member likes, but I think the proof is in the results, and I am pretty pleased with the results that we are getting from the department and particularly from the response of businesses, business as it relates to the service they get from our department.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, perhaps this is something that we could pursue after the House rises, but what I would be interested in knowing is, for example, on a simple case-study basis, let us say a medium-sized enterprise is interested in an agricultural technology application of some kind in Manitoba. They are looking for a new location and they contact our province.

What things fall in place to give them the kind of, not one-stop shopping but essentially the link that will then tap them into the strategic information they need, give them the logistical support, the infrastructure knowledge, et cetera, et cetera? How does that work in practice, and I would be happy to just have a meeting with that staff and find out just how they do that, how that actually works. It might be easier than trying to explain it during Estimates.

Mr. Downey: I will try to move through it as expeditiously as possible. Whoever would identify it if they were to come to I, T and T, if it was a specific area that needed financial support and they could not find it elsewhere, if it was a larger company that needed several departments to be part of it to help expedite some decision making, it would go to EDB. A person from there would co-ordinate and bring together all the departments, Rural Development, Agriculture, I, T and

T, and Environment to make sure all the disciplines were around the table to make sure that everybody understood what the overall objective of the company was and what regulatory authorities had to be brought to the table and what decisions had to be made and financial support, raw resources, human resources.

An example, again, of a larger one would be Maple Leaf which would be co-ordinated through EDB. A smaller one which may just strictly be—let us use another example of a processing plant or a manufacturing plant, i.e., the New Flyer which had a major expansion plan. That basically would be developed with I, T and T's Financial Services and the Industry Development people working with them to see what the financial package was that had to be brought forward and what were the job implications and all of those things.

Mr. Sale: So, Mr. Chairperson, would there be then some commitments around time, turnaround time, that would be made early in this process, deliverables identified, et cetera? Is that the kind of process that would be followed?

Mr. Downey: The answer would be yes. Again, you cannot break the law or do things outside of regulations as it relates to environmental processes. However, it would be expedited by bringing all parties within government to the table so that everybody knows that there is a priority on time and it should not sit on one department's desk or another, that the questions can be asked directly of that department as to what has to be done and how long it would take to get that process approved.

Mr. Sale: I still have a question on capital funds. Mr. Chairperson, the minister referenced ENSIS and Crocus. Could the minister tell us whether or not the news reports about ENSIS purchasing support from Man Agra are correct or not? The reports were that ENSIS entered into a \$240,000 or \$250,000 contract with Man Agra in which ENSIS would pay Man Agra to bring deals to ENSIS. The government gave ENSIS, I think, \$300,000 in a forgivable loan.

It seems strange to us that a capital fund would have to pay to have deals brought to it. That is backwards from the usual operation. Can the minister comment on that?

Mr. Downey: Mr. Chairman, I have nothing that would substantiate the comments that the member put on the record. I am not aware of any contractual arrangement between those two individuals. Because of the ENSIS fund not being overly large at the beginning stages, I think that they would have a difficulty in justifying being able to pay that kind of money. I do know that there are discussions that have taken place that, if Man Agra has, in fact, identified a potential investment, they would bring them together. But, as far as any direct overall retainer fee, I am not aware of any. I will find out if that is in fact the case, but it would be between ENSIS and Man Agra if such a deal were made. But, again, it is not my understanding. I am not aware of any monies being flowed on an ongoing contractual basis of that amount or any amount. But I do know there have been discussions and, particularly with Man Agra's knowledge of some of the agricultural sector, that they have in fact been talked to. What the formalized agreement is, I do not know.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, I am just trying to find the press so that the minister could verify this.

The Free Press, Mr. Chairperson, of December 16, 1997, reports: ENSIS Growth Fund is to invest \$250,000 in Man Agra and the fund will have the right of first refusal on all investment opportunities identified by Man Agra. That seems strange to me as a strategy. I have requested information from ENSIS and have not been able to secure information about whether that is correct or not.

That is not the only place that it was reported. It was also reported in the Winnipeg Sun, December 17: Man Agra, which signed an agreement to identify and research investment opportunities for Manitoba's newest labour-sponsored venture capital fund has access to a \$250,000 pool of funds to help entrepreneurs do market research and develop their business plans. Bill Watchorn, chair of the ENSIS Fund, said Man Agra must match the \$250,000 either in money or services.

* (1750)

Mr. Downey: Mr. Chairman, to try and answer, with the limited knowledge I have—and it is more a

guesstimate at this particular time, and it is dangerous to do that, but I would estimate that maybe ENSIS set aside so much money to allow certain research and study to be done as it related to agriculture projects, but not a contractual arrangement to pay them a fixed amount of money for services that they would expect to be provided. So I think it is an accommodation of that amount of money that may have been identified by ENSIS if in fact a project were to be worked on and worked on jointly; but, again, I do not think there is a fee for service or commitment made. I will check further as it relates to the relationship and/or any monies that may have been committed in that way.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, is the province proposing to invest further funds in ENSIS to assist them in their early stages?

Mr. Downey: Mr. Chairman, we are looking at certain options that are available to us. Again, the amount of money which was raised in the initial stages was not as great as what was anticipated could have been done because of the late start, and there are certain circumstances that would cause us to at least look at what are some of the options that may be available. We would hope that it accomplishes what was initially set out to do and that is to help some of the smaller- and medium-size companies obtain capital if they are now not able to get.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, what are the options available to the province in this regard to invest further in ENSIS? To repeat, what are the options available to the province for further investment in ENSIS? What vehicles are available? What scale of investment is being looked at?

Mr. Downey: Mr. Chairman, those are options that have not been decided upon or concluded. Again, is there greater support needed for the overall management to support the management of the system through some form of a loan may be one option. As far as adding more capital, I do not anticipate that that would be an option. But again, quite frankly, there have not been any decisions made, and we are looking at it at this particular time. I do not want to negotiate in a public committee at this particular time. If and when something is concluded, I am quite prepared to fully disclose it to the public.

Mr. Sale: Well, I might say that the minister has an interesting view of market here. Clearly, this fund was late getting to market, and so it may have had a bad first year based on its lateness. But it also may be that the market is not there for what it is wanting to do. The minister makes a great commitment to market forces. It has put legislation in place. It has advanced a loan to ENSIS. Why would the minister resist the judgment of the market in this regard? If the market is not prepared to buy into ENSIS to any further extent than \$4 million, this fund is clearly running very high expenses for its management and the fee to the rent-a-union that it rented; \$75,000 a year I think is the fee to the federal union that it has borrowed a name from. If the market is not prepared to support the fund, why would the government question the judgment of the market? It sounds like a different government than the one they claim to be.

Mr. Downey: One could get into a long-term philosophical debate. I guess one would ask the question on the other side of it, why would the same government put forward a \$2-million grant to start the first labour-sponsored fund that was set up? In fact, there was a \$2-million support that has been written off by the province of which started the Crocus Fund. So the same government that did that, that is looking at what options are available today to make sure that we in fact have a successful program in place. I have not said we have made the decision to proceed. Again, I am just saying that we are in discussion.

Mr. Sale: Well, Mr. Chairperson, let me say very clearly that I think there is a difference between a labour-sponsored fund that is truly a labour-sponsored fund where private-sector management is not being paid in Toronto to provide marketing support and a national union is not receiving fees. In fact, for the Crocus Fund, as the minister knows full well, there are no fees paid to the sponsoring unions. There is no recompense at all. It is a very different animal when highly expensive private-sector managers are hired. Fees are paid to unions. Fees are paid to BPI for marketing and administration of this fund. The public took a look at it and the public's judgment was \$4 million, and the public's judgment on Crocus was \$17 million.

I think maybe the minister should heed the public judgment. It is one thing to subsidize the front-end

costs of an initial venture in a field where no profits are being taken out by the sponsors and indeed, if anything, capital is being put in, as he knows. The union sponsoring this fund put in substantial amounts of their own capital to make Crocus an initial viable fund. So I think the minister should reconsider very carefully if this private sector fund managed by private sector managers cannot make it, then perhaps that is the market's judgment and the minister ought to hear that judgment.

Mr. Downey: A quick response, Mr. Chairman. No decision has been made at this particular time to do anything. I said it was being considered. Secondly, he admits and I admit that the offering was into the market very late in the game, and quite frankly, I do not think it is a true reflection of what the market is speaking to as it relates to this initiative.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Chairperson, I wonder if there would be a will to call it six o'clock. It is three minutes to six. I think we will be another hour or so in Estimates the next day it comes by and rather than starting a new section of questions today, we should call it six o'clock.

Mr. Chairperson: Is the will of the committee to call it six o'clock? [agreed]

Time being six o'clock, committee rise.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Chairperson (Marcel Laurendeau): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will be considering the Estimates of the Department of Natural Resources. Does the honourable Minister of Natural Resources have an opening statement?

Hon. Glen Cummings (Minister of Natural Resources): Mr. Chairman, I have a few comments that I think should be put on the record. Traditionally I do not spend a lot of time in preamble, but in this department there is such a diversity of issues that perhaps it is useful to remind my critics and myself, for that matter, of the variety of activities that this department undertakes.

One that I think is probably not well understood, nor has it received the publicity it deserves, is that we now

have a pilot project focusing on the east side of Lake Winnipeg to apply an ecosystem-based management approach of our resources. This calls for a more holistic approach to resource management to conserve biodiversity and the integrity of ecosystems while accounting for public values and needs. This, I think, is a very important addition to the work that this department does in preparing for licensing and other matters that occur when resource development is undertaken.

Hecla Island has been a longstanding issue over the years, and I am pleased to say that this past year we have undertaken an initiative there that gives ex-landowners an opportunity to lease one lot per family on previously settled lands of the heritage land use category, and 37 lots have been taken up under that initiative. Along with the north shore development which is occurring, and I do not have the number of lots that have been taken up there, but I think it is over half of those lots as well have been taken up or are on the verge of being taken up.

Manitoba has entered into an agreement with the Manitoba Wildlife Federation to see them administer and deliver the Hunter and Safety Firearm Training program. This partnership will see the Manitoba Wildlife Federation as a major player in molding our future hunters, and the hundred of dedicated instructors will continue to be backbone and strength of the Hunter and Firearm Safety Training program. This agreement comes into effect on April 1 of 1998 and came into effect then, and Resources will continue to support the program over the next 10 years with \$380,000 of support and undoubtedly will be the subject of some questions by the opposition, given issues that they raised around this matter. But when we have the affected parties leading and, in fact, working with the new hunters coming into the system, I do not think the tariff and/or the expansion of the program is in any way unreasonable.

As far as park developments, we have a development review going on for Falcon, West Hawk Lake and the Asessippi region and consultants are presently working to provide advice on improvements in both areas beginning with a series of public meetings for input and taking it forward to where they will eventually provide us with advice.

Floodproofing, which may also be of interest to the opposition, we paid out \$10 million in 1997-98 budget, this is provincial cost, so home and business floodproofing of \$25 million, including ring dikes, \$15 million.

The Dutch Elm Disease Control program, which in itself is not a big program, but attracts a lot of attention and is very important to a significant portion of the population in the city and in other parts of the province, received an additional \$137,000 for cost sharing with towns and R.M.s.

R.M.s and towns such as Gladstone, Pembina, Ste. Rose, Teulon, Russell, Melita, Cartwright, Wawanesa, Glenboro, Rosser, McCreary and St. Andrews will be included in this program. The department will also address the DED infestation in Winnipeg buffer zone through parts of R.M.s in Ritchot, East St. Paul, West St. Paul and St. Clements, St. Andrews, Rosser, Macdonald, Tache and Springfield. This buffer zone is intended to reduce the disease pressure around Winnipeg and has been the subject of some controversy. I am pleased to report that that is now being addressed and particularly after the flood of '97 when infestation was, frankly, being spread. At the same time, we were quite unable to deal with additional work in the field because of the deep snow and, of course, the early water and high flood waters. The recent inspections of the buffer zone indicate that we must address the number of infected trees, and this will be a \$400,000 additional program.

* (1440)

Spruce budworm, we will be implementing the long-term spruce budworm strategy on the east side of Lake Winnipeg and in the Pine Falls Paper Company forest management licence, which will run about \$900,000. Again, a program that needs to be put on track in protection of the long-term investment that we expect and the benefits we intend to reap from the better management of our forests.

In conjunction with the Department of Highways, we are refurbishing a network of roads in Birds Hill Provincial Park and providing some upgrades as part of the Pan Am event for triathlon, rollerblading and

cycling events. We also, of course, will be hosting the equestrian activities for dressage, endurance, and jumping at Birds Hill.

In addition, the department has been refurbishing other parts of the park to accommodate not only the games, but also the anticipated campers and day users of the park during the games, which includes major improvements to the beach and the lakefront area, which have been undertaken over the last couple of years.

There is a new initiative in rural bridge replacement program this year, with a capital cost initiative of \$1.5 million. Out of that, \$1 million will go to the conservation districts for bridge replacement, half-a-million will be used for the department bridge replacement program. This is an additional half-a-million dollars into this area.

Park water and sewage improvements. In the '98-99 activities, we will see improvements in roads, sewer and water, and solid waste upgrading for parts of the Provincial Whiteshell Park, an area that again we are glad to now be able to put some capital investment in place because of the aging infrastructure. Campground reservation, which I know is a coveted interest on the part of my critic from Dauphin, will be interested to know the SR&J Customer Care Call Centre of Winnipeg have been awarded a contract to operate the park reservation service for the '98 camping season.

Central service for booking campsites and family vacation cabins at our parks was introduced last year because of an increased interest in camping by Manitobans and our visitors from out of province, as well. Reservation requests have tripled. As a result, the service will be expanded from 20 to 38 locations for the 1998 season. The reservation system will provide a better, more convenient service for vacation planning in our parks; allows our visitors to plan well ahead and book their campsites. It does put us, I believe, very firmly in a position where we can respond to the increased demand that we anticipate for the year of the Summer Games, plus it puts us in part of a modern network across North America, for the people outside of our boundaries can inexpensively, conveniently access a system that will put them in a place to reserve a stall, if you will, or a campsite and plan their

vacations in a much more proactive and a much more accurate method.

I should point out—and I am going partly by memory on this issue, but it seems to me that we have already dealt with about equivalent to two-thirds of the number of reservations that we handled under the old system. So while we acknowledge some controversy and some concern when this was first implemented, I think even the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers) will want to applaud the high level of activity and the very positive outlook that this provides for our camping season. No, the Destinet comes from Mississauga, Ontario, not from the United States. I hope the member will want to put something on the record apologizing for saying that they were an American company because they, in fact, were a successful Canadian company that bought out an American opportunity, rather than the other way around.

We are looking forward to a very positive, and have spent some considerable time this past year developing a positive, working relationship with the Manitoba Wildlife Federation, and the Lodges & Outfitters Association. I hope to be able to continue in that vein, because the users and the people on the ground have to work closely and co-operatively with the department or any kind of opportunity for development or, if necessary, enforcement that occurs across the province will likely be less than successful, if we do not have the fullest co-operation of those who are involved in the end use or involved in the assisting us with the conservation of the resource in question.

Mr. Chairman, I will leave my comments there.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the minister for those comments. Does the official opposition critic, the honourable member for Dauphin have an opening comment?

Mr. Stan Struthers (Dauphin): Mr. Chair, I appreciate the comments put on the record by the minister, and thank him for flagging some of the issues that have been prevalent this past year in the Department of Natural Resources.

Many things have happened since the last time we sat here in the Legislature and talked about Natural

Resources Estimates, many things that I think are good, many things that are not so good, and I am looking forward to discussing all those issues with the minister over the next period of time as we discuss and debate some of the issues involved in running a department such as the Department of Natural Resources.

Let me be clear, Mr. Chair, this is one department that is very interesting. This is a department that has quite a broad spectrum of issues that need to be dealt with on behalf of Manitobans. It is far reaching. It has implications in every corner of our province. The issues that officials in the Department of Natural Resources deal with on a day-to-day basis are issues that are very important to Manitobans no matter where you live. You can live in the middle of the city of Winnipeg and still end up in the middle of a Natural Resources issue. Dutch elm disease is one that comes to mind. It is not a department in which you can be confined in any way.

I think that is what makes this department so exciting to be associated with, and even though I am the critic, I am on the opposition side of the House, I want to state unequivocally that I am very impressed. Anytime I have contact, looking for information, looking for assistance of some kind with people within the department, I am never disappointed in their willingness to co-operate to make sure that all sides of an issue are discussed, that we are not dealing on the basis of misinformation or lack of information or lack of knowledge or lack of expertise. But it has been my experience, not just in the past year, but in the three years in which I have been the critic of Natural Resources, that people within the department who work for Natural Resources have been very helpful and deserve to have their credit that is due to them expressed by myself and by others. I am sure the minister takes every opportunity that he can as well to make sure that the people within his department know that they are doing a good, professional job in helping us as MLAs do our job better as well.

As I said, a lot of things have happened in Natural Resources since last year at this time, since last year's Estimates. Probably the biggest event is the flood of the century. In 1997, we saw unprecedented levels of water flowing through the Red River Valley, at some points not flowing quick enough as it backed up and

formed what became known as the Red Sea. This was a very major event in the history of our province.

* (1450)

Again, I want to take a minute or two to congratulate those people who worked some pretty late nights, some pretty long hours, including people right here in the Legislature who got involved in the flood-fighting effort that Manitobans took on at this time last year, people within the Department of Natural Resources and other government departments who worked together to try to help Manitobans who had gotten hit by this flood. People at the R.M. level and town council level in all the communities that were affected by the flood deserve to be patted on the back for the work that they did at that time, the citizens themselves forever being vigilant and monitoring their own situations and helping their neighbours out when their neighbours needed a hand.

Mr. Chair, it was my hope at the time that that kind of co-operative attitude, neighbour-helping-neighbour kind of approach, would be continued not just when the flood was at its crest and as we sandbagged together to try to salvage what Mother Nature was ravaging, it was my hope that that kind of approach would be carried out right through the whole life of this flood which was a lot longer than just the period of time of the water being high. That, of course, was the most pressing, the most dangerous period, but we all had and still have a responsibility to those people in the flood area who got negatively affected by Mother Nature, by the high levels of the water.

In some cases, and I say this openly, there were good examples of people within Natural Resources and Government Services who tried their best to help people once the waters had receded. However, in other cases, there are still many people who approach us on this side of the House to talk about having spent the winter outside of their homes, still looking for compensation, still asking questions about flood-proofing. So even though the flood has subsided for just over a year now, there are still issues that we need to be dealing with in terms of the flood of 1997. I look forward over the next little while to hear some more comments from the minister in terms of the flood of '97 and floodproofing and the kind of ideas that we can

come up with to prevent and mitigate a disaster of this magnitude again in the future.

Another example of something that has changed, which I think is a pretty major step, from the last time we met in Estimates was the decision by this government to issue sidearms for Natural Resources Officers, an issue I know that the NROs have been lobbying for for quite some time and other groups have been a little nervous about for quite some time. But, however, the decision was made, and I think it is an issue which some time needs to be spent with here in the Natural Resources Estimates.

A number of wildlife issues as well have been ongoing over the last year. Certainly the most controversial, I suspect, would be the continuation of the capture of wild elk for purposes of ranching. That, I would think, along with many other wildlife issues will be discussed here over the next period of time as well.

The minister touched briefly on Manitoba parks, our provincial parks. Certainly an area in Manitoba which is absolutely integral to overall tourist strategy for Manitoba is our provincial parks. I think we have a lot of beautiful, natural areas that we need to be showcasing for people, not just within Manitoba, but I would like to see a strategy for promoting our parks outside of Manitoba along with a co-operative approach with the federal government, since there are federal interests in Manitoba. I know just in my own area there are almost half a million people a year that come into Riding Mountain National Park. I think this is a great area of opportunity for those communities surrounding Riding Mountain National Park to work in a co-operative way with both the province and the federal government in terms of economic development.

There are, as the minister pointed out, some controversial decisions made this year concerning the reservation system for campsites. I am hopeful that what the minister says about SR&J, the company they have hired to take park reservation systems, I hope actually that the minister is right. I hope that finally, once and for all, the confusion that has been surrounding this whole area is cleared away. I want to point out that the statement that he made here just a few minutes ago sounded a lot like the statement he made

when we first got into the whole Destinet argument a year ago. So that I am sure will cause a little bit of discussion here in Estimates.

Another issue I think that we need to be discussing here in Estimates is forestry. The forest industry in Manitoba is key to our economic growth as a province. I think that what the minister must keep uppermost in his mind is that the forestry agreements have to also reflect the word "sustainability." It is not wise to move on forestry agreements that somehow restrict our ability as a province to grow economically in the future simply for the sake of making a quick buck cutting trees down in Manitoba. So there will be some discussion in terms of forestry as well.

Another area that always is uppermost in people's minds in terms of maintaining a way of life and maintaining another industry in our province deals with fisheries. It was my privilege to attend meetings of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Department of Fisheries and Oceans, a committee that listened to people in The Pas, Grand Rapids, Gimli, and Selkirk while they were in Manitoba. This committee, I think in its wisdom, is looking at our inland fisheries.

It was not too many years ago that I remember attending a convention in Halifax. One of the sessions for the morning had to deal with Canada's fishing industry. You heard from a lot of people from the Maritimes and you heard from a lot of people from British Columbia. When I put my hand up to contribute to the conversation, I think there were people looking at me and thinking: what is the prairie gopher from Manitoba going to be able to contribute to this discussion?

So I gave them, as well as I could, a description of the inland fishery in Manitoba. I tried to give them a little bit of a history of the importance of this industry to our province, and I think there were people who were quite surprised at the extent to which fishing is important to our province here right in the middle of not only the country but the whole continent.

So I am glad that the federal committee came to Manitoba to hear from fishermen and from other people about concerns regarding the fishing industry. It is my hope that their recommendations reflect what fishermen

and others had told them here in Manitoba. It is also my hope that the minister in the federal government responsible for Canada's fishing industry will take seriously the recommendations that this committee will make. It is also my hope that the provincial government here in Manitoba will lobby the federal minister to take seriously the recommendations that will eventually come out of the hearings that took place here in the province of Manitoba.

So I look forward to some discussion on some of the areas that I think were found that were in common from The Pas to Grand Rapids to Gimli to Selkirk. There were areas I think that we can work towards that all four sites for these—and Winnipeg, they also heard the people in the city of Winnipeg as well, but I think there was lots of common area that the federal government and this provincial government can move on quickly that would help out our fishing industry, and I look forward to a discussion on that.

* (1500)

Other than that, Mr. Chairperson, I just welcome the opportunity to partake in the Estimates again this year and look forward to the information that the minister and his staff will provide me. With that, we can discuss Estimates for Natural Resources.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the critic from the official opposition for his remarks. I would remind members of the committee that debate on the Minister's Salary item, 12.1.(a), is deferred until all other items on the Estimates of this department are passed.

At this time we invite the minister's staff to take their place in the Chamber. If the minister is ready, would he like to introduce his staff present at this time?

Mr. Cummings: Mr. Chairman, I have Deputy Minister Dave Tomasson and Director of Finances Bill Podolsky with me today, and given the comments from the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers)—I distinctly heard him say that if the minister did not get a raise that certainly the administration should.

Mr. Chairperson: The item before the committee is item 12.1 Administration and Finance (b) Executive Support (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$398,500.

Mr. Struthers: I think this might be an appropriate line upon which to ask a few questions having to do with the Schedule 5 on page 11 of the Estimates book that I have received from the minister.

Mr. Cummings: Yes.

Mr. Struthers: I am looking at Regional Operations 12.2, and I am noticing some changes in full-time equivalents. I thought it might be good just, instead of wading through line by line, to do all of these at once and clump it up that way. It might be easier to handle in the Estimates procedure. The Eastern Region looks to me like it has been decreased by two full-time equivalents, and I am wondering if there is an explanation, if there is a good reason for that, or should I be concerned?

Mr. Cummings: If the member is looking for an explanation of the two staff years, we will have some further justification for that in a moment, but he would probably acknowledge that overall we have pretty much maintained staff years and increased slightly in most areas. This pretty much reflects the fact that the department has received similar funding to previous years. I do not think we would ever say that we are overstaffed. Certainly our regional staff that I have been associated with are very busy and have a multitude of issues that they have to deal with.

Now, the Eastern Region, there might be some explanation that I can provide for the background on that. The detail of that particular issue is that we did transfer in one staff member and some appropriate funding dollars into central so that that particular individual could perform a wider range of duties related to Parks promotions.

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Chairperson, so it looks to me like about a 1.9, almost two full-time equivalent lost to Eastern Region. One person has been transferred to the Central Region. That still leaves—I think what I am getting at is the minister maybe answered half of the question. I would like to know why the Eastern Region is down that many.

Mr. Cummings: As well, the other number that the member is referring to, we would be looking at what

would have been a term position, and those dollars are being redirected into operations.

A further explanation of the transfer of that one staff year, that person is still available, only on a broader basis. Using the knowledge and the background that person has of Parks promotions, it was a made-to-measure type of transfer, one which I fully support.

Mr. Struthers: Okay, I understand the reasoning when the minister says that it is a broad position, the promotion of parks. It makes sense to me that it does not necessarily have to be located within the Eastern Region. The reason why I was concerned, when I originally went through the figures provided here in Schedule 5, was that there are a lot of things happening in the Eastern Region. The minister has acknowledged that all the regions are very busy, and I would concur with him on that.

The people that I talk to in the eastern region of our province are talking about a lot of things happening in that part of the province, and I was originally concerned that if there are a lot of things happening in the Eastern Region, then it seemed to be almost two fewer people to handle the workload that is there.

Are there any plans that the minister has, or the department has, to get the full-time equivalent number back up? In other words, is he considering adding two more people to the Eastern Region to make up for the difference of having two people leave the Eastern Region, or does he see that there is not a need for that to happen? Can the Eastern Region continue to do the same work with the full-time equivalents that are listed here?

Mr. Cummings: Well, Mr. Chairman, interestingly enough, the position which the member is asking about specifically was actually central. By the way, I did not mean Central Region. I meant into head office in Winnipeg, not Central Region. That is actually where the position came from a while ago and was since moved back in there.

Mr. Edward Helwer, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

The bigger picture, of course, we always want to make sure that we operate as efficiently as possible. In

this department, as many others, there is probably a judgment that has to be made eventually as to how thin personnel can be spread, how competently the job is being administered or performed on the ground. I find a very high level of professionalism among our people in the department. The willingness to go the extra mile is quite evident.

* (1510)

I will touch, at some future point before we are done in response to the member's comments, about the willingness of Natural Resources' people to jump to the pump, as it were, in relationship to the flood but, in terms of regional operations, I am sure that he would not want us to reduce the Western Region because, even there, there is a lot of territory to cover, even though there is not as much park activity as you see in the east.

But I would suggest that the number of complaints coming out of the Eastern Region has not risen or is not unreasonable. That is not the only way or not necessarily any way to judge performance, except that an awful lot of the parks issues are a matter of one-on-one communications sometimes. That is only part of their job, I know. But it is a part that can generate an awful lot of activity, if it is not handled carefully. My observations are that the departmental people responsible in that area have done a good job of minimizing issues that they are not able to mediate right within their region. But obviously all of the regions and all of the staff in these areas are fully employed.

Mr. Struthers: I thank the minister for correcting the error which I suppose I made. Maybe the older I get, the worse my hearing becomes. I am glad he straightened me out with the transfer from Eastern to Central Region. I did not mean to get the people in Central Region all excited about getting a new staff person in there inadvertently. What I do not see reflected here, though, is if the person was transferred from the Eastern Region to the Central Office or, I suppose, that is Headquarters Operations in line 12.2 under Regional Operations. I do not see the corresponding increase in that line in schedule 5, unless there has been another full-time equivalent lost on that line to allow for this transfer to take place. Unless

again I am not reading that properly, but maybe the minister can straighten me out on that one as well.

Mr. Cummings: I guess that is the problem with getting into this particular type of detail because sometimes it is a matter of semantics. We did not lose the individual but the term position, as I indicated. The position that that individual was in, the equivalent of those dollars was put into operations in that region and, as I understand, the mathematics of it, the individual filled a vacant position but with a different set of responsibilities. That is one thing that I have, a different set of responsibilities, from what the position he filled previously, exercised because that is the other thing that happens today in government.

The member has heard me say this before, I think probably in Lake Dauphin advisory board meetings and other places, that government and government administrators today have to be nimble in terms to get the job done with a most efficient and probably, in many cases, minimal flexibility to deal with what no one would deny have been tough fiscal measures that we have imposed on ourselves over the last number of years. That means that there are times when you have to decide what is the priority that you want to get done, as opposed to other functions that you want to do but maybe are not as high on the priority list. Sometimes those decisions result in this type of a change, where we made a priority out of looking at, in this case, this individual being very knowledgeable and excellent at putting his best foot forward for Parks and the issues surrounding it, that they could communicate that appropriately both within the department and without.

Let us be open about it. There is certainly nothing—I am not reticent about responding to the question at all. The individual who was in this position was also the one who has been our lead spokesman this year on Parks activities and is doing an excellent job in that respect.

Mr. Struthers: Line (g) talks about the Fire Program, and I notice that there is one full-time equivalent increase in the Fire Program, which I do not mind seeing. I think that we have seen in the past there is a lot of work for people in the Fire Program to be doing. Hopefully this year there is not an overabundance of work to be done by our fire crews and people

associated with the Natural Resources Fire Program. If it is along the terms of preventing forest fires in the first place, that is a good thing. If it is in terms of having to fight a whole bunch of fires that are dangerous to people and result in the loss of significant numbers of timber, then that is a whole other ball game.

So I would like the minister to maybe indicate what type of position has been increased under the Fire Program, and if he can, the responsibilities that a new position within the Fire Program may have. It would give him an opportunity—this is one of those cases, Mr. Chair, that instead of me complaining about losing positions in a region, I want to give the minister a chance to tell about an increase in a program, so I think that may be a good thing for the minister to stand and talk about.

Mr. Cummings: The number of things that perhaps do not entirely show up on this line because—and I will explain in a minute or so the relationship between ourselves and Government Services. Let me deal with the one full-time equivalent salary dollars. We actually have three people in that staff year. We have enough time for an air attack supervisor, and we get two 44-week bird-dog officers. We also have, in this area, increased expenditures for fixed cost for two additional water bombers. When the member referenced whether or not we are preventing fires or whether we are fighting fires, this is, I suppose, an example of where not only within the department do we have to make priorities, we have to make those priorities against other major expenditures in government, because this was the year that we were able to purchase, at a very advantageous price, two water bombers from Quebec. Those are now part of the fleet.

This, with all of the pressures on health, education and social services for additional expenditures, which are made on a daily basis in this House, I hope the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers) will want to provide some credit for the balance that has to be brought to government expenditures under these times when there is a solid tax base. But you cannot start spending like drunken sailors because you have reached a different revenue status for the province, as opposed to 1990, '88, '89, '90 when very serious financial circumstances forced decisions on the government at that time.

* (1520)

So bringing on two additional water bombers, some additional fixed costs for them and for the staff years, the costs of running them will show up as part of the—they are Government Services recovered from Natural Resources, however, and that money, frankly, is in support of the concept that the Department of Natural Resources has been putting into place on an increasing basis the last few years and that is to put an increasingly higher priority on our capability of responding to fire outbreaks.

I do not see that so much as fighting fires as I do see it preventing fires because the quicker we arrive on the scene where there has been a lightning strike or something of that nature, provided the entire forest is not tinder dry, it allows us to knock down those fires before they become significant. The water bombers are an important part of that response, also the fact that over the last couple of years we have had an early man up and more significant man up by the initial attack crews so that they can respond in the manner that I have just referred to on a more timely basis.

As we sell more and more of the opportunity to harvest forest in this province, we have to make sure that we protect the investment that we have in the forests. The spruce budworm program of three-quarters-of-a-million dollars or more that I indicated earlier is a significant part of that because you want to be protecting the harvestable forest before it becomes damaged, and particularly if it is in an area that you do not have road access to now but may in 10 years foresee harvesting opportunity in there, things like early attack into areas that a few years ago might not have been so well protected and particularly up the east side, the two water bombers gives us additional protection there, additional response capability.

But it is all part of an overall response to the fire prevention, fire elimination, if you will. Obviously education, all those other things, are part of fire prevention, but this is very much part of an early response so that the losses are kept to a minimum. As a matter of fact, last year I think was an outstanding year even though there were some significant fire possibilities in some of our harvestable cutting areas. We were able, with the early man up, as the department

refers to it, to respond and keep those to a minimum of losses. Last year was in fact a pretty good year in that respect.

Mr. Struthers: I appreciate the minister putting into context the spending that Natural Resources did with the additional two water bombers. I want to suggest to him though that not many people accuse this government of spending like drunken sailors. Most people accuse this government of not spending, period. I, for one, do not for one minute suggest that he start spending like a drunken sailor. What I suggest to the minister is that he did a pretty good job just now of showing how some smart spending can save us some money down the road in terms of fire prevention.

I am looking at the overall full-time equivalent numbers for the Department of Natural Resources on page 13, Schedule 5, and I note that overall we have gone from \$1,115.09 down to \$1,103.85, a loss of about 11.5. So far we have talked about two of those full-time equivalents going down in the Eastern Region and one going up in the Fire Program for a net loss of one so far.

Then we get into the Parks and Natural Areas, line (4) Park Operations and Maintenance, and we see that there is a loss of over 10 full-time equivalents in the area of Parks Operations and Maintenance.

Over the course of the last couple of years, the last couple of Estimates that we have been through, the minister has been fairly clear in stating that one of the reasons why we have all these increases in park fees, one of the reasons why we are charging people an entrance fee into our parks, one of the reasons we now charge seniors in parks, one park fee after another has been tacked onto people wanting to enjoy our parks in this province, the minister has always maintained that that revenue would be plowed back into our parks in maintenance, in the construction of new things for our parks.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

So I was quite surprised, given the statements that the minister has made in the past, to realize that 10 full-time equivalents have been taken out of Park Operations and Maintenance. I would like the minister

to explain to me where those positions have come from, what those positions were doing before they were lost from this schedule that is before me, what the overall effect this is going to have on the maintenance and operations of our parks.

Mr. Cummings: Again, I guess I will have to take a little bit of time to explain what the concept was here. Certainly I am quite prepared now and any other time to defend the fact that as much as possible the dollars that we are seeking in revenue are being used to make sure that the province and the users in particular are getting their money's worth out of parks.

The fact is that we transferred that salary money into operations to provide funding for beach safety programs at Winnipeg and Birds Hill Park were two areas where the additional dollars were spent. That in itself is a troublesome issue. We do need to have safety patrols in my view. On the other hand, we know the Markesteyn report from the original inquests that have occurred historically as a result of accidents that occurred within our system.

Of course, the concern is that people think there are lifeguarding duties or lifeguards on hand that will protect everyone who might be on that beach from any potential drowning. In fact, it is virtually an impossibility to guarantee that, and that was pointed out in that inquiry as I recall. So it is with some considerable care and caution that we invest in this area, but reminding people that beach safety is very important and that the ability to warn people when they are getting themselves into untenable or unsafe situations, at the same time without giving them undue comfort if you will, or inappropriate comfort, that somehow this is a lifeguarding service, the same as it would be at the local town pool where you have crystal clear waters, and you have the ability to limit the number of people who may go into the water.

There are very strict rules about the relationship between the number of guards to the number of people in the pool. There is an ability to, on the sounding of a signal, tell people to clear the pool and make sure that there is not someone who is in trouble in the pool. So people come from that environment to a natural environment of a beach, and if they do not change their thinking from that environment that I just describe to

that of a beach environment where, in fact, physically it is pretty near impossible to provide that type of a safety assurance, No. 1; and No. 2, where we do have, however, a need to put safety programs on people who will do some enforcement on the beaches in place. That is the nature of the expenditure that is going in there.

* (1530)

I just wanted to add that caveat because again that is very critical that that be seen in that light and not as an attempt to restore lifeguarding capability to our beaches. It is, by experience and by what I hope was learned from that Markesteyn report, that this is an area where we have to be very careful about how we educate the public in the manner of how they view it. Some of that money will also go toward the new Spruce Woods Visitor Centre and to cover some increased operating costs.

So while the number of employees is down somewhat, some of those numbers will not be the same people probably, but numbers will still be employed, obviously, in the areas that I just referenced, where those dollars will be redirected in the interpretative centre and in the beach safety areas. I do not know if you can say it is an exact trade-off, but certainly the numbers of people employed are probably similar, although they will have different skill sets.

Mr. Struthers: Well, of course, Mr. Chair, the Markesteyn report is something that is important and something that should form the basis of decision making when it comes to beach patrols and beach safety, and I agree with many of things that the minister has been saying about not confusing those two responsibilities with a full-fledged lifeguard that would be sitting on a chair at the McCreary Pool. I understand the difference.

I must say that any move that this government can make to improving safety at our beaches is going to get the support of this side of the House. However, I still notice that the drop in the total full-time equivalents for the entire Department of Natural Resources is still pretty much equivalent to the drop along the line entitled Park Operations and Maintenance. So I do not know if the minister was trying to tell me that those

positions have simply been moved, which would indicate to me that the drop would not be seen on the bottom line for full-time equivalents in the entire Natural Resources department. It seems to me that that full-time equivalent would not drop at the bottom. Maybe I am not following this, but maybe the minister could help me out with that.

Mr. Cummings: We have about 700 part-time employees who are hired during the summer. Those are seasonal. They are three to four months, the amount of time that they are employed. I am pointing out that the equivalent salary dollars that are here, these dollars are switched into Operations, but the bodies do not show up as numbers in hiring because they are brought in under contract for different purposes.

I am not trying to play a shell game on the number of people, but this number that is here in terms of total full-time equivalents is in itself very deceiving because most of those would have three people in one staff year. Some of them will have different numbers. So it is not a shell game. It is a reality of the seasonality of the work in Parks and how you best manage those dollars. Sometimes you bring in a crew; sometimes you contract. For example, the lifeguarding is contracted so the numbers would not show up, frankly, but the expenditure still shows up.

Mr. Struthers: Of course, Mr. Chair, the bottom line is whether the work is getting done or not, which leads me to ask the question of the minister, what is not being done now under Parks Operations and Maintenance that was being done last year before the 10 full-time equivalent positions were moved out of that area of the Department of Natural Resources? Is the work still being done but by other people, or is there something that Parks Operations and Maintenance is not doing now that they did last year?

Mr. Cummings: Well, I do not want this answer to appear to be a smart-aleck response because it is not intended that way, but it is like when the member opposite was teaching school and he had a basketball team or a volleyball team that needed to take on a bigger challenge, and that is frankly what we—there is nothing in Parks that we have specifically said shall not be done this year. We are expecting the work to be done as efficiently as possible. You may have to do

double time in some areas and prioritize a little bit of the work within the various operations, but we are not intending to back away from the work that is being done.

We do look for opportunities to contract. There have been some small wayside parks over the last few years that we have farmed out, contracted out or leased for private interest. The member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk), that should bring a smile to her face because now undoubtedly she will want to talk to me about one of her favourite local watering holes, but the fact is that the department tells me they are not anticipating that there is a list of projects that will not be done.

But there is another point that we passed over very quickly, and that is in relationship to the overall Parks budget and whether or not people are getting their money's worth out of Parks. Let us remember that there are, in Capital Expenditures, big chunks of money that have to be spent.

Falcon Lake is a good example where the lagoon has been—as Minister of Environment, I think for seven years I have been telling the minister of parks that he needed to be looking at the lagoon in Falcon Lake. It is ironic that I now have the opportunity to actually do something about it, but that is, in fact, in our budget to upgrade that. If you look at Falcon Lake, if the member is familiar with it at all, it is becoming an aged facility, there and West Hawk. They have a certain 1950 charm to them but, after a while, some of that infrastructure needs to be upgraded and approved. That is the kind of area where you can drop a million bucks and you really do not see what you have done for it, to tell you the truth.

So, that is in terms of if you were to drive into the town, let me put it that way, the first place you visit is not the lagoon when you are on your holidays. So that is the kind of expenditure that also, frankly, needs to be addressed, and that is one of the areas that we are struggling with, there and in a few other parks as well.

Mr. Struthers: The minister is partly right when he talks about my background in teaching and coaching. Being somebody who has coached in little, small schools taking on bigger schools, sometimes you do ask

your team to do more with the energy that they have left. But I also, Mr. Chair, know that you cannot field the volleyball team with three people. You have to have certain minimums. You have to have a certain number of people out on the floor to do the job. So my concern, if the minister can convince this House, can convince me that people within Parks Operations and Maintenance can do more with the same number of people and if he can get that kind of efficiency, that is fine.

But my worry is that if we lose 10 full-time equivalents this year, lost some in years past, if we lose some more the next year, I think the minister can understand that there would be a concern that there are not enough people to do the same amount of work every year. No matter how professional and how good the workers and people working within Parks are, if you go down to a certain level, the job will not get done. So that is the concern that I have there.

Then, as I have stated, I was a little bit surprised to see that these full-time equivalents were coming out of a line which the minister has claimed would not suffer, an area in which the minister was actually rationalizing the increases in fees that have taken place over the last several years by this government, an area that we have gotten many calls on with confusion from everything from reserving of sites to confusion in general park maintenance and operations. So I was a little bit surprised to see full-time equivalents being decreased in that particular area of Natural Resources. I would like to know what part of Parks and Operations is not going to happen this year as a result of a loss of 10 full-time equivalents?

Mr. Cummings: Mr. Chairman, the member dwells on one line and believes that he can build a case. We are talking, as I said, almost 700 staff years on a part-time basis. You can manage around those 10 staff years simply by the number of weeks that certain employees—you might still have the same number of employees. You might manage the number of weeks differently in the end. Now that may be less in terms of dollars, but if we are looking at the same line, I think you are going to find that the Operations and Maintenance and in fact the dollars are slightly higher year over year, the dollars themselves. When this is linked back to whether or not are we refurbishing our

parks as best we can, considering that we are charging more for entrance fees and user fees within the system, the answer is yes.

Remember, however, this department is also supported significantly from general revenue. While some of the dollars go directly into activities of this department such as in the parks, when we look at the fact that we are spending \$1.5 million on parks capital this year, including refurbishing the lagoon at Falcon, then you have to acknowledge that we are beginning to put some of those significant dollars back into the park system. You could always argue that it is not enough. You could argue that we put more, but we also have a million and a half or more going into waterways and those sorts of initiatives. So parks is part of the bigger picture. But in the end, parks have not been shortchanged. Parks have in fact received some significant expenditures, even though some of those dollars do not show up here under Operations and Maintenance. These are branch responsibilities that the member is looking at.

* (1540)

Mr. Struthers: Since we were talking a bit about parks and operations and maintenance, given some of the discussions we have had last year, particularly last year during Estimates, we had an extensive discussion on the revenues that are being brought in through fees, implemented by this department, and trying to figure out just where those fees are going once they are collected. At that time I had maintained that \$1.6 million was being brought in through the revenues. It was \$1.6 million in fees that this department was levying against people who are using our parks. At that time only \$300 million of that was going back into the parks.

An Honourable Member: \$300,000.

Mr. Struthers: Sorry, \$300,000, exactly. Let me start that again since I goofed it up. The contention at the time that I made was that \$1.6 million was being raised in revenue by the Department of Natural Resources and only \$300,000 were being put back into the operations and maintenance of parks.

At the time, the minister was telling me that there would be construction going on, improvements to our

parks, new outhouses being built and picnic tables being built. On and on goes the list. I am hopeful that the minister can, today, show me some figures, can convince me again that there is significant money going back into provincial parks from the fees that are being collected by this government.

This is not just one MLA, one Natural Resources critic wanting the answer to this question. There are a lot of people who believe that if we are going to have provincial parks that are worth anything to Manitobans and to tourists, we do have to put money into them. Nobody is going to argue with that. It has always been my contention that if you want something decent, you pay for it. I applaud every time this minister announces more money going into a certain park here or there across our province. I think that is a good thing.

But what I want the minister to do is to show to me that there is a significant portion of the fee revenue going back into our parks. He maintained last year at this time in Estimates that it is a very tricky question, a very hard question to answer, because the money originally goes back into general revenue and then is disbursed from there. But I contend that people who use our parks want to be assured that that fee they are paying when they enter the park is going back into the parks, and not going back just into the general revenue of the government for the government to spend wherever it likes. I think people want to have that assurance so I am hoping that the minister will be able to present a case, this time around, that would convince people that these fees are in fact going back into our parks.

Also, the minister might be able to indicate what percent of the revenue is going into parks and what percent of the revenue is going into general revenues. I just want to point out that it has been done with the hunting fees where the minister was clear. He said that half would go into general revenue, half of the fee that the hunter pays, and that the other half of that revenue would be going right back into maintaining habitat for animals that we hunt. I think the hunting community was quite glad to hear that explanation. I think they agreed that they should be paying for part of that through their fees and that made it a lot easier for people to accept that particular fee increase. I am hoping he can do the same with the park fees today.

Mr. Cummings: Well, if the member wishes to continue to pursue this line of thinking then we are going to have a long philosophical wrangle because less than an hour—well, about two hours—ago in Question Period, members of his side of the House, his colleagues, were up hassling the government about its expenditure in the social services, increase the expenditures there.

I think almost on a daily basis in the last couple of weeks they have been up raising Cain about whether or not there has been enough money put aside in health care. From time to time, in my own mind, I accuse them of believing that the only thing that is wrong with health care is that it needs more dollars. Frankly, that is probably not a debate we need to have in Natural Resources Estimates, but it does raise the issue about whether or not Natural Resources has anything to contribute to the overall well-being of the citizens in this province, and whether the revenues Natural Resources takes in are only the revenues of the Department of Natural Resources, or is there a reason to believe that we have to contribute to part of the overall process of government and the cost of government and the services to the public in this province.

Services—we can focus on services within parks, and I believe I can defend the amount of money that is spent on our parks. We could spend more, but we could, however, look at the fact that once you get past the gate fees, we have increased enormously the user fees within our parks for those who cottage—enormously, compared to what they were a few years ago. The member gets a grin on his face. I suppose he is going to quote me in the Dauphin Herald saying: the minister acknowledges park fees have gone up enormously. He better not, because the answer is that we are looking at a user fee in an area where we are the only jurisdiction that has cottaging in its parks system to any extent, and we have an enormous amount of what are really recreational communities within our park system. Should he and I, as modest users of that system, should we be building the roads in there? Should we be providing the garbage pickup? Should we be providing the sewer and water for the recreational homes that are sitting in—and they are homes, summer homes—the park setting in this province? I admire the people who have that opportunity, I support them, but I say to them,

through the fees that we have imposed over the last two or three years, that they have an obligation to contribute to the actual cost of providing the maintenance of the service to them in the parks.

That is another area where revenues have been increased, but they are directly related to the cost of service that are provided to those people. But are they revenue? Of course, they are revenue, but they are offsetting the expenditures that we are putting into those areas.

So let us not get on the single, narrow track that whether or not every dollar that comes in in revenue to this department goes in its entirety to offsetting the expenditures and enhancing the service. There are far more dollars spent in this department than there is revenue. This is not a department that provides enough revenue to cover its \$90-million budget.

* (1550)

So the member has some suggestions about where we get the tax dollars from. Perhaps he would like to see additional tax on fuel so that people could enjoy the parks better. Does he want wildlife hunting and user fees to increase more than they already have? I mean, where is he going to get the balance of that \$90 million? He uses the term, as do his colleagues very often, of general revenues as some sort of a slush fund that I and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) gleefully divvy up every Friday afternoon in preparation for the next week. I mean that is a ludicrous analogy, but it does come down to the very question of whether or not the Department of Highways, the Department of Natural Resources can, in fact, be revenue neutral and cost neutral in terms of their position within the expenditures of government.

We have responsibilities across a full spectrum, but focusing just on parks, on the one hand there is an obligation to make sure that parks are accessible to the general public, that parks are, indeed user friendly, that the services are there that people expect. They are, in fact, the key element of our tourism strategy, that people be attracted to come and see and share in the natural beauty and resources of this province.

That revenue, should we be paying more of our share for the advertising that Tourism does in order to attract

people to our parks, or should Tourism be paying Parks to improve the parks so that they could attract people better? I mean eventually you have to say that government has a responsibility, that the administration of government has a responsibility of bringing some balance to the income, the revenue and the expenditures of various aspects of government.

And, yes, in today's world, everybody looks more and more for a user-pay concept, but in health care, which is a constant source of haranguing across the floor here, user pay is not a system that our society has or should embrace, but we do need revenue to support that system. We need revenues to support the educational. Education is not a user-pay system. We believe in the public education system and the opportunity for all. Same thing with social services. We believe that we have to spend dollars to support those who need help in a time when they cannot help themselves.

So to say to Natural Resources that every dollar you take in in revenue must be reflected in a better park gate, a better road as you enter the park, more staff in the field and parks, after a while it starts to beg the question: does the member believe that there has to be balance in government or not?

Mr. Struthers: Before the minister gets too wound up and maybe it is a little late for that advice now, but I can understand why he would want to have a philosophical discussion on this because I think, as he did last year, he failed to be able to convince people that a significant enough portion of those fees, that revenue, was going back into parks.

Mr. Chairperson, I was also quite surprised to hear that the minister would be worried about what I put in the Dauphin Herald about him. I do not think he has to worry about that. What I think he should be worried about is putting in the Dauphin Herald, well before I ever go to the Dauphin Herald, so that people in Duck Mountain Provincial Park or Manipogo Park or Assessippi Park can read to see an accounting, an explanation of where their fees are going.

If the minister wants to check Hansard after we are finished here today, he will see that my previous question was not whether every dollar raised through revenue of these fees was going back into Parks. It was

what percent of those fees were going back into Parks and what percent was going into general revenue. Mr. Chairperson, I understand fully what general revenue means. I do not envision the minister sitting with the Finance minister on a Friday afternoon, chopping up money to be divvied out to people across the province. I know how that system works. So I think what the minister should do is today, instead of trying to shift the discussion, instead of getting too bent out of shape on this, should simply tell me, first of all, how much revenue is going to be created by the fees that we charge in our provincial parks? That would be a good place to start.

Mr. Cummings: Mr. Chairman, I look at park infrastructure and facility renewal \$2.7 million; I look at park road maintenance \$0.5 million, that looks to me like 3.2; park enhancement projects, another \$325,000, that looks like 5.25; park districts, another \$800,000, that puts it in the neighbourhood of \$4 million. Another park site development, another three-quarters of a million. That ignores equipment and facility maintenance, regional equipment and infrastructure, and the revolving inventory and all of the other aspects that go towards management in this area related to capital. So those are the type of capital expenditures.

I do not have the revenue figure at my fingertips, or I would share it with the member, that is not a problem. I think he should contemplate things in his own area, I believe, where there is a request for the Blue Lakes to be electrified. A problem that seriously grieved me, because I have some friends who use that area, who are dedicated to its improvement, who want to see dollars spent there, but in the end, they are probably going to need a quarter of a million, maybe more, maybe \$350,000 of tax dollars spent to supplement over and above the costs that they are prepared to pay for in sharing that electrification project.

Now the member is free to advocate in that area, but he is going to have to justify spending that much money to put electricity into an area where not everyone wants electricity, frankly. There are those who believe that that area should be kept to a low-level development in terms of the available services. Nevertheless, if I could see my way clear to electrify and justify that kind of a service for the number of people involved, I think I would be more than happy to support that type of

project. Nevertheless, I think the member would agree, when you balance that against all of the needs across our parks system, when you balance that against the number of people who would most likely benefit from that, that is probably not the No. 1 priority today when you consider some of the other areas of park enhancement that we are dealing with.

I think the member is confusing the user-pay concept that we are imposing on cottagers within our system as opposed to just the straight fee at the gate that we charge. Yes, we have increased the fee at the gate, the same as we have increased a number of hunting and fishing fees, but we have always done it within the context of what is the normal charge across all jurisdictions—Manitoba is generally neither high nor low—and is it commensurate with the level of service that is available in that particular area as well.

Certainly that has always been one of the considerations when we have dealt with those issues. So I have found, after the initial reaction to the fees that we were just discussing, that by and large people are quite satisfied and, I believe, appreciative of the fact that we have tried to place these fees in a context that is appropriate, the parks district fees, as I touched on, but also the various golf fees and other user fees within the system.

I would also indicate that we also have something that is very low compared to the—or not very low but relatively low compared to municipal charges, and that is where we start with a base charge of 4 percent of assessed value on the properties that are being charged a levy within the fees. We start with that base fee. Relative to other locations within the province, that is an advantageous rate.

* (1600)

So the member is welcome to put that into a charge that we need to return all that money into parks, but if he is implying that we are talking about a balance-in, balance-out, then I suggest that he is asking for a smaller parks budget than what we have today, because the fees do not cover the dollars that we invest in parks. In fact, I think we are looking at \$16.2-million worth of expenditures compared to revenues that would run somewhere between the \$5 million and \$6 million. So

if you take the cottagers out of that, I do not know how you would appropriately divide those services. It was difficult when we put the assessments together, but in fact we are not talking about revenues that are in excess of our expenditures. In fact, the general revenues, that terrible slush fund that the public thinks is a sinkhole for tax dollars, is in fact supporting parks in a large measure and undoubtedly will continue a long time into the future when you can make those comparisons.

Mr. Struthers: The minister indicated in his answer that he would not have at his fingertips the amount of revenue—

An Honourable Member: He just got it for you.

Mr. Struthers: Oh, well. He said he could not get them, they were not at his fingertips. If he has them now, if he has the total figure for the amount of revenue that these fees have brought into his department, I think it would be helpful to know that. Maybe he would like to take the opportunity to put those figures on the record for us.

Mr. Cummings: Mr. Chairman, I just provided the gross dollars. We are between \$5 million and \$6 million in revenue as opposed to a \$16.5-million expenditure in that area. So my point is, without breaking it down to the last 50 cents, you are looking at a ratio of 3 to 1—a third of the revenue, pardon me, that can be generated, and that is being generous. I mean, all the risk is still associated with whether or not you get a good season if you are talking gate fees. So at the same time it has got to do with the promotions that we are able to do both within the province and nationally and internationally in promoting people to come to our parks.

I just cannot pass this without giving a shot. Revenues are not necessarily the driving force behind our ability to provide a reservation system that is of international calibre that allows somebody from Washington state, if they want to plan a driving trip across parts of the States, and come up into Manitoba to come to our parks that they can with assurance phone one number and choose between over 30 parks as to where they might want to spend two or three nights while they are in Manitoba. They can do that well in advance. They can be assured that it will be

there. They will even have the ability to know the description of the lot without ever having been there, the dimensions of it. They will be able to look at the location if they have appropriate maps with them, and we will be able to then enter into what I consider a more normal position for us to be, which is actively part of a system that people become familiar with across North America.

Mr. Edward Helwer, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Manitoba is not freelancing on this. Manitoba is playing catchup, frankly, in some areas in order to do this. But, we have tried to do it at as low a cost way as possible. There are other jurisdictions that charge much more than our \$6.75 or whatever the figure is that we charge. We made that comparison a while ago. Yet, we know that going from zero to that is a significant jumpstart for those who are used to getting that service for free.

But while I am on a roll here, let me also say that most of the people who complained about that service were the ones who wanted to change what were traditionally transient sites into long-term sites, because they had found ways of getting around the transient limitations that were on the sites. Now with this system, they find that they are not on the advantageous footing that they used to have. Perhaps the bigger issue is: should we have more long-term sites in our parks? That is a legitimate question, but do not put some of our more valuable camping sites in a position where they are not available to the broad public on a first-come, first-served basis for a maximum of a certain number of days stay. That, I think, is where I would acknowledge that there were people who took umbrage with the system. But the system itself was not the problem. The park plan and what the lots were intended for was really the problem that they were railing against, but they used the reservation system as the point at which they were able to express their anger.

Mr. Struthers: I appreciate the minister, I guess twice now, putting those figures on the record. I appreciate him repeating them for me, so I could get them marked down here.

The minister started to speak of the reservation system that was in place that was changed by this

government to Destinet, a company that was hired to provide that service, and now a change again to SR&J, a company with their own particular park reservation system. In his opening remarks, the minister made some comments about Destinet and what he referred to. I think he used the word misinformation that was out there about the company, where it was located, whether or not it was an American company or not.

All those statements, before there is any kind of speculation going on about SR&J, I would like to give the minister the opportunity to tell us about this company, its location, number of people that it will be employing, its system for providing reservations for people who want to camp in our provincial parks because, quite bluntly, I received a lot of complaints about Destinet. I received petitions from campers complaining about the process that Destinet used to reserve campsites. I received petitions and phone calls and letters from people saying here is my bad experience this summer. I would have hated to have been a school teacher and asked that question at the beginning of September to kids to say, what did you do for the summer, because I am sure teachers got letters back saying, well, we had a terrible time camping at this park or that park. So before we get down the road of debating the government's latest move on park reservations, I would like to give the minister an opportunity to put on record right from the beginning just exactly what this SR&J is and how he sees the park site reservation system working.

Mr. Cummings: I appreciate the comments of the member for Dauphin, because this is important that there not be any misapprehension or misgivings I hope in the end on anyone's part about continuing with this initiative to drag our reservation system into the new millennium.

There is going to be a high demand, we anticipate, next year, and the member asked me: where is the location of SR&J? I cannot give him the street number, but I can tell you they are a Winnipeg-based group who bring about 40 years—the operators bring about 40 years of combined experience to the call centre business.

In moving in this direction, they went in certainly with their eyes open, as we did, in terms of recognizing that in establishing a call centre for this type of service,

it needs to be established in conjunction with other services that a call centre may be prepared to provide, because it is very seasonal. Something we learned last year with Destinet is not only is it seasonal, but it is very unusual—maybe not unusual in the call centre business but certainly interesting to me as an observer, an interested observer obviously—in that the majority of the calls come in between nine o'clock and 10:30 in the morning, and then things would just sort of die for the rest of the day.

* (1610)

You can explain the psychology of families and how they operate in that manner as well as I can, but it would appear that people went to work, perhaps made the call early or quickly when they got to work, or they left for work and after the kids were away at school, the remaining member of the family who was at the residence made the calls to attempt to get their reservations. So there would be a flood of calls that would come in for about an hour and a half in the morning, and then things would be dead, so, you know, very difficult to respond under those circumstances, but the very important and significant part of this is that, No. 1, compared to our old system, this way a person makes one call.

There needs to be adequate numbers of people to answer the calls. Now, there was some waiting last year with Destinet, and that is where the rollover came to their American affiliate, but it was still a Canadian company which actually had an American affiliate where they turned the calls to. But the member had his fun, and I hope that he will acknowledge that he was perhaps stretching the truth a little bit when he continues to refer to them as an American company. They were a Canadian company. Nevertheless, they are history and we learned from the Destinet experience.

The fact was most of the complaints that I received, and I think they are the same ones the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers) received, were in the main related to one particular, very attractive campsite where people were very annoyed that traditionally they had been able to stay camped on one particular site at that campsite for time in excess of what would be the normal transient period, but under the new system, of

course, because they had to rebook and they had to go through a system that put them on sort of an even footing with other interested users, they did not always get the renewal that they had expected.

For that I understand their frustration. I hope that they, in turn, will reason their way through what our campgrounds have been and generally are intended to be, that there needs to be a balance between transient campsites where people stay for varying lengths, but, you know, they come in and reserve for three days, a week, maybe 10 days, 14 days, but they know they are not going to be there all summer, and then we have seasonals where people book in, some of them in such demand that we have a draw in order to accommodate those who want to be part of seasonals and want to be there all year on any particular site.

But, interestingly enough, I have just been handed a note here that says that to date there have been no recorded concerns that have been raised with Otter Falls, that we seem to have brought at least some semblance of satisfaction in that area. The concerns did level off in mid-July and that arriving mid-week and leaving the site vacant until Friday—you know, registering and then leaving the site vacant until Friday—this system avoids that type of what sometimes might even be a very annoying process that a family used to have to go through in order to reserve themselves a site.

I mean, I know neighbours who would drive to Spruce Woods or other places, commandeered, register, whatever word you want to use, get themselves a site, then go home and then go back again when they were really ready for a day off when the weekend came. I mean, in reviewing how people should be served, that is not a good example of service. That is not a reflection on the people within the department who ran the previous service. It is just a reflection of the reality of what they were dealing with and the reality of how service can be delivered now in a much more efficient and practical way.

Destinet's agreement was that they were to deliver a service in Manitoba by January of '98, which it became apparent that they were not going to be able to deliver—they indicated that—so we were able to go through a list of appropriate candidates here, asked

them for proposals, and SR&J was the most appropriate survivor of that screening process. There were six, I believe, five that were involved in that process, and we believe that so far—and I have some figures to support this.

Actually, the figures are very interesting. As of eight o'clock, May 27, the system had received 2,401 calls. Out of that, we sold 2,056 reservations. Now, that is an astounding turnaround from the types of concerns and complaints that were raised previously about the inefficiency of the system. It also answers some of the concerns, I believe, that the department had and had expressed to me and that SR&J would have had on whether or not they would be able to respond appropriately.

Interestingly enough, the very first day when they opened, somebody was sitting on the recall button somewhere, and there were 1,800 hits in one day. They were not calls. They were hits, and they were getting busy signals. Well, that happened for one day, so I suspect that there were maybe a handful of people out there who were frustrated from a year ago, and they were determined that they were going to show me that this system would not work. But after they got past their fun on the first day, and I am making assumptions here, but I do not think I am too far wrong, they now have—pardon me, I said 1,800; I should have said 18,000 hits the first day.

I mean, let us be real here. Somebody was spending their day punching the recall button, trying to create havoc on the line. Now, either it was—well, there could be all sorts of motives, and I should not put anything on the record, but that information I have just given the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers), I think he probably would concur with me that somebody out there, or maybe more than one person, was deliberately trying to create havoc on the system in order to prove that it would not work.

But, anyway, once we got past that first day, we are now doing very well. Initially, in the start-up there were some calls—the average call was in excess of 10 minutes. We are now looking at five and a half minutes, and we are probably going to be less than that as the operators increase their competency. The number of people on the calls, about a dozen, I believe,

are employed, but as I said before, this also requires the company, in this case SR&J, to make sure that they have other work for these people, because once the reservation system for camping has gone by—and it will go by very quickly; June, July and it will drop off very quickly—they will need other work they can turn their hand to, and I am sure that that, with an experienced company, is important.

I would remind the member of one other thing that is very important in this respect. Manitoba has attracted a huge number of call centre and the subsequent jobs that go with it. I think the Minister of I, T and T (Mr. Downey) has the numbers at his fingertips, but it seems to me that we now exceed New Brunswick in terms of call centre jobs, and some of them inbound calls which are much more valuable jobs, some of them very well-paying jobs in the \$40,000 range that we have been able to attract here.

That does speak to the essence of when we originally sought someone to operate a call centre, whether or not we could exclude out-of-province bidders, and how would we be able to do that in the name of fairness when we are drawing in call centre jobs from all over North America? I mean, if you either believe in open trade and competition for this type of service which can be delivered in many cases from universal number of locations depending on the competency in the phone connections or whether you believe in an artificial barriers to competition. While Destinet is history, we do have another active call centre of which Destinet is part of their portfolio, and I am confident that this will be a pretty successful summer. We are counting on this being successful and competent delivery of service this summer so that we can pick up the increasing number of reservations we anticipate for next year.

* (1620)

Mr. Struthers: At the beginning of the minister's comments, he seems to be quite intent that I am going to admit that we were wrong in raising the issue of Destinet and its American connections. I want him to know, and I want him to be assured, that the bulk of the complaints that I got about Destinet and the reservation system were that the company was unfamiliar with the actual lay of the land here in Manitoba. They were unfamiliar with our parks, they were unfamiliar with,

for example, where overflow parks are located in the Whiteshell. If you cannot get in at one lake, in previous practice when people in Natural Resources were fielding these reservations calls, they knew that if you were overbooked and you could not get in at one lake, they knew that the overflow was another lake within the Whiteshell.

Those are the kinds of real, hands-on, practical things that people were angry about, and when they had to call a company in Mississauga, Ontario and then got bumped on to a call centre in San Diego, California, I think the callers were quite justified in being frustrated with the system that the Department of Natural Resources had set up. Of course I am not going to apologize for representing those concerns on behalf of Manitobans and park users here in Manitoba.

I want to also point out that if the minister wants to debate on whether or not we should be putting artificial barriers up, I want to make the case that you have to have somebody reserving campsites who knows all about our parks. Now, this, I do not think is an artificial barrier to anyone. I think it is good common sense to hire somebody who can do the job, who can do it well, who can maximize the number of sites that are being used over the course of the summer and who will lessen the amount of frustration that campers in this province have undergone for the period of the last year or so.

So, Mr. Chair, I am glad to hear the minister say that Destinet is part of our history and that it is not in charge of our reservation systems anymore in this province. My hope is that SR&J can do a whole lot better than what Destinet did, and I hope that the minister has learned some of the lessons from Destinet. I think listening to what he has said here today is that there are some lessons that they have taken from it.

I would imagine the whole Department of Natural Resources learned those lessons because they are very professional people and they would learn from the mistakes that this government made in the past. So part of the complaint, as well, that emanated from this whole Destinet fiasco is that Destinet seemed to come into the province on the hope that they were going to provide X number of jobs. I remember when we raised this whole question of our reservation sites in the

House that the minister was very quick to point out that Destinet was going to provide hundreds of jobs here in Manitoba. They were going to set up a call centre in Manitoba. All these great things were going to happen in Manitoba.

Just like most promises that this government makes, it did not come to fruition. I would like the minister to indicate how many jobs he sees being created as a result of SR&J getting this contract to do the reservations and maybe indicate what kind of dollar benefit he sees to the province of Manitoba in taking this decision to hire SR&J to handle our reservation system.

Mr. Cummings: Mr. Chairman, SR&J will probably staff up in a variable level so they keep the waiting time down. That is the advantage of them having a diversified portfolio. So we are looking at a minimum of, I would suggest, a dozen jobs that would be implemented, depending on the number of calls that come through, which is pretty well the same number that I had indicated.

And Destinet, it was their intention to come to Manitoba, expand into other services, and probably create about 20 or more jobs on an expanded service basis. So we are still putting the opportunity for job creation as part of this initiative, and it is in fact occurring. Whether the member would agree that it is the same jobs that I said were coming before or not, it is, in fact the same jobs employed by a different company however.

Something that I have to put on the record that the member for Dauphin and others very often conveniently overlook when they defend the previous system, that is, how did people like phoning in? Phone Spruce Woods; have you got any spaces for the July long weekend? No, we are booked. Okay, hang up. Dial another number. Another long distance call. Call any other one of the campsites. Each site in the main had to be called individually and the person looking for a booking had to pay a long distance charge each time they called.

Now we are talking about one charge that does cover obviously part of the in-bound 1-800 number calls, but provides access to over 30 sites. So, okay; Spruce

Woods is full; what else is available? Or if not, what else, is such and such a site, Asessippi, whatever, is it available? Is it booked, and so on?

Part of the criticism that the member levels is that there was not a strong base of knowledge on the part of those answering the phone. Part of the problem with that is related to the computer capacity to have all of the information displayed in front of the individual. It has to do with the program that is developed around that. I am not going to get into the technology of this, but it would follow that it makes sense if an operator has a call coming in and pulls up information in front of them about a particular site, if the system does not have the full capacity to display all of the relevant information for answering particular questions, then the alternative is to have somebody behind that phone who is probably a long-time park employee, who has had years of experience in all of the various parks and by memory can tell you whether or not site No. 37 down under the big oak tree is still available and if it will take a 25-foot goose neck.

That information has to be fed into a system, so that it can be run as any system would be. Whether it is the Holiday Inn, you might ask where does the Holiday Inn downtown here have its call centre when it takes reservations? I mean, I do not know the answer, but I am sure the large international hotel companies have systems similar to what I described. I can assure you that we have received a fair bit of information about the various systems that are available across North America to provide the system service to various park needs in various jurisdictions. Manitoba is small enough that the amount of reservations that we would take in in a year is probably equivalent to what the state of Texas would take in in a week. That puts into context the amount of money that needs to be spent and the amount of money that needs to be recovered from the users of the system in order to provide the totality of information that we have just talked about and the convenience of that registration from thousands of miles away without having to make several long distance phone calls.

It is one thing to be calling from Neepawa. It is not the cost so much as it is to know the list of parks and know the quality of the park. When you already know that as a resident of Manitoba, perhaps that is one thing. If you are calling from out of province, half way across

the continent, the best you are going to be doing is looking at a list that has some kind of a criteria on size and location, and so on, from which you will want to choose a park. So we need to have that ability for somebody from a long distance to make it one call, and to then make a decision based on the information they can get from that call as to whether or not they can stay at which park and provide the information as to whether or not their equipment is suitable for the site and make a reservation that is ironclad in terms of their being able to protect it.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Just think how frustrating it is for the person who is a half a day late coming in, or a day late coming into a park, and they have to drive, let us say, to Hecla Island, and they get halfway up there and they blow a tire or an axle or whatever, and they do not need the frustration of wondering whether or not their campsite is still going to be there when they get there.

This system is a prepaid system. That is one of the advantages of a prepaid system. It is a guaranteed system. While there were some criticisms of our system last year that sites were seen to be vacant, the fact is we were probably still getting revenue on those sites, because some people chose, by their own volition, to be a day late. All sorts of matters could have made them a day late, but they did not need to worry about whether that site was still going to be there because it was darn well paid for, and we were not going to take it away from them.

* (1630)

So that is the kind of business approach to this, the kind of tourism service, that I think is so important that we demonstrate in order to get the usage of our parks up, to make sure that people, not only Manitobans but others who want to take advantage of them—that is the kind of thing that once we get this working, and I am optimistic as of this point, that the people will feel much more confidence in the system, and not just because they will have better people on the phones or because they will have the information that we talked about earlier. It will be related to the total package that the people on the end of the phone are working with. The development of that package is a different

computer capability that we are dealing with. I think it will provide the service that the member thinks is necessary.

Mr. Struthers: How much money will this cost the province, the deal with SR&J? What are we paying them to provide these services?

Mr. Cummings: We are looking for the numbers here, Mr. Chairman. Yes, we are looking at the per-call basis. We have some additional costs that we have put into this system in order to guarantee that we will not be left without capability for some unforeseen reason we have to ever change operators in the future. The province will have some proprietary rights in this system for which we are prepared to pay.

There is also the question that the member raised in the House earlier about whether or not this system can accept a cheque, whether or not people can walk down and drop an envelope in through the door and make their reservation. I can assure him that those numbers are mighty, mighty small, but nevertheless I am not going to be in a situation of denying those who are demanding that service the opportunity to have it. So that is paid for on a per-minute, per-hour basis. It is not a huge charge, but it is a per-hour basis to cover off those that fall outside of the normal call centre cost.

In other words, if there is—and I would suspect there is going to be one person or maybe two who is going to want to walk a cheque down to wherever and put it through a mail slot and know that they have a chance to reserve. You know, they do not want to provide a credit card and perhaps they do not have a credit card, but those numbers are extremely small. It is more likely the person who, out of long-established habit as opposed to not having a credit card, is demanding the right to be able to do that. Some systems do deny it, but we, in order to make sure that no one in the public is denied the opportunity, will pay by the hour, and that will be a one-off cost, but I anticipate it will be very little, unless I misjudge society. But that is one charge.

The other is that we are trying to break down from the totality of the contract what this might be, and I will provide the number to the member in a moment. But we are paying some small cost over and above the \$6.75. That is the base charge that the user pays. The

province is paying some small additional cost, but I do not have that breakdown in front of me. We will get it as soon as we can.

Mr. Struthers: Will SR&J be responsible for the complete list of provincial parks and providing that service; or is there a set number that they will deal with?

Mr. Cummings: We are building on the work that was done by Destinet last year. There were 20 sites last year. That is moving to 38. I said 30 a few minutes ago; it is 38 in fact, and we will continue to build the bank of information. It is a matter of expanding the computer capacity and the bank of information in the main. But also it depends how good the communication is at the site itself to be able to accept these. You cannot necessarily courier the information on the reservations out to somebody if they do not have a phone or a fax.

Mr. Struthers: That sounds good. Is the eventual goal to have all the provincial parks under the umbrella of SR&J?

Mr. Cummings: It is our goal to have them all, but it is limited by communication capability at the site. So there will likely be the odd one. I could not name them today if you asked me, but there will likely be the odd one where we would never be able to get them on-line. They may not even have a phone other than wireless. But we want as much of the information, as many sites as possible on there.

By the way, this program will ultimately be able to display the configuration of various sites and whatnot for the operator, so that they can provide the backup on whether or not certain types of equipment will be able to be used. By equipment I mean camping equipment; it will be used in certain sites. That sometimes has to be juggled by the operator or the manager on site today. We hope to have that reduced over a period of time as well.

Mr. Struthers: I wonder if the minister could not—I do not need an answer to this just on the spot here, but I wonder if he could not provide a list for me of the provincial parks that are now under the auspices of

SR&J plus a list of the ones he sees there is going to be a problem with in hooking them up to this service.

I applaud the goal that the minister is setting. I think that any way that we can see to make the camping experience more accessible and more enjoyable, and also if it is going to bring down the costs, although I do note that there is still a cost to the fee at the beginning. I think most people booking campsites now know that. But if this work can be done centrally, and you can phone and get information on any park you want, I think that is a goal that we should be striving for. I wonder if the minister could take it upon himself to get those two lists together and send them to me at his convenience.

Mr. Cummings: Oh, I can certainly provide him with a list of the 38 and others. Someone in the department probably has an analysis of the future capability, but that can also change. So if the member is happy with the list of those on the reservation system and others, we would be glad to provide it.

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Chair, I thank the minister for that. I want to wrap up the discussion on the reservation system. Just by highlighting some of the very particular complaints that came in, and I am sure the minister has heard from campers on this one as well—and yet even this spring I have had people say to me two totally different things. On the one hand, I have had campers say to me that they were really angry that they were asked to provide their credit card number in reserving a site at a park. They were told that they could not write a cheque to do this. They were told they had to have their credit card number available for them. I know that out there today amongst citizens, there is a lot of skepticism when it comes to giving out your credit card number given the number of frauds that take place, the number of people that get ripped off. So I can understand people who are a little nervous about that.

* (1640)

What I find frustrating is that I listen to those very specific complaints saying, we were told we have to have our credit card, we cannot write a cheque. I come to the House and I ask the minister the question in Question Period, and he says, you know, write the

cheque, send the cheque, no problem. So I am faced here with the minister saying one thing and campers actually coming across the exact opposite when they go to reserve sites. So who is right? Well, it does not really matter to me who is right on this one. I am willing to accept what the minister is about to tell me in his next answer to this question.

What is the situation now? Can a camper pop a cheque in the mail and reserve his site, or am I going to have more people calling me saying, I have been asked for my credit card number and I have been told I cannot write a cheque? So when the next complaint comes through to my office, I want to know exactly what I should tell them. Can they write a cheque?

Mr. Cummings: Yes, you can send a cheque. You can walk a cheque down and put it in if you wish. I said that earlier in this discussion. When the member is commiserating with his constituents or whoever is calling into him, when he is trying to make the system look like something less than what I believe it will become—because I would not expect him necessarily to become an advocate at this point yet—I would ask him also to be fair with those people and say, you know, when was the last time you made a phone call and reserved a hotel room and said I will put the cheque in the mail, and then the hotelier after he hangs up, he says, h'm, okay. But meanwhile, the next day, that hotelier gets a convention that says they will come in for that particular date and will take all his rooms. You think he is going to wait on that cheque to come in the mail?

And why should your park system take somebody's word? I take people's words till people prove otherwise; I am prepared to take their word. But no normal reservation system will take somebody's phone call as the lockdown on a site for which somebody within the next few minutes may well phone in and say, I want that site. So I ask the member when he is commiserating with these people, just remind them that their cheque may take a week to get to the site, and then maybe the site they want will not be available.

Now I know the squeamishness and I know the public consumer advisory that goes with the question—do not hand out anybody your credit card number—but I would challenge all the members sitting in this

Chamber that if they are willing, or unwilling, to provide some kind of a guarantee to the hotelier when they phone to reserve a hotel room, there is a difference if you have an office doing it for you, I know, but, on a personal basis, do you provide a guarantee to that hotelier that you are going to take that room in the form of some kind of an identification number, some kind of a guarantee that they can take down against that room?

So this system is not asking for anything any different than what the majority of reservation systems do across North America, around the world for that matter, I would think. It can accommodate the other style of doing business, but that person, unfortunately, has to also deal with the fact that the mail might be there tomorrow, it might be there three days or it might be a week. This is not a shot at the mail system. It has got to do with weekends, whether or not people are sorting mail over the weekend; it has got to do with when to make connections. Neepawa's mail goes to Portage to be sorted, I believe, and then it is spun out from there. The member knows the levels of how it is delivered around Dauphin better than I do.

So I do not apologize, but the system has been structured, as I said, at extra cost on a per-hour basis so that we can accommodate people from all styles of business as to how they get their reservation. I implore the member to be honest with those who say to him they do not want to give any kind of credit ID to the system, to warn them that that might well mean that a week from that time they are, in fact, risking their—but if they are phoning next year in February or March and they want to reserve the September long weekend or something like that, then, certainly there is lots of time, probably, for that type of a system to work.

But if you phone on a Wednesday afternoon and you say, I am going to send you a cheque and I want the campsite, in this case, on Saturday, I am sorry, it might not work.

Mr. Struthers: Really, all the minister needed to do was say yes or no whether you could get a cheque or not, but I appreciated the rationale that he supplied as far as why the answer is actually yes. I agree you cannot just put a cheque in the mail Wednesday for a site the next day. Common sense should dictate that to people. He can bet on a couple of things. First of all,

when I commiserate with my Dauphin constituents on this, as he put it, No. 1, it is not just Dauphin constituents. I think I have actually talked to some Ste. Rose constituents on this one in terms of Manipogo beach and the beautiful little park we have there north of Ste. Rose. The other thing that he can bet on—I mean he implied that I may not be an advocate for a system like this—is that if this works, I would be an advocate. I think he can count on that, if it works.

There were so many complaints about the Destinet arrangement that his government had come up with that I could not tell people with any confidence that it was working, so I was not an advocate. If it had worked a lot better, I would have been an advocate. If there were no complaints about the situation before Destinet, I could have been an advocate of that as well. I will assure the minister that if people phone me, and they are saying that this system works and that they have learned all their lessons from the Destinet fiasco, then I will be an advocate.

I hope that I get to be an advocate on this because, quite frankly, we have had too many months, a couple of summers now with way too many complaints and way too much frustration, so I hope that it works.

So, Mr. Chairperson, probably the other issue that came to me just about as much as the credit card issue was the situation in which there were limits put on family sites. I think this leads to maybe a discussion about who gets to make the rules in our provincial parks. What kind of latitude does SR&J have for making rules such as four people per site or whether that can be six people per site, those kinds of rules that go along with camping in a provincial park? What jurisdiction does SR&J have and what kind of a jurisdiction does the province have? Does the province still call the shots when it comes to those kinds of rules? Maybe the minister can outline some thoughts on that.

* (1650)

Mr. Cummings: I do not think I can quote in minute detail all the various aspects of conditions of the camping, but SR&J does not set any of the conditions. Those are all set by the department with my approval. I think that people took advantage of the fact that there

were complaints about the Destinet system last year, to also complain about what may have been genuine misunderstandings, but certainly what were not new requirements or obligations that were put on the people when they acquired a campsite. In fact, I am sure I probably heard or saw the same person, certainly a member talking about that regulation.

As I recall, I think there was a limit on the number of adults per site. That is generally intended to reflect that you do not want six teenagers—and I use the term advisedly—you do not want six adults—it does not have to be teenagers—in an 8 by 10 camper who intend to spend the night sitting beside the bonfire and disturbing their neighbours. It was simply a control mechanism for what is a reasonable population in what are sometimes quite tight areas. There was a person with a family who complained that somehow we were impeding their opportunity to have the neighbouring site reserved. I think it was related to the fact they wanted to reserve two neighbouring sites. Certainly, the system is intended to accommodate that.

The rule was in place, however, to limit the number of adults who might, in a minimal amount of space, want to crowd in and very likely would lead to some disruption within what would be the normal campground ambience, whether you have six people in a tent on a site. I mean that does start to beg the question, so where are they going to sit? Where are they going to spend their time? There is not enough room on the site to accommodate that many people, frankly, in some cases. So it was not intended to be something that either—certainly, the reservation company had nothing to do with it; it was campground rules. The difference might be that when they are conveyed through a reservation system, people automatically assumed there would be no flexibility in how it was handled.

The system is intended to accommodate additional sites, where possible, but it is also meant that sometimes people have to be flexible in their expectations. They may not be able to dictate that they want sites 14 and 15 in bay 6 or whatever the description might be. They might have to take a second choice, because someone may have already been allocated to one of the two sites that they wanted. As I recall, the mixup that occurred last year, I think it was

a misunderstanding which was joined to the fact that they were talking to somebody on a phone, as opposed to their normal experience of talking to the manager of the campground.

Mr. Struthers: Would it be possible for the minister to put together some numbers for me, the annual visits to provincial parks, and run that back over the last five years? I know that he has given me bits and pieces over the course of questioning through Question Period and through Estimates. What I would appreciate is the number of visits annually to our provincial parks over the course of the last, say, four or five years, including last year.

The minister referenced that already this year that they are seeing some good numbers in terms of reserving sites. He talked about the numbers being good last year. I am wondering if he cannot put together a string of about four or five years in which we can see if there is a pattern developing and the number of annual visits and maybe identify—if there are successes we can identify those successes, and what we did each year to maybe encourage those numbers up. All kinds of factors affect the number of visits from the weather to the date the ice leaves the lakes and that sort of thing. So I am wondering if that is possible for the minister to provide.

Mr. Cummings: Mr. Chairman, that does not seem like an unreasonable request, but sometimes this type of information can appear to be unreasonable in the manner in which it is manipulated. We will attempt to pull together the information the member is asking for, but a good example and he referenced it, that last year was a perfect example of when at the height of the flood the whole province, whether they were flooded or whether they were not, was focused on the battle that was going on in the Red River Valley, and frankly it was an absolutely lousy May long weekend.

You have to take that type of parks information, attendants information as the member is asking for and put it into context. If we have very much weather like we are having today, there is not going to be very good news, this weekend, for example. But we have come through a very good May long weekend. It was early this year. The risk was there that it might not have been good. It turned out it was very good. So that is the type

of thing—providing the raw data is one thing, but once you get more than a year or two back, you have to start stretching people's memory as to what really influenced people during that time.

That is the other thing that enters into this reservation system we are talking about, of course, and that is when the weather turned bad we had people who had reservations under the old system who simply did not show up. Yet if I phoned in looking for a reservation, I might have been told that a certain site was in fact booked. Now if people plan on being there on a certain date and a certain time on a weekend, unless they phone three days in advance, I believe the number is, I forget the precise number now, and in fact revoke their—or asked to be relieved of their obligation, we will in fact receive the revenue for at least part of that weekend when it might have been rained out other years. People may well choose to stay back a day knowing they will have their reservation and come the second day when the weather is nicer, plus they will have some confidence that if they want to keep that option open for themselves, that site will be there.

Whereas under the old system, if you did not show, eventually it was put back for rent, so there are pros and cons. I am truly believe as people become more comfortable with this way of providing reservations that we will all have a better experience.

Mr. Struthers: A few years ago when I was just a rookie MLA and had much thinner skin, I might have been offended by the minister suggesting that I might manipulate the figures that he gives me. Being here now a whole three years and I have developed a lot more thicker skin, I can understand that there are some risks in simply looking at an annual report of numbers coming out of the parks. So I am wondering if this is possible, if maybe instead of that last request I made for an annual number, I wonder if it makes any sense then to look at, say, the May long weekend, July long weekend, the August long weekend, September long weekend, the ones where the numbers may be up and having a comparison of those from one year to the next, so then it might allow me more of a chance to see a better picture of what the real numbers are instead of just an annual list.

I would settle for each. I wonder if the minister would be able to consider that.

Mr. Cummings: Yes, as I said, we will assemble some information. It is not impossible to do the gross numbers but, again, they have to be put in context or they do not make sense.

Mr. Struthers: Just before we move off of Parks, I have a specific case that was brought to the attention of my colleague the MLA for Flin Flon. It was brought to him. It is the case of Mr. Tom Crowhurst, who was writing to the member for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen) in terms of the \$300 levy that he is now being charged to live at, I believe, Rocky Lake.

Again, we are getting into a situation where it is not so much the amount of the levy or whether the levy is being charged to him or not. It is again a case of where that revenue is going. Mr. Crowhurst, his request to us was to find out if in fact that money was going towards education, as it was alleged to him when he questioned whether or not he should be paying this \$300 levy. He was told that that money would go into education. His suggestion at the time was that instead of that money just going into the Department of Natural Resources or into general revenue that that money should be better collected by the local Kelsey School Division if this government really is being honest about the money going towards education.

* (1700)

So I would like the minister to shed some light on the rationale that was given to Mr. Crowhurst that that money would be going towards education.

Mr. Cummings: Well, certainly I think I recall the letter. At any rate, I am pretty sure I recall his concern. I did respond in writing to that. It is a chief place of residency fee. He went on into a couple of examples, at least one of which I also responded to in my letter, about what he thought were frivolous expenditures by Parks or irrational expenditures by Parks. At least one and maybe both of those irrational expenditures occurred under an NDP administration. So he was being somewhat liberal with his criticism towards this government when in fact the only part that we were responsible for was levying the \$300. But it was based on that concern that he did not want to pay the \$300 to Parks.

There is a very basic principle here which the member for Dauphin being a teacher would appreciate, or being a teacher in his past life would appreciate, and that is that we do not want two or three tax collection systems. School divisions have never run their own tax collection. General revenues have always supported schools along with opportunity for local levy. At the same time, if he requires some known offset to this revenue, this is an example of revenue that would go into general revenues. The government did redirect additional revenues into Frontier School Division, if he is looking for a place where those dollars might possibly have gone. Those are not revenues for the Department of Natural Resources. Those are to support education.

I could make a further argument that it does speak to fairness. If you are going to live in a park as your chief place of residency and if you do not pay maintenance on your roads, if you do not pay school taxes and you have children attending school—the member for Dauphin smiles about this, but I had young people in my house who were children of people who were being dinged this \$300, and they very vociferously told me what their parents thought of it. But they attended school for 12 years and their parents, other than through their tax deductions off of their payroll, would not have contributed one nickel towards the maintenance of the road, management of the school division, or provision of educational services.

So yes, they are now being forced to pay the real cost of providing the roads and the maintenance within their area, the same as they would be if they lived in the municipality. Without going to the full force of assessment and the province imposing a tax based on the value of their property, which I would think would normally be quite expensive based on lake front property, high resale value in many cases, very desirable recreational property, we chose a nominal figure, \$300. I would think you will find that most properties under similar circumstances are paying \$500, \$600 of school tax. If you are paying \$1,200 taxes, most school divisions are asking for about half of the total assessed revenue.

So there were a few people, and this gentleman was one of them, who vociferously opposed, and some have in fact refused to pay it, I believe, but I think that

number is extremely small. As I hope I just did, I think there is a very logical answer as to why it is not some practical thing to do. Many people have argued, and it is an argument that does not hold water with the vast majority of our population, but many people have argued that traditionally they were never required to pay in parks, and there should be no reason for them to pay now, but then that frankly is an issue of fairness and a whole lot of other things that come to bear on this. It is not an unreasonable charge.

Mr. Struthers: I do not question the unreasonableness of the charge; I question who gets the money and then gets to spend it again. One of the points that good old general revenue—you are back into that argument again. Can the minister indicate how much money the department takes in with this levy altogether?

Mr. Cummings: I think the multiplication is simple. I will double check our number here, but I think it was 300 residents times \$300. It is not an enormous number, but I do not apologize for the fact it is revenue that is not necessarily dedicated as it goes out, because it—[interjection] It is 500. Pardon me, there were 500 properties at \$300 per property, so it is \$150,000.

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Chairperson, I would like to move on—

Point of Order

Mr. Cummings: On a point of order, I did not provide the context of the expenditures. I am pretty sure that we can show an increase in expenditures that went to Frontier School Division as well, which would in fact, could be linked directly to those dollars.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister does not have a point of order. It is a matter of clarification. But it was a point.

* * *

Mr. Struthers: I think that when we are talking about Executive Support, it might be a good idea to talk a little bit in terms of wildlife. Maybe I should have made this a little more clear at the beginning, but I believe maybe I forgot to get the advice of the Chair in indicating the plan that I have for Estimates, and that is

to remain on the line that we are on now and take in as many different areas of the Natural Resources Estimates as we can and then pass things at the end, line by line.

I probably should have okayed this with the minister before we got going, before I made that assumption, or with the Chair, but it was the way we had done it last year, and I am hoping that that is still okay in terms of this committee. Maybe I need the advice of the minister or of the Chair.

* (1710)

Mr. Chairperson: Is the minister in agreement with that, that the honourable member ask all the questions under Executive Support? Do you have all the staff necessary?

Mr. Cummings: It is his nickel.

Mr. Chairperson: In that case, the committee is in agreement.

Mr. Struthers: That nickel will be spent wisely and not like the drunken sailor that the minister talked about earlier in Estimates. But a nickel does not go far these days either.

I would like to get some questions to the minister in terms of the Manitoba Trappers Association. I was disappointed to hear of some of the controversy in reading in the media the controversy surrounding the funds that the province provides for the Manitoba Trappers Association, letters to the editor of Grassroots News, for example, in which a member of the Manitoba Trappers Association made some allegations having to do with not just the amount of money that was going toward the MTA but also what the writer felt was a lack of accountability in terms of where the money was being spent.

Now, what I need to get clear in my mind is, first of all, how much money the Department of Natural Resources provides for the Manitoba Trappers Association and what procedure the province follows in terms of making the Trappers Association accountable for that money, taxpayers' money, that we provide for that association.

So maybe the minister could deal with that, indicate the amount of money that is paid to the Trappers Association and what process there is for him to make sure that the Trappers Association is accountable for all that money.

Mr. Cummings: I am interested that the member raises this concern. It strikes me that the Trappers Association has done a pretty good job, and the dollars involved are \$60,900 to assist them with administration and management. I am wondering if the member is concerned about the issues that were raised about the political alignment of the Trappers Association. As I recall, that was the main concern upon which the person was complaining, was basing his fact that he wanted some kind of special review.

Mr. Struthers: Well, Mr. Chairperson, I do not think that was much of an answer. Frankly, I do not really care if the MTA is supporting the New Democrats or the Tories or the Liberals or the Reform. I want to know, I want to be assured that the minister knows where that money is being spent, and based on the answer he just gave me, it would indicate to me that he either does not know where it is being spent, or he does not care to make the Manitoba Trappers Association accountable to the government when they get Manitoba taxpayers' dollars. So I would suggest that the minister take another run at that question.

Mr. Cummings: I just wanted to make sure that the member for Dauphin would address the underlying currents of the reason that this was even an issue. I wanted to know where he stood on the issue. He did not rise to the bait obviously, which is his privilege.

But, yes, we know where the money is going. We have appropriate auditing process on their expenditures. The Trappers Association, there is always some potential for disagreement. I hope that the disagreements that arise are not based on political concerns that people have expressed from time to time. I have no political axe or otherwise to grind with or against the Trappers Association.

I have been very active, as was my predecessor, using the Trappers Association to put forward the message, nationally and internationally, that trapping, while it is in many cases a subsistence or a small support to a

number of people in northern and remote areas, it is extremely important to their overall well-being, not because of the traditional opportunities so much, but because if you are living in a remote area you do not have a lot of opportunities sometimes to gain real dollars to spend on personal needs. The revenue from trapping is very important in some of those more remote communities—\$5,000, \$6,000, in some cases \$20,000, I suppose, depending on the aggressiveness of the trapper and the prices of the year. The whole of that was at risk, given the international animal rights and antifur lobby that was at play.

As I recall the history of this, the province became quite active in supporting the Trappers Association to use them to put forward their own message to help them—use them is the wrong word—help them put forward their own message so that they could be heard in Ottawa and, subsequently, around the world. They had their own version of what I just tried to say in terms of the importance of the industry, and they also have, however, some internal political strife that I hope does not boil over.

I would suggest the member does not have a secondary agenda on this, but there was one person who certainly made a career for a brief period of time out of accusing one of the leaders of the association of having an active Reform agenda. So what if he did? He was also one of the best spokesmen for the industry and had credibility across this province, across Canada, and I can tell you that when I met with fur people from Europe, his name was recognized as somebody who is a spokesman on behalf of the active trappers in terms of the message they need to get out.

So we get a report, financial statements. We have workplans from the association. I have no qualms about the manner in which they handle their funds. I suppose there is always grist for the mill there. There is potential for conflict between the trappers who are active in the North and the trappers who are active in the south and who is running the association. But frankly, I have had a fair bit to do with rubbing shoulders with people within the association.

I was at the fur table this past year, spent a day there, and did a fair bit of lobbying with the international community on behalf of getting the European ban or

potential ban slowed down against leghold traps or any kind of fur industry.

The Trappers Association is a key player, and I have not seen any evidence that would collaborate some of the fear and loathing and some of the concerns that were raised around how they manage their affairs. In fact, European media has taken a very active role and was very involved with representatives of the Trappers Association, both Indian, Metis, and with some of the southern community who were showing them the science that was involved. It led to some active TV work that was presented in Europe.

I suppose while I have the floor, Mr. Chairman, it is also a good opportunity to provide a tip of the hat to at least one of the European media outlets who came to the fur table. They came to my office, and I had the opportunity to meet with them again on their own turf. The producer, broadcaster, if I have his right title, certainly the spokesman who was involved in this endeavour by the name of Christian Dettwiler took a lot of personal heat in Europe after he did the broadcast showing what the Trappers Association and the trappers themselves were doing here because he did do a pro-trapping program. He talked about the social aspects; he talked about the reality and the renewable resource that we had and what it meant.

So I tie all that together for a very purposeful reason. I am not rambling. The Trappers Association has played an important role, and we have been glad to support them in that role. Anytime you take a leadership role and anytime you have someone who is involved in your organization who, in fact, might be outspoken and wants to get involved in other ways, in politics I suppose it can be a bit of a lightning rod. But, obviously, it is not my politics that is involved here that I think spurred on some of the criticism, but, nevertheless, I do not want to see the Trappers Association get the back of somebody's hand because of that, and therefore what I put on the record.

* (1720)

Mr. Struthers: If I was not very concerned when I asked the first question about the Manitoba Trappers

Association, I am all of a sudden a lot more concerned, given the answers that I just got from the minister.

When I asked the question, I fully expected the minister to say, well, we give them \$60,900, but we ask for an audited statement or we ask for an annual report or we ask for minutes of meetings or something like that that shows that they are accountable for the money that the Manitoba taxpayer is providing for them. What I got, though, in the answers was an indication that the minister may be aware that there is some money going into partisan politics, and that worries me, Mr. Chair.

Again, I would ask that it might be advisable that the minister takes a third run at this question. For a government that talks a lot about accountability to not even mention audited statements or annual reports in a question about the Manitoba Trappers Association leads me to believe that the word "accountability" is nothing more than a cliché, and I would give the minister this chance again to explain to me how Manitobans can be assured that there is some accountability on this matter in this department when it comes to \$60,900 worth of taxpayers' money being given to a lobby group, a group that is more than just a lobby group, but there is an example. Maybe the minister can explain the objective ways in which this minister keeps track of where that taxpayer's dollar is being spent.

Mr. Cummings: I indicated earlier that we do get financial statements, work plans. We check the work and the expenditures, so that way we do audit reports on a rotational basis. So all the things that the member is asking for are, in fact, in place to protect the accountability and to protect the credibility of the group.

Now, I do not know if the member meant to be using the term lobby group as some kind of a derogatory reflection of—well, he shakes his head, no—I take that back then, because I do not consider this—they are a lobby group in the sense that they are putting forward the position of their livelihood, but they are not a lobby group in the sense that they are a gimme group that is only asking for support in order to continue some sort of an artificial management structure.

They are always short of cash. They are always in need of having people out there acting as spokesman.

You cannot take somebody out of the north who is knowledgeable and who makes their living dealing with trapping. You cannot move them around. You cannot get them to where they can interface with the right people unless you have some money to do it. That is why we were only too happy to be involved in supporting. As I am sure the member for Dauphin would agree, it is important that we do that.

Mr. Struthers: In that case, Mr. Chairperson, would the minister condone the use of taxpayers' dollars going from this government to the Manitoba Trappers Association? Would he condone that association then turning and using that money for partisan political purposes?

Mr. Cummings: Absolutely not.

Ms. Wowchuk: I would like to take this opportunity to ask a few questions on issues that have been raised in my constituency. I wanted to ask the minister on the subject of capture of elk. In the latter part of the year, the minister made an announcement that First Nations would be responsible for the capture. First Nations were quite pleased with that announcement, because it gave them an opportunity to play a role, and the agreement that appeared to be signed was beneficial to them. A short time later the plan changed, and the capture was then turned over to producers in the Swan River area in one area in particular. I guess the same agreement was available to other parts of the province.

Can the minister indicate why he changed his mind on the agreement that he had with First Nations, where they would have the responsibility of looking after the elk capture and then switching it over to the other route where, then, the various farmers were able to participate?

Mr. Cummings: I think the member is probably dealing with the stories that were rampant in the valley, that we were going to turn the valley over for the aboriginal capture. In fact, the department had some discussion. I mean, I am not going to try and sugar the cookie. The department had some discussion on whether or not there should be some regional approach as to where capture should take place and whether there should be some separation of the areas between where,

not Treaty 5, but the association of First Nations would be running the capture.

In the end, what we decided to do was that the province would maintain, through its regional officers, the final okay as to where capture would occur. In other words, there were a couple of sites that the First Nations groups wanted to capture on, but we denied them access, and the same with other individuals who wanted to capture. We did not always approve where they wanted to set up traps. So the places we did approve in the end were not necessarily agreed with by everybody in the public, but it should be known that there were some sites we also did not approve. We did not change, I do not believe, from any line of the agreement. That is why I referenced some of the discussion and some of the debate that may have occurred in the valley. I think that has to be the basis upon which she is concerned.

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): It was my understanding that there was an agreement made with First Nations, West Region Tribal Council, for people in that region that they would be responsible for the capture of the elk. If I am not mistaken, there was also an announcement on the percentage that they would be able to keep, and that that was where it was supposed to go, that the First Nations were going to be responsible for the capture. Then, afterwards, the minister changed his mind, and I wonder what kind of obligations he has to that first agreement that he made with First Nations that they would be responsible, and then changing his mind to then open it up to other people to do the capturing.

* (1730)

Mr. Cummings: There never was any discussion even of them running the entire capture in the province. I was part of the discussions. I guarantee you there was no discussion or no intent on the part of this ministry to turn the entire capture over to the First Nations.

Ms. Wowchuk: Is the minister saying then that there was no agreement signed with the First Nations that spelled out the number of elk that they would be able to capture, and was that agreement for the full amount of elk that were going to be captured in the past season?

Mr. Cummings: There was an agreement, as the member described, and that agreement prescribed the number of elk and a percentage of elk that would be captured over a three-year period, who would retain them, and so on, with the First Nations.

But that was not meant, nor was there ever any discussion, that that would be an exclusive deal for the whole province. The exclusivity is what I am objecting to, not the fact that there was an agreement. There certainly was an agreement, one which I am very proud of. We got a lot of input and a lot of movement on both sides to bring that forward. I took a fair bit of satisfaction from that agreement, but it was never meant to be exclusive, nor did the province ever give up control as to where a capture might occur. Although we had a few other private contractors whom we also signed contracts with, they did not sign the same type of contract.

The agreement with the First Nations is still in place for two more years. The private contractors for which we had agreements with, I do not think we signed any more than a seasonal agreement with them. If they want to capture again next year, they will have to come back and make a subsequent agreement with us. So frankly there were some hard feelings that were generated based on the very thing, I guess, that the member is asking, which is why I am so strong on my answer, that despite the fact that that was a rumour that was very strongly circulated out there, it was never written, it was never offered, it was never asked for, but somehow the feeling got out there that we were going to turn over to the First Nations an exclusivity. There was some question asked about the exclusivity of having them have an area, possibly an area in the Swan River Valley, but that is not the only area where elk could be captured.

In fact, it was never written into the agreement, so exclusivity was only a management tool in terms of the province saying where they would have wanted the capture to occur. Frankly, that never went past the question of whether or not should the First Nations capture in this area, should our private contractors be over here just so that they are not working in the same area, and we have to decide whether they are going to capture on section 3 and you are going to capture on Section 4. I mean, there was a potential for some

conflict, but in the end I thought in the Swan River Valley, having also the advisory committee being the proponent of at least one trap that that was a good compromise. But there was never anything written in any contract with anybody along the line of exclusivity.

Ms. Wowchuk: I forwarded to the minister a request, probably well over a year ago from Sapotaweyak Cree Nation, asking that a herd be established in the Pelican Rapids area. This would not be a domestic herd; it would be just a re-establishment of another herd. There were steps taken to establish a herd some time ago in the Cranberry Portage area, but the government did not proceed with that.

Can the minister tell me if there are any plans or any consideration is being given to these proposals to establish herds in other parts of the province where they would not be domestic herds, rather that they would be herds that would be established and would be available for harvest through hunting and similar aspects?

Mr. Cummings: No, there has not been any serious long-term planning done in that vein, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, there are a few more questions that I am sure my colleague the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers) is going to want to ask on this subject, but there are a few other areas that I would like to touch on today, while he is giving me some of his time. One that the minister touched on earlier in the day and that is the concern about the privatization of the spring water wayside park in the Pine River area. The minister is aware of petitions that have been signed, and he had many calls in his office last year about this. I have had the opportunity to meet with the proponent of the park and share with him, but there is still a concern in the community with the whole aspect of this park being developed.

I want to ask the minister if he can share with us, perhaps if he does not have the details of it here today, a copy of the contract or tell us what the proponent is required to provide in exchange for taking water from that site? What are their requirements as far as maintaining the park? Certainly in the last year, we were told that the park would be maintained, but this spring the people from Pine River, in fact, had to get together and clean up the site because it is not clean.

So what are the requirements of the individual as far as maintaining the park area that is beside the spring?

Mr. Cummings: I will double-check, but I am not sure that the agreement was ever officially signed, No. 1. I know that the proponent was very amenable to trying to put forward a proposal that was acceptable within the community. He was not looking to be unreasonable or unethical in any way. From the perspective of the department, it was negotiated. The early negotiations, in the early potential agreement that was looked at to be signed, would have provided some limited access to water, which was the concern the community was raising.

But the proponent certainly indicated fairly quickly after discussions with the department that he could come up with another way of providing unlimited access to the water for local consumption if that was the issue. Not tank loading obviously, but there could be ways that sort of that same amount, same volume, same nature of delivery of water could be provided. In exchange he was going to put in access to that water for himself. He was going to put in some restrictive fencing. Frankly, that site is in danger of being polluted. The very people who are using it cannot wing their garbage down over the bank without realizing that when that garbage deteriorates, it is soaking into the very aquifer to which they are wanting to draw this very sweet and desirable water.

So in all fairness, in all honesty, I was not annoyed with the department when they brought forward this proposal. I was not annoyed even when it became controversial, although I would sooner it had not degenerated into a hair-pull in terms of the community and how they felt about it frankly. But the objectives were very laudable. It was, to get the site, someone who would, because he had access to the site for larger volumes of water, was prepared to invest his own time and money cleaning up, provide service in that respect.

The original proposal may well have been objectionable in the eyes of the community in terms of they might have felt they were going to be too restricted or they were going to have to pay for water. But certainly the objective and the desire on the part of the people who entered into this discussions within the department and eventually had to defend it publicly

were all very honourable, and I do not think should, today, be a problem for the community.

But there may have been some other business concerns that have since entered into it. For example, in terms of delivering the water in Dauphin, I think if you are going to do that on a commercial scale, there are health standards and other things that the proponent would have to meet. There was a significant amount of investment that he would have had to have made. I think we have health regulations, when you are talking about drinking water that you are selling for commercial purposes, that enter into it.

* (1740)

Mr. Jack Penner, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

I am talking very openly here about some of the concerns that I know were raised. Whether they are still today the concerns, or what has ultimately influenced the proponent in any decision that he has made, I cannot tell you. I do know that the original concept was a laudable one and was not meant to be offensive to the community or to anybody else.

Ms. Wowchuk: I just want to share with the minister, it is interesting, and I would like the minister to investigate whether a contract has been signed yet, and what are the obligations on the part of that individual as far as maintaining the site?

Mr. Cummings: He is not drawing water?

Ms. Wowchuk: No, he is not drawing water, but my understanding is that he has got a contract signed and he is responsible for maintaining the picnic area, and that is not being maintained.

However, I think the real problem here is, although the minister is well aware, the people have made the minister aware; I have made the minister aware that this is a very contentious issue, and it is still contentious. I think part of the problem is that the individuals who have decided to take on this site have not been prepared to come to the community. Perhaps, maybe that is what should be one of the requirements: you are going to take this site over; then come to the community, hold a meeting, and explain to the public what your intentions are.

I know we will continue to disagree as to whether or not the site should be privatized. That is where we will disagree, but if you have proceeded to the point where it is privatized and someone has a contract to maintain it, in fairness to the community I think that there should be a little bit more public information. That is why I am trying to find out who is responsible for maintaining the site, what are the plans here, and, if this is going to be some sort of business venture, is there any opportunity for local people to be involved in it?

What I am asking for is for a little bit more information to be put out. If the contract is not signed yet, maybe there can be some information provided to the community. Because at the present time, I want the minister to be aware that there are not very good feelings out there. People are saying he can put any kind of pumps he wants in there and there are threats of vandalism. That is not a good sign. I do not think the minister would want that, and I certainly do not want it. So what I am suggesting is that there has to be a way to work through this and ensure that the water supply is there, that it be maintained as a good water supply, and that people have a full understanding of what the plans are for the area. So if the minister could check into this a little bit more and exactly what the responsibilities are of this individual to maintain the site.

Mr. Cummings: Well, yes, now that the member has brought that to my attention, we certainly will review what the situation was, but I am going by memory from last summer. Regardless of whether there is a contract in place or not, I am pretty sure that the contractor is concerned about the bad blood that seems to be generated about this. That is why I say that both the contractor and the people in the department, when they looked at this issue, obviously have profit motive in the long run. The alternative would be because he is doing it out of the goodness of his heart that he wanted to go and maintain that site, but if the area is not going to be developed under a contract, maybe one of the things that is stopping it from proceeding is the fact that people are inclined to express some very violent feelings about it.

I am sorry that they feel that way. They may well be missing an opportunity, because if this contract or contractor does not proceed, then the question is, from the point of view of Natural Resources, we would

almost be better off to shut it down if it cannot be maintained in a safe and healthy standard. We would have to spend some money or we have to find a contract. We would be quite prepared to look at a local contract. The member has asked me about this before. If there is some local area that wants to take it over, wayside parks, the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers) asked earlier about expenditure of parks and so on. We have actively looked for other ways of managing some of these small, local wayside opportunities.

Local people do a much better job of managing them. I do not care how much money we spend, we are still sending people in on an hourly wage to go and do a certain job. It is not the same as taking some local ownership and pride in an area and maintaining it for local opportunities. I mean picnicking and everything else all enters into it, so I am not wanting to be obstreperous about this at all. If the contractor does not intend to proceed, then we will be glad to seek other partners.

Ms. Wowchuk: I will look forward to getting more information on this one from the minister as to the status of the contract. I know that the department was hiring local people to maintain that particular site before, and I know that there are people who are prepared to maintain it now. As I said the local people went out as a group and cleaned it up just this last spring because it was not in very good condition. So perhaps we can work on that and have this resolved, because it is one issue that is causing a lot of hard feelings in the area.

Mr. Cummings: Mr. Chairman, it should be put on the record that I am pretty sure an offer was made to the community a year or two ago prior to this independent contractor coming forward with an agreement, and the community was not at that time interested or, at least, the people we talked to were not. So if nothing comes out of this, at least, we now have the attention of everyone, and we can bring it to some conclusion, because this should be run to the benefit of the community. The community has, I think, at a very low cost, an opportunity to develop something that could be very beneficial.

It should not be seen as somebody corralling up a resource to the exclusion of others. That was the

impression to begin with. The contractor, certainly, I had every indication was prepared to be flexible, that this should not have to be a problem. He may just have changed his mind at this point, and I will further investigate where it is at.

Ms. Wowchuk: Just to finish that up, the contract was offered to the LGD of Mountain, and the LGD of Mountain's offices are some 60 miles away, and I think that it might have been councillors—the local people in the particular area were not even aware, so I think it was maybe the way it was offered up. Lack of proper communication is the way I understand it.

There is one other area that I would like to ask the minister about, and that is the use of Crown lands for agriculture purposes. We will have a chance to discuss this further with the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Enns), but my understanding is that at the present time when there are agriculture leases close to wildlife habitats, if a farmer has them in his hands right now and decides to let those leases go, then they go back to wildlife habitat. They cannot be transferred to another farmer for agriculture use. Also, there are areas along the edge of the mountain in the Ethelbert area where people are trying to get agriculture leases, but cannot get them because this land is not available for pasture. Now, these people are not looking at cultivating this land. They are wanting to use it for grazing land or for cutting of hay, and I have had several people in the area—and the minister is well aware that with low grain prices you have more and more people wanting to change over to livestock, but their hands are being tied because of policies of the Natural Resources department that do not allow particular lands to be transferred over to another farmer or for these lands to be used for agriculture purposes. I would like to ask the minister the purpose of that and whether there is any way we can resolve this.

Mr. Cummings: First of all, on the previous question, if the member has a name of a contact in the Cowan area, perhaps you would put it on the record or send it to us.

On the last question, I will have to seek some details, but it seems to me that probably we are talking about land where there have always been some wildlife habitat concerns. I do not know of it being—there are

Crown lands out there that we simply are concerned about the maintenance of habitat, whether by putting it into agriculture we are reducing that. If it is going to be cultivated or bulldozed, that is an issue. So I believe there are actually some leases in WHAs that we would not renew, but being adjacent to, it has got to be land—and I need further detail. I will investigate this, but it seems to me that this has to be land that has a habitat concern and would not have a habitat caveat placed on it if it were to be re-leased in any way. I am not familiar with situations where we may have denied a renewal continuing the present lease unless it is, in fact, inside a designated area, so I am going to have to get further details.

* (1750)

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Ms. Wowchuk: Is the minister suggesting then that I provide him with the various land locations that I have been contacted about, and then we can work on it from there?

Mr. Cummings: Yes, we can very quickly identify what the problem might be if we have the description of the land.

Mr. Struthers: I have some quick questions, still in the area of wildlife, before we run out of time this afternoon. [interjection] This is the short snapper section. That is right. We will see how good the minister does. We will keep tally of the points that he racks up.

The first one deals with falconry. The minister has decided to allow falconry in the province. He has set up a situation where people can trap two birds for the purpose of falconry. I have been approached by several people who have some concerns with this. The concerns deal with the enforcement and the regulations that may be needed to control this practice.

I think the observation has been made to me that it may not involve a lot of birds being captured, but how do we go about ensuring that only the number of birds to be captured are actually captured, and how do we get around the perceived problem of the birds being

captured and sold into a black market to be used elsewhere, thus making this a conservation problem?

What are the minister's plans in terms of controlling what he set in motion here by okaying falconry in Manitoba?

Mr. Cummings: Well, first of all, there is nothing today that would change in terms of those who want to be involved in the black market. Illegal operators, it would be illegal yesterday, it would be illegal today and it will be illegal tomorrow. The question, as the member has identified, is, well, because we are allowing some legal activity, are we going to get that confused with some kind of illegal black market function subsequently?

First of all, the process has to be inspected. Anyone who would propose to hold a falcon has to receive approval for that. So they are in the system to start off with, and they get approval to capture a nestling. I forget the word now that is used. There is a particular name for a falcon that would be in that stage of its growth, but, nevertheless, once they acquire that, then they must also report. The fact is if someone who is a registered falconer today should apply to take one bird but takes two and attempts to market one on the black market, he is today going to be dealing with regulators. At least he is going to interface with a regulator two or three times during the course of that event, whereas if he were to be operating in the black market previous to today, he would not be interfacing with a regulator at all.

So you could argue that having regulations in place actually pulls these people who might choose to be in violation of all sorts of things by operating in the black market, actually pulls them a little closer to the regulator, and it might well slow down their activity. But that very statement implies that those who might choose to engage in falconry may be predisposed to selling the birds illegally.

One of the reasons that I, personally, felt that this was not an objectionable thing to do was that the history of falconry, modern-day falconry, is that those who want to practise this are the very people who are the strongest advocates in support of the various raptors that are out there, that they strongly believe in the

survival of the species, that they strongly believe in the education of the community, particularly the youth.

I interfaced with a lady who was very opposed to the legalization of falconry. She felt that I was somehow condoning going into the schools and encouraging young people to become falconers. That is not at all what people are talking about. If they choose to become interested as a result of seeing a falconer who is demonstrating or who has brought his bird in, this is no different than the Manitoba Great Horned Owl or the Great Grey Owl that are our Manitoba symbols, brought in and shown to the youth in the schools, generate some interest, some knowledge of the bird.

The same thing is true with falconers. We have falconers today in Manitoba who are anxious to do that. In fact, I believe two of the six people who I interfaced with who wanted to become falconers are teachers in our school system, and this is one of the great advantages that they see to allowing them to practise their sport within the boundaries of the province.

In terms of game that they take, in terms of birds that they take from the wild, in terms of training the birds, they just enjoy working with raptors. They enjoy the opportunity to share that pleasure with others. So this is not a blood sport of ancient kings practised in the way that some people would think that falconry used to be. It is a very small, discreet group of people who do, in fact, like to train raptors of some sort to come back

to hunt, but they simply take them in the wild and allow them to hunt what they would normally be doing if they were in the wild, but they come back to the original trainer.

I got at cross-purposes somehow with the Humane Society on this issue when they originally wrote a letter of support. Management has changed, directors have changed and they have said they do not want to be seen to be supporting this. But the fact is the very practice, the very skills that they demonstrate are the very skills that the rehabilitating injured raptors—the things that these falconers do is the very practice of how they would get some of these injured raptors back into the wild and gainfully survive.

So I see it as an educational opportunity to allow people to share the—

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. The hour being six o'clock, committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Marcel Laurendeau (Deputy Speaker): The hour now being six o'clock, this House now adjourns and stands adjourned until tomorrow (Tuesday) at 1:30 p.m. Good night.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, June 1, 1998

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