

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

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authority of
The Honourable George Hickey
Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, September 25, 2007

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 16—The Statutory Holidays Act (Various Acts Amended)

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth (Mr. Bjornson), that Bill 16, The Statutory Holidays Act (Various Acts Amended); Loi sur les jours fériés (modification de diverses dispositions législatives), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. Allan: Mr. Speaker, this bill will provide hardworking Manitobans with a much needed statutory holiday between Christmas and Easter. The new holiday will be held on the third Monday in February and, based on the winning entry that was chosen by the MB4Youth from the many suggestions put forward by students across Manitoba, will be called Louis Riel Day.

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

PETITIONS

Provincial Trunk Highway 2

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

As a result of high traffic volumes in the region, there have been numerous accidents and near misses along Provincial Trunk Highway 2, near the village of Glenboro, leading to serious safety concerns for motorists.

The provincial government has refused to construct turning lanes off Provincial Trunk Highway 2 into the village of Glenboro and on to Golf Course Drive, despite the fact that the number of businesses along Provincial Trunk Highway 2 have increased greatly in recent years.

We petition the Manitoba Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) to consider implementing a speed zone on Provincial Trunk Highway 2 adjacent to the village of Glenboro.

This petition is signed by Gerry Neale, Derek Robidoux, Jan Nelson and many, many others.

Mr. Speaker: In accordance with our rule 132(6), when petitions are read they are deemed to be received by the House.

Provincial Trunk Highway 10

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Provincial Trunk Highway 10 separates two schools and residential districts in Forrest, Manitoba, forcing students and residents to cross under very dangerous circumstances.

Strategies brought forward to help minimize the danger pose either significant threats to the safety of our children or are not economically feasible.

Provincial Highway 10 serves as a route for an ever-increasing volume of traffic, including heavy trucks, farm vehicles, working commuters, campers, and the transport of dangerous goods.

Traffic levels are expected to escalate further due to projected industrial expansions.

We petition the Manitoba Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) to act in this situation by considering the construction of a four-lane highway that would bypass around the village of Forrest.

This petition signed by Leah Link, Gordon Link, Lillian Hamilton and many, many others.

Headingley Foods

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

The owners of Headingley Foods, a small business based in Headingley, would like to sell alcohol at their store. The distance from their location to the nearest Liquor Mart, via the Trans-Canada Highway, is 9.3 kilometres. The distance to the same Liquor Mart via Roblin Boulevard is 10.8 kilometres. Their application has been rejected because their store needs to be 10 kilometres away from the Liquor Mart. It is 700 metres short of this requirement using one route but is the required 10.8 kilometres using the other.

The majority of Headingley's population lives off Roblin Boulevard and uses Roblin Boulevard to get to and from Winnipeg rather than the Trans-Canada Highway. Additionally, the highway route is often closed or too dangerous to travel in severe weather conditions. The majority of Headingley residents therefore travel to the Liquor Mart via Roblin Boulevard, a distance of 10.8 kilometres.

Small businesses outside Winnipeg's perimeter are vital to the prosperity of Manitoba's communities and should be supported. It is difficult for small businesses like Headingley Foods to compete with the larger stores in Winnipeg, and they require the added services to remain viable. Residents should be able to purchase alcohol locally rather than drive to the next municipality.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister charged with the administration of The Liquor Control Act (Mr. Selinger) to consider allowing the owners of Headingley Foods to sell alcohol at their store, thereby supporting small business and the prosperity of rural communities in Manitoba.

This is signed by Sandra Ammeter, Debbie Wright, Steve Spicer and many, many others.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Standing Committee on Public Accounts First Report

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Chairperson): A rare occasion. I wish to present the First Report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Madam Deputy Clerk (Bev Bosiak): Your Standing Committee on Public Accounts presents the following as its First Report.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense?

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Public Accounts presents the following as its First Report.

Meetings

Your committee met on the following occasions:

September 7, 2004

September 8, 2004

November 25, 2004

November 28, 2005

December 6, 2006

December 14, 2006

February 22, 2007

August 15, 2007

All meetings were held in Room 255 of the Legislative Building.

Matters under Consideration at the August 15, 2007, meeting

Auditor General's Report – Investigation of Hydra House Ltd. and A Review of the Related Department of Family Services and Housing Financial Accountability Framework dated June 2004

Auditor General's Report – Follow-up on Previously Issued Recommendations on Business Planning and Performance Measurement Report dated December 2003

Auditor General's Report – An Examination of RHA Governance in Manitoba dated January, 2003

Auditor General's Report – Environmental Audits – Review of the Province of Manitoba's Management of Contaminated Sites and the Protection of Well Water Quality in Manitoba dated November 2005

Committee Membership

Committee Membership for the September 7, 2004, meeting:

Mr. Aglugub

Hon. Mr. Gerrard

Ms. Irvin-Ross

Mr. Loewen

Mr. Maloway (Vice-Chairperson)

Mr. Martindale

Mrs. Mitchelson

Ms. Oswald

Mr. Reimer (Chairperson)

Hon. Mr. Selinger

Mrs. Taillieu

Committee Membership for the September 8, 2004, meeting:

*Mr. Aglugub
Hon. Mr. Gerrard
Ms. Irvin-Ross
Mr. Loewen
Mr. Maloway (Vice-Chairperson)
Mr. Martindale
Mrs. Mitchelson
Ms. Oswald
Mr. Reimer (Chairperson)
Hon. Mr. Selinger
Mrs. Taillieu*

Substitutions received during committee proceedings at the September 8, 2004, meeting:

Mrs. Rowat for Mrs. Mitchelson

Committee Membership for the November 25, 2004, meeting:

*Mr. Aglugub
Ms. Brick
Mr. Cummings
Hon. Mr. Gerrard
Ms. Irvin-Ross
Mr. Loewen
Mr. Maloway (Vice-Chairperson)
Mr. Martindale
Mr. Reimer (Chairperson)
Mr. Swan
Mrs. Taillieu*

Committee Membership for the November 28, 2005, meeting:

*Mr. Caldwell
Mr. Cummings
Mr. Hawranik
Mr. Maguire
Mr. Maloway (Vice-Chairperson)
Mr. Martindale
Mr. Nevakshonoff
Mr. Reimer (Chairperson)
Mr. Santos
Hon. Mr. Selinger*

Committee Membership for the December 6, 2006, meeting:

*Mr. Aglugub
Mr. Cummings
Mr. Derkach
Hon. Mr. Gerrard*

*Mr. Hawranik
Mr. Maloway (Vice-Chairperson)
Mr. Martindale
Mr. Santos
Mr. Schuler
Hon. Mr. Selinger
Mr. Swan*

Your Committee elected Mr. Derkach as the Chairperson at the December 6, 2006, meeting.

Committee Membership for the December 14, 2006, meeting:

*Mr. Aglugub
Mr. Cummings
Mr. Derkach (Chairperson)
Mr. Hawranik
Mr. Lamoureux
Mr. Maloway (Vice-Chairperson)
Mr. Martindale
Mr. Santos
Mr. Schuler
Hon. Mr. Selinger
Mr. Swan*

Committee Membership for the February 22, 2007, meeting:

*Mr. Aglugub
Mr. Derkach (Chairperson)
Mr. Faurshou
Mr. Hawranik
Mr. Lamoureux
Mr. Maguire
Mr. Maloway (Vice-Chairperson)
Mr. Martindale
Mr. Santos
Hon. Mr. Selinger
Mr. Swan*

Committee Membership for the August 15, 2007, meeting:

*Mr. Derkach
Mrs. Driedger
Mr. Faurshou
Ms. Howard
Ms. Korzeniowski
Mr. Lamoureux
Mr. Maguire
Mr. Maloway
Mr. Martindale
Hon. Mr. Selinger
Mr. Swan*

Your committee elected Mr. Derkach as the Chairperson at the August 15, 2007, meeting.

Your committee elected Mr. Maloway as the Vice-Chairperson at the August 15, 2007, meeting.

Motions

Your committee agreed to the following motions at the November 25, 2004, meeting:

THAT the Public Accounts Committee call forward Bonnie Mitchelson, Member for River East, and the Minister of Health to respond to questions on the issue of Hydra House.

THAT this Committee adjourn, with the agreement that at the next meeting of the Public Accounts Committee, Mrs. Mitchelson continue to answer questions regarding the Auditor General's report on Hydra House Ltd.

Your committee agreed to the following motion at the December 6, 2006, meeting:

That the Public Accounts Committee deal with the Auditor General's Report – Examination of the Crocus Investment Fund until 8:15 p.m. and at that time deal with the Environmental Audit until 9:00 p.m., and that the Committee also meet until 9:30 p.m. to consider the Crocus Report, following the review of the Province of Manitoba's management of contaminated sites which will conclude at 9:00 p.m. at the latest.

Your committee agreed to the following motions at the February 22, 2007, meeting:

That the letter tabled by the Member for Lac du Bonnet be added to the agenda and dealt with not later than 6:45 p.m. tonight.

That this committee request that the Auditor General, in accordance with her discretion under section 16(1) of the Auditor General Act, consider an examination and audit into the "Spirited Energy" campaign.

Officials Speaking on Record

Officials speaking on the record at the September 7, 2004, meeting:

Mr. Jon Singleton, Auditor General

Ms. Bonnie Lysyk, Deputy Auditor General and Chief Operating Officer

Officials speaking on the record at the September 8, 2004, meeting:

Mr. Jon Singleton, Auditor General

Ms. Bonnie Lysyk, Deputy Auditor General and Chief Operating Officer

Officials speaking on the record at the November 25, 2004, meeting:

Mr. Jon Singleton, Auditor General

Ms. Bonnie Lysyk, Deputy Auditor General and Chief Operating Officer

Mrs. Mitchelson

Officials speaking on the record at the December 6, 2006, meeting:

Carol Bellringer, Auditor General

Bonnie Lysyk, Deputy Auditor General and C.O.O.

Hon. Mr. Struthers

Don Cook, Deputy Minister of Conservation

Officials speaking on the record at the December 14, 2006, meeting:

Hon. Mr. Rondeau

Hon. Ms. Melnick

Officials speaking on the record at the February, 22, 2007, meeting:

Hon. Ms. Melnick

Carol Bellringer, Auditor General

Officials speaking on the record at the August 15, 2007, meeting:

Martin Billinkoff, Deputy Minister of Family Services and Housing

Carol Bellringer, Auditor General

Hon. Mr. Mackintosh

Hon. Ms. Oswald

Heather Reichert, Acting Deputy Minister of Health

Don Norquay, Acting Deputy Minister of Water Stewardship

Reports Considered and Passed

At the August 15, 2007, meeting your committee considered and passed the following reports as presented:

Auditor General's Report – Investigation of Hydra House Ltd. and A Review of the Related Department of Family Services and Housing Financial Accountability Framework dated June 2004

Auditor General's Report – Follow-up on Previously Issued Recommendations on Business Planning and Performance Measurement Report dated December 2003

Auditor General's Report – Environmental Audits – Review of the Province of Manitoba's Management of Contaminated Sites and the Protection of Well Water Quality in Manitoba dated November 2005

Reports Considered but not Passed

At the August 15, 2007, meeting your committee considered the following report but did not pass it: Auditor General's Report – An Examination of RHA Governance in Manitoba dated January 2003

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to table the following report: *Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, Supplementary Information for Legislative Review: 2007-2008 Departmental Expenditure Estimates.*

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Conservation): I am pleased to table for all members, the *Supplementary Information for Legislative Review: 2007-2008 Departmental Expenditures for the Department of Manitoba Conservation.*

I'd also like to table the *Supplementary Information for Legislative Review* for the Sustainable Development Innovations Fund, 2007-2008, Expenditure Estimates. Thank you.

* (13:40)

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table for the House the *Supplementary Information for Legislative Review* for the Department of Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth 2007-2008 Departmental Expenditure Estimates.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table the following annual report, *Manitoba Justice, Supplementary Information for Legislative Review: 2007-2008 Departmental Expenditure Estimates.*

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Tribute to Soldiers Killed in Afghanistan

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Yes, I have a statement for the House.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the loss of two Canadian soldiers who served their country with honour and distinction in Afghanistan.

On behalf of the House and all Manitobans I would like to pay tribute to the lives of Private Lane Watkins and Captain Jeff Francis for their service to our country.

Private Watkins was from Clearwater, Manitoba, and was stationed with the Edmonton-based 3rd Battalion Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry.

Captain Francis, originally from New Brunswick, was stationed with the 1st Royal Canadian Horse Artillery in Shilo, Manitoba.

Their armoured vehicle was hit by a roadside bomb on July 4, 2007, as they were returning to their forward base following a joint operation with the Afghan national army. It is important we remember the men and women of our armed forces who put their lives on the line every day in the service to their country. These two exemplary citizens will be remembered for the difference they made in their country and the world. For their courage we are incredibly proud of them.

I would like to extend my deepest condolences to both families for their loss. All Manitobans are grateful for their effort.

Mr. Speaker, after other members have made their statements, I would like to ask this House to join with me in a moment of silence to recognize the lives lived by Private Lane Watkins and Captain Jeff Francis.

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Premier for the statement and we certainly agree that a moment of silence is appropriate in these circumstances to acknowledge the loss of these two fine young men who served our country in Afghanistan.

I know the Member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Cullen) was present at the memorial service for Private Watkins in Clearwater. I, certainly, through family and other connections, know many members of that community and know what a profound impact the loss of that young man had on that community and, in particular, to his family and friends.

As well, the loss of Captain Jeff Francis was a great loss to his family and friends, as we know. Both of these young men were engaged in service in Afghanistan, working toward the establishment of a framework that would provide stability and security for the people of that country. It would provide a framework within which women could get an education and have all of the rights that would be expected and hoped for in any civilized society. They're striving for many other objectives, some of them relating to the basic establishment of things like clean water and other basic necessities for the people of that country.

So they've died in a great cause, Mr. Speaker, and we certainly are proud of them and support the Premier's request that we take a moment of silence. Thank you.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): I ask leave to speak to the Premier's statement.

Mr. Speaker: Does the honourable member have leave?

An Honourable Member: Leave.

Mr. Speaker: Leave has been granted.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I rise to join the other party leaders and the other members of the Legislature here in paying a tribute to Private Lane Watkins and Captain Jeff Francis and the efforts that they have made on behalf of all of us with the Canadian Forces in Afghanistan. I would like to offer and extend condolences to members of both families. I have had the opportunity to meet with Lane Watkins's mother in Clearwater when I was there during the summer and to offer my condolences personally. Certainly, it has not been an easy time for the family and other members of the Clearwater community, and to them I say we certainly offer our condolences and our best wishes and thank Lane and Jeff for the efforts that they have made.

I would agree with the others that we should be having a moment of silence and to pay tributes to both Private Lane Watkins and Captain Jeff Francis as an important signal of our appreciation for them.

Mr. Speaker: It's been agreed to that we'll have a moment of silence. So all members, please rise.

A moment of silence was observed.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if I might seek leave

of the House to revert momentarily to Tabling of Reports.

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement in the House to revert to Tabling of Reports? [*Agreed*]

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the House. I would just like to table the signed copy of the Estimates order dated September 25, 2007.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, I thank the honourable minister for that.

Introduction of Guests

Now, prior to Oral Questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to my left and right. We have eight students who have been selected to serve as pages at this session. They are, beginning at my extreme right: Ms. Angela Cung, Ms. Karen Power, Mr. D. J. Levy, Ms. Laura Dutfeld, Ms. Stacy McPhee, Ms. Jennifer Aho, Ms. Autumn Beardy, Mr. Adb Al Mageed Salem.

On behalf of all honourable members, I welcome you, and we're pretty excited that you'll be with us for the duration of our sitting. So, welcome.

I'd also like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today some parents of the 2007-2008 legislative pages. On behalf of all honourable members, I also welcome you here today.

I'd also like to draw the attention of honourable members to the Speaker's Gallery where we have with us six individuals who were appointed to the Manitoba Legislative Internship Program for 2007-2008. In accordance with established practices, three interns were assigned to the government caucus and three to the official opposition caucus. Their term of employment is 10 months. They will be performing a variety of research and other tasks for private members. These interns commenced their assignments in September and will complete them in June.

They are, working with the government caucus, Ms. Andrea Dyck of the University of Manitoba, Ms. Katie Strachan of the University of Manitoba and Mr. Daniel Voth of the University of Winnipeg.

Working with the caucus of the official opposition, Mr. Matthew Hamilton of the University of Winnipeg, Ms. Ash-Lei Lewandoski of the University of Brandon and Ms. Elisabeth Saftiuk of the University of Manitoba.

Copies of their biographies have been distributed to members. Professor Jean Friesen looks after the academic portion of the internship. The administration of the program is carried out by our Clerk, Patricia Chaychuk. The caucus representatives on the internship administration committee are the Member for St. James (Ms. Korzeniowski) and the Member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Faurichou).

I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of all members to congratulate the interns on their appointment to the program and to hope that they will have a very interesting and successful year with the Assembly.

I would also like to draw attention of honourable members to the loge to my left, where we have with us Mr. Binx Remnant, who is a former Clerk of this House.

On behalf of all members I also welcome you to the Chamber.

* (13:50)

ORAL QUESTIONS

Child Welfare System Effects of Policy Changes

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While nobody in this House, including the Premier, would have wanted this outcome, we know from reports of tragedies and reports of front-line workers our child welfare system in this province is in chaos.

This NDP government has failed children and families by pursuing policies that have put politics and theory ahead of the best interests of children. Since unleashing these policy changes seven years ago, the Premier has now gone through four ministers of Family Services and is now on his fourth Deputy Minister of Family Services. This revolving door of ministers and deputy ministers is the Premier's smokescreen in an attempt to run away from accountability for the leadership and management of this system which ultimately rests with him and his office.

The ever-changing leadership and conflicting guidelines within the system have confused front-line workers and created chaos. Social workers who are overworked and unsupported by government have left, and those that remain are overworked. One former social worker who was quoted this morning in the *Winnipeg Free Press* said, "Workers were anxious and afraid. This unsettling period, coupled

with the daily stressors of the job, made for terrible working conditions." The children, Mr. Speaker, are ultimately the ones who pay the price of the chaos and instability stemming from these failures. Decisions are made that can have tragic and sometimes fatal consequences.

Will the Premier, in light of what has taken place under his watch, now take personal responsibility for his failure to deal with chaos created by his decisions, decisions today that are having tragic consequences?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, first of all, all of us in this House, whenever there is a tragedy of children in care or children out of care, whenever a child dies or is injured or is hurt or is put in a vulnerable situation, everyone in this Chamber I'm sure their heart aches and the pain of that tragedy is felt by all Manitobans. It has been ever thus because I think it's safe to say that the best child welfare system is actually no child welfare system. A safe environment at home with loving parent or parents, strong support with families, is still the best alternative for any child and that's something I believed long before politics when I was a volunteer with kids, and I believe today. A family and a safe environment is still the goal of all of us for all our children and all children indeed in the country.

I also would want to point out that the paramountcy of care, the paramountcy of children and their safety remains the ultimate goal of the child welfare act, and it is still the goal of any worker, any agency, any court and any government in the law to ensure the children are given as safe an environment as possible and that remains today, as it did before and it remains today even with changes that were made in the law in 1997 by adding culture as part of the care, and it's something that was carried on and passed by all parties in this Legislature.

In terms of the individual tragedies, there are investigations and accountability that people and Manitobans require and are going to get. In the case of Phoenix Sinclair, the young child, we have already promised, and we are committed, to having an independent judicial inquiry after the very serious charges of murder, alleged murder rather, have been adjudicated in the courts. And we remain committed to that accountability in the case of another tragedy this summer. There is an ongoing investigation under section 4 of the child welfare act, and anything that is produced to us will be implemented as recommendations.

We could look at some of the statements made by the Leader of the Opposition, but I would say that the decisions that we made were recommended by a number of different independent bodies. I want to assure Manitobans that those of us who have worked with kids in the past remain committed to their best interest into the future.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, there is no debate in this House in terms of the intent and the wishes of any member of the House, including the Premier and his minister. The issue is the fact that, and it's well documented and established, subsequent to a series of policy directions and decisions that were made by the Premier and his Cabinet around 2000 and 2001, a series of changes were undertaken very, very quickly that resulted in a rapid transfer of many case files that resulted in significant responsibilities being handed to staff who were then overwhelmed by the workload and left with unclear guidelines and directions as to what should guide them when they have to make the very difficult, in some cases life-and-death decisions, that they are put in charge of making.

When you consider the responsibility that any given worker has within the system it is an awesome responsibility, and they need the support, and they need clarity from those who are at the top of government, and they need to know that there is accountability at the end of the day for decisions.

The number of tragedies, as we know, has gone up significantly in the last couple of years. The evidence of decision taking that came about as a result of blurry accountability and unclear criteria for making decisions has come forward not from us, Mr. Speaker, but from front-line social workers who are dealing with these cases day in and day out. These are the direct result. One decision, the decision of the Premier and his Cabinet to pursue a set of policies in a rushed and hurried way without adequate follow-up and oversight, led to a series of situations, some of which cost children their lives.

So I want to ask the Premier: Given the conflicting and unclear policies guiding workers, given the blurring of the lines of accountability that have taken place under his watch, will the Premier commit today to taking action to replace the current policy of confusion and conflict with a policy that is crystal clear, and that is, that workers are to be guided by one criteria which overrides everything else. And that criteria is what is in the best interest of this child in the reality of these circumstances.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, it's certainly not appropriate to get into an issue of statistics today because any tragedy in any year at any time and under any Premier is a tragic situation. Any loss of life that could have been prevented is a serious matter for anyone in this Legislature.

* (14:00)

I would point out that there are clear and have always been clear legislative instructions to all of us on children, and those have not been changed by us. The paramountcy of child protection is under the child welfare act. The paramount law: children must be cared for in the best interest of the child, shall be the paramount consideration, children must be safe and protected, is clearly within the law, Mr. Speaker, and it's clearly within the guidelines for all agencies.

I would also point out that there were recommendations to this Legislature by an independent judicial inquiry. They were also given to the Legislature with caution, dealing with any stumbling that would take place and the kind of accountability that would go on with that situation.

We do promise accountability. We are willing to and able to be subjected to cross-examination in an independent judicial inquiry with the Phoenix Sinclair case. We believe that some of the allegations and statements and comments that have been made can or cannot be substantiated in cross-examination after the criminal charges of alleged murder have been dealt with in a court of law as they appropriately should be dealt with.

I also would point out, Mr. Speaker, that there are life-and-death decisions that are made by social workers under any system. The issue of the safety of a child and the issue of the emotional care of a child is always of paramount consideration to individuals who are dealing with the 7,000 kids in care today in Manitoba. Every day, child welfare workers make life-and-death decisions, and most of the time, if not all of the time, they make the right decisions. They make decisions on the basis of safety of a child, which is paramount under the law. The emotion that one can get, and the emotional care that a child will get as close as they can be with a parent that is, hopefully, loving, with a family that, hopefully, cares and every day with different, not different but with guidelines that are very straightforward, there are judgments that are made by good people that are working in very difficult circumstances with very vulnerable children by definition. The 7,000 children in care are vulnerable children, and people are

making good decisions every day and making the right decisions every day.

So I just want to say on behalf of this Legislature that we recognize that it is not a simple matter to look at the safety of a child in terms of physical care and the emotional best interest of a child, and I want to say that I think the 7,000 kids in care are—I just want to applaud the people on the front lines every day that are doing what they can for those children.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, we certainly applaud those people who work within the system on the front lines every day, and we think it's regrettable when their representatives, the union that represents them, and Mr. Olfert, who I know is close to the Premier, were raising concerns back some time ago, that those concerns were not properly taken into account in terms of the way the transition was taking place.

The Premier talks about, ideally, let's keep kids with their family, and in most circumstances, that is what we should be doing, Mr. Speaker. Nobody can disagree with that objective. The fact is that families who come into contact with the child welfare system are there by virtue of the fact that there is some issue or problem within that family that prevents them, for whatever reason, from providing the sort of care, support, sustenance and safety that's required for their children. So, to blindly attempt to put children back with a family when the reason they're in the system in the first place is because of problems with that family is to put incoherent and sentimental considerations ahead of the reality of what's happening with these kids in these circumstances.

So the incoherence of the Premier's answer to this question and the attempt to respond with platitudes instead of reflecting the reality of what's going on within the system is, in effect, putting his head in the sand and ignoring not what we are saying in this House, Mr. Speaker, but what his front-line workers are telling him.

He said last year in Estimates, Mr. Speaker, that transition is difficult, but we feel, over the longer haul, this is going to be safer to get kids close to their own families. It's going to be safer. Well, the fact is that, in some circumstances, that defies logic when the family setting can't provide the degree of safety that's required.

So I want to ask the Premier to get beyond the platitudes, to move beyond recommendations that were made a decade ago which, in practice today, are

not serving Manitoba's children very well, and to admit that conflicting standards and blurry accountability are failing Manitoba children. We acknowledge that in ideal circumstances family reunification and preservation of culture are objectives that could be pursued, but in the reality of where we are today, those must take a back seat to what is in the best interests of the children.

So, will the Premier today issue a clear directive that the best interests of children trumps any and all considerations, including cultural considerations?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, again, I have worked with social workers. I used to represent them. I was a volunteer at a drop-in centre that became the Boys and Girls Clubs, working with social workers on the front line. I care about what they say, but I also consider the reports that we have been given as a society, and reports that have been confirmed over and over and over again. I would point out, just so you know, and I am surprised you are not aware of this, that the word "culture" was added by the former government in 1997 to the criteria, and appropriately so.

But the weakening of the guidelines—paramourcy of the child is the No. 1 criteria under the law for all directors, all social workers, all courts, the Child Advocate, Mr. Speaker. And I have sat down with social workers that have been involved in life-and-death decisions in the past, long before I was involved in politics. There are 7,000 children in care now. That is not a guideline that says do not protect children. There are 7,000 kids in care. And, yes, because of the advice of social workers and the stress that they are under, we have increased the number, and we increased the number again last year.

We didn't do a good enough job on foster parents. The rates—when we reversed some of the cutbacks on foster parents, and I acknowledge that we didn't go far enough. We have increased it by a number of amounts last year and have over 500 foster parent placements since a year ago, but I acknowledge that the system has to be accountable. We are prepared to look at all issues of accountability. I am confident that the inquiry that is going to be held will completely disclose the fact that all the advice on transition—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Doer: All the advice dealt with the issue of paramourcy of the benefit, the child welfare benefit,

to the child. Always. And appropriately, by all the agencies.

The status quo, Mr. Speaker, has been identified in a 400-page report last year conducted by the Ombudsman, the Child Advocate, the chief child psychologist at the Manitoba Adolescent Treatment Centre and other first-line Aboriginal people. It has been stated that the system was broken before the changes were made, but having said that, I don't take any comfort and no one in this Chamber should take any comfort when a child is in the child welfare system and perishes in a situation. And there are criminal charges, to be sure, that have been laid in those situations. But yes, accountability should be at all parts of the system, including every minister and the Premier, in government.

West Nile Virus Government's Response

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, this year alone there have been 542 Manitobans that have been diagnosed with the West Nile virus, and the clock is still running. Experts in the field saw the early warning signs that this would be a particularly dangerous and deadly year for West Nile virus, and yet the Minister of Health failed to give adequate warnings and failed to take strong action to combat the virus.

Mr. Speaker, why did the Minister of Health fail to act on those early warnings and instead put the risk of many, many thousands of Manitobans' health at risk?

* (14:10)

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Before answering, I do want to take an opportunity to welcome the member opposite to his new portfolio. In all seriousness, it's a very important job, and I do wish him well in his pursuit of that. I would say, Mr. Speaker, however, that the member opposite is not correct in his facts on his first question.

We have, on the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health, ensured that a public communication strategy was in place. Indeed, we extended that public communication strategy. We extended our larviciding program this year on the advice of experts, and we extended the spraying program across Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable minister's time's up.

Mr. Goertzen: Earlier this month, in California, a place that this government likes to take lots of advice from, California declared a state of emergency as a result of West Nile virus. California, with 30 million people, declared that state of emergency with only 56 cases of West Nile virus. Here in Manitoba, with a million people and nearly 600 cases of West Nile virus, this government sends out brochures that tell people to wear light clothing and to stay at home at suppertime.

Why did the NDP Minister of Health have such a pathetic response to such a pressing problem when other jurisdictions have taken this issue much more seriously, Mr. Speaker?

Ms. Oswald: I'm not certain if I heard correctly, but I do think I heard the new critic for Health belittle the importance of personal protection, the single most important thing that an individual can do to protect against West Nile virus, and certainly the No. 1 recommendation of the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

I would note that the number of cases to date recorded in Manitoba is 504. We know that in regions surrounding us like Saskatchewan, the total number to date is 1,054, Mr. Speaker. We know that we are working on programs different in different provinces. Certainly, we can suggest from those numbers that some of our interventions are working. The member opposite is incorrect in his statements.

Mr. Goertzen: Let's be clear. I was belittling this minister's poor response to what is a very serious, serious issue in the province.

Mr. Speaker, despite all the early warnings and despite the experts saying that this was going to be a significant issue this year, the minister sent out brochures throughout the year, already when she knew it was going to be a significant issue that says, and I quote, and they had it in bold, "The risk of developing illness from West Nile virus is generally low." She was telling people that the risk was low at a time when she knew, in fact, that the risk was high. California has a state of emergency for 56 cases. Manitoba tells people that the risk is low when we have almost 600 cases.

Why should we believe that she could take care of a virus, a significant pandemic virus with no warning, when she had all the warning, she still couldn't get it done?

Ms. Oswald: We know that we take advice, and very good advice, from the Chief Medical Officer of Health who has indeed agreed that we have taken the most aggressive action on West Nile virus that we have in any other year. Our action started in 2002 when we made amendments to The Environment Act and, indeed, in comprehensive terms, the information that we gave to the public, the larviciding that was done and the issuing of health orders to 19 communities. That is more than all of the other years combined. In order to do mosquito mitigation, we worked together with the Chief Medical Officer of Health on medical advice. We don't take advice from the member opposite making cheap political points.

Stubble Burning Results of Ban

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, on August 29, without warning, the Doer government enacted a province-wide stubble burning ban. Days later, the government flip-flopped and lifted the ban. Producers burned to make up for lost time. Heavy smoke blanketed most of southern Manitoba, including the city of Winnipeg.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Agriculture explain why this government rushed to enact a ban without fully examining the serious consequences that could arise when it was lifted?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, it doesn't speak well for the opposition when their next question after a question on health, now a question of agriculture, they don't have their facts right.

The member opposite should know that there is a ban on burning from August 1 to the end of November, Mr. Speaker. There's a ban on every day. It only happens on those days when the burning conditions are right that people are allowed to burn. In the situation that we were facing, there were people who were burning when it was not a burning day. There were accidents that occurred, and the people who advised us said that we should step back and review this matter.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, Manitobans are listening, are very angry and frustrated the way this government mismanaged stubble burning. There seems to be both an educational and enforcement issue here. In recent weeks we've seen this government spend a lot of money educating people on other threatening issues.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Agriculture explain if, in the weeks leading up to the ban, her staff worked with producers to educate them about alternatives to stubble burning?

Ms. Wowchuk: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. My department works on an ongoing basis with people in the agriculture industry looking at alternates to burning straw, looking for better methods to incorporate straw back into the soil. But we do have a smoking ban that is in place, that was put in place under the previous administration, that set times out when burning would not be allowed and a process whereby burning of stubble would be approved. We continue to work on new technology and live within the regulation that the previous government put in place.

Mr. Eichler: Mr. Speaker, producers will tell you that stubble burning is not the preferred way to manage crop residue, but at times it is needed. Producers want alternatives to uses for straw that will add value to it, and Manitobans want assurances that what happened a few weeks ago will not be repeated.

Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Agriculture assure Manitobans that its panic-driven mismanagement, knee-jerk reaction response with respect to stubble burning won't be repeated?

Ms. Wowchuk: I can assure the member opposite that we will continue to work with the agriculture community as they get through this fall's harvest and in harvests in the future, Mr. Speaker. We will continue to work to look at new opportunities and new technologies where straw can be incorporated into the soil. We all know that that's the best way to use straw. Unfortunately, it can't always work that way, and when there is a need to burn, it's important that the farmers who are burning follow the law and look to the Web site and to the call line to find out whether or not they can burn on a particular day.

I would encourage the member opposite to encourage farmers as well to call into the stubble burning line to see whether it is legal to burn or not, rather than trying to create pandemonium.

Lake Winnipeg Water Quality

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, it is no secret to children, to Manitobans and to tourists to our province who like to frequent our beaches, that there is a serious water quality issue with Lake Winnipeg. One need look no further than the

warning signs that were posted on our beaches some 25 times this summer on Lake Winnipeg alone.

Mr. Speaker, after eight years in power, why has this government failed to yield real results to the water quality issue so that our children may safely enjoy playing on our beaches?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Water Stewardship): Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to put on the record that our beaches are monitored through the Clean Beaches Program, a program that was set up by this government in 2003. We regularly monitor about 60 beaches on a daily basis during the time that Manitobans are using the beaches. It's very important that we are letting Manitobans know if there is a concern, what type of concern that is. We will continue to work with that program to inform Manitobans, to provide employment for the youth in Manitoba and to make sure that we are in fact watching what is happening on Lake Winnipeg.

* (14:20)

Mrs. Stefanson: But what Manitobans are looking for from this government is real results, Mr. Speaker. Lake Winnipeg is the 10th largest freshwater lake in the world and this government has a responsibility to protect it. There have been a number of announcements, round table discussions and open houses with no results.

It has already been eight years. When can Manitobans expect to see results or is it the strategy of this government to make the warning signs on our beaches permanent fixtures?

Ms. Melnick: Well, it is in fact the intention of this government to work to clean up Lake Winnipeg, Mr. Speaker. That's why the Premier (Mr. Doer) created the first Department of Water Stewardship in the history of Canada. That is why we passed The Water Protection Act, the first of its kind in Canada. That's why we passed The Drinking Water Safety Act, the first of its kind in Canada. That's why we started the Office of Drinking Water. During the 1990s there were two drinking water officers in Manitoba. Now there are 14, Mr. Speaker. That's why—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Ms. Melnick: That is why we put a pause on the expansion and development of hog barns which members opposite opposed, Mr. Speaker. That is why we have brought in some of the strictest regulations in Manitoba which the Leader of the

Opposition opposed when he was running for his leadership.

That is why we have brought in nutrient limits so that the nutrient levels will eventually go down in Lake Winnipeg, all opposed by members opposite.

Tax Regime Reform

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, even the Finance Minister must know by now that the Canadian dollar has reached par with the American dollar. He should also know that Manitoba exports 76 percent of its goods and services to the U.S. market.

In order to be competitive in an ever-increasing competitive market, Manitoba must establish a level playing field when it comes to taxation. Is the minister going to continue to keep his head firmly buried in the sand, or is he finally going to become proactive and reform our punitive tax regime?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): First of all, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to welcome the Member for Brandon West to the House. While he was on vacation, he would have noted that Manitobans' manufacturing shipments are 14.2 percent up this year. He would note also that the Canadian average is 0.6 of 1 percent. In other words, Manitoba is performing 25 times greater than the Canadian average in the country.

He would have also noted in his summer reading, which I'm sure he was doing diligently, that in five of the last six years we've been above the Canadian average. With respect to measures that we've taken, he would have noted in the spring budget, which we will have ample opportunity to discuss in Estimates, that we've made many measures.

Manitoba Economy Effects of Exchange Rate

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, the Finance Minister should also realize that he's dealing with a six-to-eight-month lag time. That's not the case it is today in the window today.

The minister has failed miserably and he should know that the economy is in peril. The Manitoba GDP will be affected. Cattle producers are selling below cost. Manufacturing is losing jobs. Manitoba payrolls as of today, Mr. Speaker, are less than they were yesterday.

From all I've ever heard from the minister, he's prepared to do nothing. The last time the economy failed in 2001, by the way, the minister raided Manitoba Hydro for \$203 million to pay off his fiscal financial folly. Is he going to be proactive now or will he continue to go down with his fiscally inept ship?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): I'm very sorry the members notes slipped off the table and he lost his place in the script, Mr. Speaker, because if he would have actually done his homework instead of follow the script, he would have noted that we have 4,400 additional jobs in Manitoba since the start of January 2007.

Yes there has been a decline in manufacturing jobs across the country but Manitoba has gone against the trend. We have more manufacturing jobs in this province now than we did last year by 4,400.

Spirited Energy Campaign Expense Claims for Alcohol

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, we all know and remember—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I need to be able to hear the questions and the answers in case there's a breach of a rule. I ask the co-operation of all honourable members.

The honourable Member for Minnedosa has the floor.

Mrs. Rowat: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We all know and remember it was an expense claim for a \$1.29 pack of gum that brought down David Dingwall. Imagine if Mr. Dingwall had made his expense claim for beer and wine. Well, imagine no more, Mr. Speaker, for indeed beer and wine have been billed to the Manitoba taxpayer for the development of the Spirited Energy campaign.

I ask the Minister of Competitiveness (Mr. Rondeau) how many bottles of beer does it take for the NDP to develop a slogan as bad as Spirited Energy.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Acting Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade): Mr. Speaker, the members will know that at Standing Committee of the Public Accounts that we all agreed to do an audit of the Spirited Energy campaign. We know that the government spending was about \$2.9 million, far less than many other jurisdictions, some

of which we're very aware of, but because the Office of the Auditor General is an independent office and have now received a mandate from the committee, a unanimous mandate from the committee to review these matters, we will wait for their analysis and their report and then we will have ample time to debate that.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table a receipt made out to the Premier's Economic Advisory Council from the Sheraton Hotel. This bill is for a total of \$2,219.83 for room rentals, wine and beer and something called a Mediterranean buffet. The bill indicates that a good deal of money was spent on beer and wine, but the number of bottles have been blacked out.

I ask the Minister of Competitiveness to clarify how many bottles of wine and beer were consumed, or was the total so high that no one remembers?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, all of those receipts were released for the review of the Auditor General. They will make appropriate comment on those expenses to decide whether they were reasonable or unreasonable. The important thing is that all the information has been made available to the public and the Auditor General, and they will be reviewed accordingly.

Mrs. Rowat: I guess it's connect the dots, Mr. Speaker, on this. There's a lot of black dots on this invoice.

To have Manitoba taxpayers foot the bill for beer and wine billed under the Spirited Energy campaign is both absurd and an insult to Manitobans. We knew all along that the nearly \$3-million Spirited Energy campaign was a failed expense of taxpayer funding.

Mr. Speaker, I am asking the Minister of Competitiveness why did the government see the need to black out or censor the number of bottled spirits consumed for the Spirited Energy campaign.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the copy of the bill. I can tell the member that I'm informed that most of the people in attendance at this event were volunteers, people contributing their time, business people from the community, all of whom have made contributions of their talents, their time and resources in some cases to support this campaign, Spirited Energy, all across the province, to rebrand the province as a place where there is a dynamic economy which is growing faster than the Canadian average, where there are exciting

developments in many sectors of the economy. As I said earlier, this document, any documents that the Auditor General will review and comment on in due course. Thank you.

Child Welfare System Connection to Increased Crime

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, the Child and Family Service system in Manitoba is designed to identify children at risk, to provide these children with opportunities to grow and develop as good citizens and have the opportunities in Manitoba that they should have. But, here in our province, tragic failures of the Child and Family Service system under this government appear to be one of the significant reasons for increased crime in our province. Studies have shown that about one-half of the children who get involved with the criminal justice system are children who've been involved with child welfare services.

I ask the Premier (Mr. Doer): Why has today's NDP so tragically managed the Child and Family Service system with the result that we have such major problems with increased crime in Manitoba?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, the shortcomings in the delivery of child welfare services, not just here but across this continent, have gone on too long. Indeed, as the Premier mentioned, with over 7,000 children in care, even the death of one child in care is nothing less than sickening. That is why, last October, when this government received the recommendations from the Children's Advocate and the Ombudsman, and others, after listening to over 700 front-line workers and other experts giving us 289 recommendations for change, this government accepted it. That's why this government has put in place the Changes for Children initiative for a major overhaul in the child welfare system. Children deserve no less. That's what we're doing.

*(14:30)

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, as the members of the government well know, there has been a huge increase in the number of children in care under their watch, showing a failure of the way they have supported children in this province.

The Premier well knows that the Youth Criminal Justice Act specifically says provinces should not be offloading their child and family service system problems onto the criminal justice system. It is time for the government to recognize the tragic

consequences of the horrible failures in Child and Family Services under their watch. It is well known that the government has a specific duty toward children in care and that these children are at higher risk, both to themselves and, if not helped, to others.

When will the Premier realize that his tragic failure to deal with the child and family service system and caring for children has had such terrible consequences for crime in Manitoba?

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, as significant parts of the Changes for Children initiative, that we are not quite through the first year of, the Province has, in this budget year alone, increased its investments in child welfare by 25 percent; I think one of the biggest increases that can be found anywhere in the Estimates book. But it's not just a matter of more investments, it's a matter of more foster parents. This is where Manitobans have come forward, as we always know they are prepared to do, to open their hearts and their homes to be foster parents. Four hundred and ninety-three new foster beds have been created, and we know we're not finished yet.

We've increased the rates for foster parents. We're increasing it by another 10 percent on January 1. We're enhancing the training all across this province to deal with the challenges of not only the foster parents having to deal with multiple needs of the children, but for the child welfare workers. We're dealing with the challenge of workload relief, Mr. Speaker. That is just one piece of what has to be a multifaceted approach.

Justice Committees Continuations

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to fighting crime, no government in Canada has been as worse or as bad as this current regime. Whether you talk about automobile theft or you talk about gang activities, whether you talk about grow-ops, whatever it might be, there is no government that has performed as poorly—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable Member for Inkster has the floor.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, my question to the Minister of Justice—his action speaks louder than words, and we know he went to Ottawa, and they love to blame Ottawa. Can the Minister of Justice tell us why the justice committees over the last number of years have virtually collapsed? I understand even

the joint chairs committee is folding. This is what I am being told. I ask the Minister of Justice: Why has this government given up on justice committees in the province of Manitoba?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the Member for Inkster that actions speak a lot louder than words. I was very pleased to go with an all-party committee and hear the member's leader say he supports Manitoba's initiatives to change the Youth Criminal Justice Act.

But what actions speak louder words, I ask the Member for Inkster. Will he show that actions speak louder than words and demonstrate his own leadership, Mr. Speaker, and living up to his words in this Chamber that he would resign if the investigation came back and vindicated the government? He can set an example to all those Manitobans there and let his actions speak louder than his rather stray words.

Mr. Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

September 11, 2001 Anniversary

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): September 11, 2007, marked the sixth anniversary of the terrorists attacks that took over 3,000 lives in 2001. As time passes, we all know how important it is that under no circumstances we forget the tragic events of September 11, 2001. Countless people lost family members, loved ones and friends. Heroes made the ultimate sacrifice to save the lives of others. This unspeakable tragedy touched close to home when we lost Dr. Christine Egan, a Manitoba woman, who died that terrible day. Let us always remember and honour each victim.

In memory of this disaster, a service was held at the International Peace Garden on September 11 of this year, located on the Canada-United States border between the state of North Dakota and the province of Manitoba. I had the pleasure of attending that service along with my colleague the Member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire). As well, we were pleased to partake in a ceremony that was led by American Consul General, Mary Speer, and where we heard remarks from the Premier (Mr. Doer), the governor of North Dakota and others. The City of Winnipeg Police Pipe Band opened the event with a moving musical tribute. We also heard from the firefighter who penned the moving song at the memorial to those firefighters from the Winnipeg fire

department who lost their lives in that tragic fire earlier this year.

Approximately 400 people gathered at the 9/11 memorial site in the Peace Garden. This permanent memorial has been constructed from 10 twisted pieces of steel which once stood as girders at the World Trade Center.

Mr. Speaker, at this time, I'd like to recognize the 45 firefighters from the Winnipeg Fire Paramedic Service who were in attendance at the ceremony and also those firefighters who travelled from Brandon, Portage la Prairie and parts of the United States to be present at the event along with those involved in emergency medical services in a variety of capacities.

The attacks of September 11, 2001, have left a permanent scar for both the United States, Canada and the world. In the midst of such tragedy, it's hoped that greater peace can be achieved between all nations. I ask the members here today to show appreciation to the International Peace Garden for holding this event and also to thank those who made the service possible. Thank you.

Historical Museum of St. James-Assiniboia

Ms. Sharon Blady (Kirkfield Park): Museums are treasuries of our past and the guardians of our memories. On August 17, I was fortunate enough to present a grant to Bonita Hunter-Eastwood of the Historical Museum of St. James-Assiniboia in my riding of Kirkfield Park.

The funding was presented as part of the museum's annual Pioneer Days where the museum welcomes the community with various cultural activities reflecting the rich history and numerous cultures associated with early St. James. These activities included tours of the William Brown house by interpreters in the roles of Brown's Métis grandchildren and performances by hoop dancers. My children and I enjoyed these activities and the passion which the board and volunteers bring to preserving such a vital part of our historical legacy.

The museum is a cornerstone of the neighbourhood. The Brown house is a two-storey Red River frame house built in 1856 and furnished with period pieces dating from 1860 to 1890. It is the oldest wooden home in the St. James area and is a vital connection to our fur trade and colonial history.

The Historical Museum of St. James-Assiniboia also houses one-of-a-kind exhibits from the

immediate community as well as from neighbouring parishes. The collections serve a vital role in telling the stories of the Manitobans who came before us. For example, the exhibits on blacksmithing, farming and transportation in the 1911 Municipal Hall building remind us of our roots and the hard work that was needed to build our province. The tools that were used, to construct shelters, feed families, epitomize the many Manitobans' struggles to build lives for themselves with only meagre means.

The museum has an integral role within the community. During the summer months, community members put on environmental theatre that makes history come alive through performance art. The many outreach programs and interesting exhibits excite visitors about the history of the neighbourhood.

I call on all honourable members to join me in congratulating the Historical Museum of St. James-Assiniboia for preserving a valuable part of community history for the enjoyment of generations to come. Their work truly is an asset to the community and the province as a whole. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

* (14:40)

West Nile Virus

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): The number of confirmed West Nile cases has reached record highs in Manitoba. Mr. Speaker, over 500 people are suffering from this outbreak. I was alarmed to learn about this NDP government's mishandling of the West Nile crisis. As a Manitoban and representative for Brandon, I want to know why more was not done when evidence indicated this would be a record year. I want to know why this dithering NDP government endangered the citizens of Brandon, my friends, my family, my neighbours.

The elderly, young children and those with weakened immune systems are more susceptible to developing the more serious form of this virus. This NDP government, Mr. Speaker, should have taken greater steps to protect those vulnerable groups and all Manitobans. They should have listened to the experts, seen the red flags and acted accordingly. Instead, we saw a continued negligence and gross incompetence. To perpetuate an NDP smokescreen they ignored the problem and put Manitobans at risk.

The best prevention is a proactive approach and knowledge. There was a blatant failure to communicate, Mr. Speaker, the genuine risk posed to

the general public. The further spread of this virus could have been prevented. More aggressive action should have been taken. There has been no fogging in Brandon for several years. Regardless of arguments for or against the spraying of malathion, to be effective it has to be consistent, aggressive and earlier in the season. This ineffective government did not utilize the full advantage of a fogging strategy. Their delays are a disgrace. I call on the members opposite to learn from their blatant mistakes in handling the West Nile crisis in 2007. If they repeat the same blunders and indecisive dithering in 2008, they will further endanger the lives of Manitobans and especially southwestern Manitobans. Not only am I embarrassed for them, I am appalled at their dereliction of duty. Stop playing politics with Manitobans' health.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Folklorama Volunteers

Ms. Marilyn Brick (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw the attention of the House to students from Fort Richmond Collegiate who played an important role in the Caribbean pavilion during this summer's Folklorama festival. Keshan Sankar and Chantel Paul, both grade 12 students originally from Trinidad and Tobago, worked together to choreograph a dance show at the Caribbean pavilion. Drawing on the Caribbean folklore of the island ghosts called the jumbi, the pair created an upbeat, fast-paced dance routine that also incorporated the depth of the pavilion's calypso theme. Chantel worked on the dance routine with 10 volunteers between the ages of 10 and 17 that she recruited while Keshan worked on remixing a popular song from Trinidad to fit specifically with the dance's choreography.

Begun in 1970 as a one-time event to celebrate Manitoba's Centennial, Folklorama just concluded a hugely successful 38th year and has become the largest and longest running multicultural event of its kind in the world. The festival has grown from a one-week celebration with 21 pavilions in 1970 to a two-week pavilion with 45 diverse and well-loved pavilions that we know today. While the festival has grown substantially over the years, its mandate to showcase the cultural diversity of this city through traditional music, folk-dance and other cultural demonstrations has remained unchanged.

Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure of visiting a number of pavilions this summer and ran into many of my constituents from St. Norbert volunteering

their time at the festival. All of Folklorama's pavilions are run by volunteers like Keshan Sankar and Chantel Paul. I am pleased to recognize these two students from Fort Richmond Collegiate, and I ask all members of the House to join me in thanking the approximately 20,000 other volunteers, some who have not missed a single Folklorama in 38 years. We want to thank them for the countless hours they put into ensuring the success of this festival.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Folklorama

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, this year marked Folklorama's 38th anniversary. It was, yet again, a very successful and truly memorable experience. There was a total of 45 pavilions at locations across Winnipeg to welcome visitors. The Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen), fellow Progressive Conservative colleagues and myself were privileged to experience over 100 pavilions.

Folklorama gives all of us an opportunity to learn more about diverse cultures, to taste a multitude of food selections and to enjoy a variety of cultural entertainment, thus enabling us to experience Manitoba's multicultural citizenship. I enjoyed the proud ethnicity demonstrated at each of the 23 pavilions I visited. The Filipino pavilion had a lively party and I was pleased to meet Philippine Consul Edda Pangilinan. The African pavilion was one of the most diverse pavilions in Folklorama representing over 50 countries. As the official opposition critic for Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, it was especially exciting to visit the Métis pavilion, and I was thrilled with the enthusiastic step-dancing of the young performers.

The quality of entertainment provided by the talented singers and dancers is outstanding, and I must applaud the young people who participated in this event, the visible pride in their heritage, and their active involvement in promoting cultural awareness. There are far too many people to name individually, but I was impressed by the passion and knowledge of the youth ambassadors.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the members here today to join me in celebrating the success of this year's festival. I would also like to recognize and thank the more than 20,000 workers, volunteers, sponsors, performers and ambassadors for their dedication and hard work. Thank you to the great citizens of this

province and for those from afar for their continued support of this unique multicultural celebration.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

House Business

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader, on House business?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker, on House business.

Mr. Speaker, I understand the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) has provided notice of bringing forward a matter of urgent public importance, and to that end I had discussions with the House leaders from both the Liberal Party and with the opposition. I believe there's an agreement that two members from the Liberal Party, two members from the opposition, and two members from the Government House will speak for approximately an hour with respect to that matter of urgent public importance and, to that end, and it could be commenced with the Leader of the Liberal Party insofar as he brought the motion, and that we will ask that the House sit in Committee of Supply for an hour longer in order to deal with the time that is being utilized to deal with the matter of urgent public importance. I think I have unanimous consent of the House in that regard.

Mr. Speaker: Is there unanimous consent of the House to debate the MUPI that's been brought forward by the honourable Member for River Heights for approximately one hour and consisting of two speakers from the parties and the two independent members, and that the hour used for the debate will be added on in the Committee of Supply? Is there agreement to that? *[Agreed]*

I'll call on the honourable Member for River Heights to move his motion.

MATTER OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), that under rule 36.1 the ordinary business of the House be set aside to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely the continued escalation in Manitoba of violent crimes against women and, in particular, the unsolved homicides of at least 19 sex trade workers in the past 25 years.

* (14:50)

Mr. Speaker: By leave, it has been moved by the honourable Member for River Heights, seconded by the honourable Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), that under rule 36(1), the ordinary business of the House be set aside to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely the continued escalation in Manitoba of violent crimes against women and in particular the unsolved homicides of at least 19 sex trade workers in the past 25 years.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, I bring this forward at the earliest possible opportunity given the fact that there has been increasing attention and concern with the women in Manitoba who have been the basis for a series of unsolved murders. The latest, of course, of these is Fonessa Bruyere, who was murdered this last summer.

The heightened awareness of this problem clearly is not just from what's happening in Manitoba but clearly results from events in Edmonton and in British Columbia which also are contributing to highlighting this particular issue.

In Manitoba in the last 25 years, there have been at least 19 female sex trade workers who've been killed and the crimes are still unsolved. It is time, Mr. Speaker, that we as elected officials in Manitoba recognize that there is a major and very serious problem in regard to violence against women in our province. It's time that we as provincial lawmakers start taking some responsibility to bring this issue forward and to look at actions that should be taken on an urgent basis.

The fact that these women are sex trade workers does not diminish their humanity. They are Manitobans and, as such, they need to be treated with the same respect and dignity as other Manitobans.

Today, women are being murdered and their dead bodies dumped into fields, three dead women in the past six months. The issue of violence against women can no longer be downplayed as just another crime. How many more women will have to die before all of us as MLAs do something about it?

I know many people in this room may not agree with the chosen professions of these women, but that is not the issue. It is not the issue at all. The issue here is the broad one of violence against women, pure and simple. We have indeed had ceremonies, paid attention in one way or another to this, but it has risen to the point where much more effective action is clearly needed. This violence appears to be on the

increase in Manitoba, and more and more of our citizens are becoming afraid to walk down our streets at night, sometimes even in daylight. We have to address this urgent matter, and it's time that we make changes because one more dead or injured woman or frightened woman is one too many.

Over the time that I've been in this Legislature, I have had many people come forward with issues related to violence against women. It is a much broader issue in our province when we are talking about the spectrum of violence against women. One person with whom I have talked fairly frequently and who's been a very strong advocate in this area is my sister-in-law, Nikki Gerrard, who has co-edited a book entitled *Intimate Partner Violence*.

I've highlighted this issue on quite a number of occasions on my blog, and it is important, given what has happened recently, that we are taking forward in this Chamber the issue and bringing to bear the views, the opinions, of members of the Legislature from all parties.

It is sad, Mr. Speaker, when we have a situation, as I did recently, when a young woman came to me and said she was more afraid to be walking at night in Winnipeg than to be walking at night in New York. When somebody, a woman, feels safer walking at night in New York City than in Winnipeg, we have a problem. We have a problem that we'd better deal with and much more is needed at the provincial level.

Now, I'm aware that there is a task force of, I think it's deputy ministers working across the country who are going to bring forward some recommendations sometime next year, but I don't believe that we want to wait until sometime next year for recommendations and for who knows when for their implementation. We need to take action now and we need to take this from the realm of bureaucrats to the realm of politicians and public discussion and public input.

Ms. Marilyn Brick, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

Politicians need to get involved, in the wide variety of ways that we can. I'm pleased that members of other parties have seen fit to sanction and to agree with this debate and discussion today and I believe that it is timely and it is important that we move forward with some real meaning initiatives here in Manitoba to make a difference. Thank you.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Madam Acting Speaker, I'm

very pleased to have the opportunity that we have to deal with this tragic matter. I'm glad we can deal with it in an all-party function. I want to deal with this specific issue. The member strayed into some different issues.

The one thing that I think is really significant is that we have all-party support both on what we did in Ottawa and the fact that the member—the opportunity to discuss these things works both ways and it means that not only is it an opportunity for the public to find out but for the member to find out that there is a task force working nationally on this issue.

First and foremost, as the Minister of Justice, in this matter one has to be very careful in terms of comments that I make with respect to this specific issue. I do want to outline for the member and for members of this House that a number of actions have taken place independent of the Chamber, and the members, I think, will be very interested in being alerted to.

First off, that there is now a Web site maintained by the police services of Manitoba with respect to missing persons. It is updated daily and is provided. Just in terms of statistics the RCMP have identified 123 missing people: 103 males, 20 females; Brandon Police Services, two: one male, one female; Winnipeg Police Service: 38. That's over the last 50 years, Madam Acting Speaker, with respect to an updated Web site.

The second very important aspect of this debate, Madam Acting Speaker, is the fact that we have a national problem and we have a local problem and we have to resolve the issue on both fronts. We have a significant issue with respect to individuals who are involved in high-risk activities who are more exposed to difficulty and it is our job to try to get these individuals and to try to provide assistance to them to move them from a high-risk category to a lesser risk category and therefore deal, not put them in harms way.

*(15:00)

We have, Madam Acting Speaker, a series of programs that have been put in place by the government in a variety of fashions that deal with individuals in high-risk activities and, in fact, we have provided to the police and investigative authorities additional resources to deal with high-risk individuals as a result of some of the matters that have come to our attention.

I can indicate that there has been constant discussion between the investigative services and various aspects of the justice system dealing with these issues. I can indicate that there are ongoing investigations, and I can indicate that one of the recent cases that occurred in Winnipeg, there has been a suspect charged with respect to a particular aspect.

The fundamental issue, Madam Acting Speaker, is the fact that there are a lot of individuals in our society who are marginalized, who are vulnerable, and who are utilized in a variety of fashions and abused in a variety of fashions. It is tantamount and it is paramount for all of us to reach out and bring and provide whatever resources are necessary in order to bring these people back into our community in order to allow them the opportunity to lead a lifestyle that is much more appropriate.

Madam Acting Speaker, there is no doubt, as I indicated when we went to Ottawa on the mission, that organized crime is at the root of our addictions and drug trade, prostitution trade, human trafficking and the vast majority of offences that go on on the street. It is incumbent upon all of us to break down to whatever extent possible those links where a vulnerable person on the street is taken by organized crime and used up and thrown away literally in addiction, in prostitution, in a variety of fashions, both male and female, but clearly predominantly female.

Madam Acting Speaker, this issue goes beyond all political boundaries, as we discovered when we went to Ottawa. It's an issue that requires ongoing work and vigilance, and it's an issue that has been recognized in the Alberta task force report, in the Saskatchewan review, in the Nova Scotia review, in the work that's done in British Columbia, in the work that's done here in Manitoba.

I am very pleased that we have in place the number of programs: the Cybertip outreach, Honouring the Spirit of our Little Sisters, residential child care, the Meth Strategy, training for front-line workers, human trafficking program, student research project, the TERF program, shelters program, *Sex Trade Reality Check*, *Neighbourhood Solutions*, child sexual exploitation awareness resources, school learning resources, the amendments to The Highway Traffic Act—the first of its kind to deal with the impoundment of vehicles, et cetera, and with an education capacity for johns—and in particular, our TERF program that is focussed on

targeting individuals, our work with First Nations communities, our work with the communities and the variety of agencies that provide programming, shelters and supports to individuals that are involved.

Bottom line, Madam Acting Speaker, is that we have to be vigilant; we have to allow the investigations to take place. But more important, and most important of all, we have to allow people to be back into the community, to be part of the community and not be marginalized and not be in a situation where they can be at increased risk, because they're all our parents, brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers; we're all related in this fashion.

I close by saying that part of my route on my bicycle, riding on a daily basis, is down my home street in the North End where the south end has become a focus of this kind of activity. It is something that we all have to work at diligently. It is something that we should not take lightly and is indeed something that I agree the risk is increasing according to intelligence information that we have in terms of working on the street. Anything that members might suggest, we are prepared to look at and to work co-operatively with them on, in order to lessen the harmful effects that it may have on women and, hopefully, prevent any further deaths or any further tragedies occurring in the community. Thank you.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Madam Acting Speaker, I am pleased to stand and speak on the matter of urgent public importance put forward by the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard). It is indeed a tragedy when we hear of the escalation in the number of violent crimes against women, particularly the number of unsolved cases of homicides within the sex trade and peripheral to that.

So far this year, we've had three deaths, young, young girls, one of them not even 18 years old, still in fact a child. It's terribly alarming and we note that the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chomiak) has spoken and focussed on himself and his government and the things that they are trying to do, but I would like to—for the record, Madam Acting Speaker, out of respect for the women that have died over the last 20 years, I'd like to read their names into the record. We know that there have been at least 26 trade workers who suffered a violent death in or around Winnipeg since 1983, and we know that charges have only been laid in two of those cases. Two of them may have been accidental, but 16 of these cases remain unsolved.

August 30, 2007, Fonessa Lynn Bruyere; July 15, 2007, Aynsley Aurora Kinch; April 19, 2007; Crystal Shannon Saunders; May 9, 2005, Tatia Ulm; November 3, 2004, David Joseph Boulanger, also known as Divas B.; October 2, 2003, Nicolle Hands; December 15, 2002, Therena Silva; August 15, 2001, Noreen Taylor; September 29, 1998, Tania Marsden; March 20, 1998, Evelyn Stewart; March 17, 1994, Jamie McGuire; April 13, 1989, Susan Holens; May 23, 1988, Charlene Orsulak; December 5, 1987, Cheryl Duck; August 6, 1984, Constance Cameron; August 15, 1983, Marie Edith Banks.

As I read through these names and I look at the circumstances of which they were found in death and where they were found in death, Madam Acting Speaker, it alarms me. It alarms me that this is all over our province, and it alarms me when I look at and I see three of these deaths closely in chronological time occurred near where I live. I wasn't aware of that until reading this right now.

Tania Marsden was found at the Perimeter Highway and the Assiniboine River. I remember that day. Jamie McGuire was found in a ditch near St. François Xavier, very close to where I live. A few years before that, Susan Holens was found in a ditch near Headingley.

This is tragic, and the number of people that have disappeared and we are not able to solve these crimes. It's alarming that this has escalated. We've had these three deaths in the last year.

* (15:10)

We know those that may work in the sex trade are more vulnerable. They may be addicted to drugs, but we also know that those types of crimes, although I believe that our law enforcement agencies are doing what they can to solve these crimes, I do believe it's harder in certain circumstances because the community doesn't talk about these things.

However, having said that, there are a number of people that have spoken up because they fear for the safety of their own daughters, as anybody who would have a daughter would because, as I say, it's not just women in the sex trade but women in general who are more vulnerable to violent crime.

Parents from the Brokenhead First Nation have talked and alerted the RCMP to what they term and what they believe to be a sexual predator or a pedophile luring their teenage girls into situations where they could possibly take advantage of them. At least that's what these mothers fear. They reported

this and, in fact, a number of mothers have come forward. Mothers of at least five other girls say that their daughters have reported this luring that's been going on. In fact, it is so fearsome within the community that a number of the men in the community have taken it upon themselves to go out and look for this predator. But the RCMP say it's unlikely charges will be laid. They just have not enough evidence, I guess.

I know that the minister has indicated that he's provided the Winnipeg police with additional resources, and we hear this from time to time from this government: We'll put more money in. We'll put more resources in.

What we want, what we all want is to see results. We want to see the level of violent crime go down. We want to see it eliminated. We want women in this city and this province to be able to walk on the street and not fear that they're in jeopardy or that they are not safe. We need to work towards that. It's very, very important. Women's groups have organized an event called Take Back the Night in which they fear being out on the streets. Why should we fear that? Why can't we take back the night? Why can't we take back our safety in our own communities?

But Manitoba, as I had said, does have a very high rate of violent crime and the second highest rate of sexual assault. We need to do better. We need to provide those resources in a meaningful way that translates into safety, that translates into not only just a lessened number but no deaths of women or anybody in the province of Manitoba.

I'd just like to again say that it's very moving when you look at all these people, all these women, that have died and knowing that their families and their friends have not got closure because these cases have not been solved. No one knows what's happened. No one knows what's happened to these women. We care about what's happened to these women. We care. We'd like to have these cases solved and we'd like to make sure with all the resources possible that this type of violent action against women is eliminated in this province.

With those few words, thank you, Madam Acting Speaker.

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister responsible for the Status of Women): The issue of missing women is a concern not only for Manitoba but I think for our country as a whole, and I think that it is important that governments are doing all they can to address

this very, very serious problem of missing women. It is a national problem, and the Native Women's Association of Canada has estimated that more than 500 Aboriginal women may have gone missing in the last 30 years.

We also had an opportunity yesterday as a caucus and as a government to meet with the Provincial Council of Women, and they raised the very important issue of violence against women in their brief with us; and we heard passionate words from Rita Emerson who is with the Mother of Red Nations and her words were profound. She is a woman who works in our community on the front lines with Aboriginal women, and she encouraged us to take this issue very seriously and to continue the work that we have started here in Manitoba. Our government supports the development of a strong, well-networked continuum of community-based agencies that can intervene and prevent the cycle of domestic violence that affects so many women, so many children and so many families here in Manitoba.

Manitoba Family Services and Housing, through the Family Violence Prevention Program, provides almost \$11 million in funding to 33 agencies throughout the province to deliver family violence prevention and intervention services including women's resource centres, residential second-stage housing, a range of counselling and support services, and ten emergency women's crisis shelters.

As the Minister responsible for the Status of Women, I think it's important that we acknowledge the very important work that has been done at the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women table. The recent report from 2006, Statistics Canada's *Measuring Violence Against Women* report—it was an initiative that Manitoba was part of through the Status of Women FPT table—notes that one in four Canadian women has experienced or will experience domestic violence in their lifetime. Sadly, Aboriginal women are three times more likely to experience domestic violence and eight times more likely to be killed at the hands of an intimate partner. Those are very, very sobering statistics.

Mr. Rob Altemeyer, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

The Family Violence Prevention Program funds three programs which are specifically focussed on the provision of culturally sensitive programs to Aboriginal clients, and we heard very clearly when we were working with the Aboriginal stakeholders

and our women's group that the kinds of programs that were culturally sensitive were critically important in stopping the violence. These programs include the Ikwe-Widdjiitiwin Inc., a women's crisis shelter; the family violence counselling program at Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata; and Wabanong Abinoonjiiag Inc., services to children exposed to violence. All of these agencies are required to consider culturally sensitive programming and delivery, as many of the clients who access these services are of Aboriginal background. Agencies are also expected to make efforts to reflect community cultural diversity in both their staff and their board complements.

* (15:20)

The Family Violence Prevention Program is working with the federal government on a number of issues affecting Aboriginal women and children. It is providing consultation and support to Indian and Northern Affairs Canada as the federal government works toward developing consistent standards and funding arrangements for all federally funded shelters.

The Family Violence Prevention Program works closely with the federal government to lobby for a consistent level of service for Aboriginal women who are impacted by violence and has supported the national Aboriginal circle of violence with many of the issues that this organization addresses. We are part of a federal-provincial consultative group on matrimonial real property including a specific response to Aboriginal women living on reserve and impacted by domestic violence.

I'd like to mention a report that was done recently, the work that was done by the Sisters in Spirit campaign, the Native Women's Association of Canada, and all the levels of government that have a responsibility and a role in resolving the many issues that we are facing around violence and women.

The Amnesty International report made recommendations as to how authorities could better protect the safety of Aboriginal women. The issues that the Stolen Sisters report addressed are both long-standing and real. There is considerable evidence to suggest that Aboriginal women and girls are more likely to experience violence and abuse than any other members of their population. This violence is linked to cultural dislocation, discrimination, poverty, homelessness, geographic and social isolation, and racism. This is a very serious issue for us, and I want to take this opportunity to thank our Minister of Justice (Mr. Chomiak) who has met with

the RCMP and the Winnipeg Police Service on this issue and has offered resources and has communicated to the police that we want to be a part of the solution in regard to resolving this very important issue.

In light of the concerns over missing Aboriginal women, Manitoba asked Ottawa to join the province in acting quickly when recommendations are released by senior federal-provincial-territorial justice officials who are currently examining these issues at their FPT table. The Premier (Mr. Doer) recently raised—our Premier—with Prime Minister Harper, at their meeting on September 20, the very important issue of violence against women.

I believe that we have many programs here in Manitoba that we have worked diligently on to resolve some of the issues in our communities and in our neighbourhoods that have affected women and children and families. There is, I believe, much more work to be done because I believe all of us in this House take this issue very seriously, and we would, I think, all like to say, someday, that we have completely and totally resolved this issue.

The MLA for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu) mentioned the Take Back the Night event that just occurred last week here in Winnipeg, and there was a walk from the Legislature to Wolseley. I want to thank the Advisory Council on the Status of Women who worked with these young students at the University of Winnipeg who got the event going because there was some concern that that event was not going to occur.

One of the most important things that we can do as a society and as a community is we can continue to work with our community partners and our community stakeholders in raising awareness about this issue because that is one of the most important things that we can do, is continue to raise awareness. That was one of the issues that Rita Emerson, the Mother of Red Nations, when we met with her yesterday in the provincial Council of Women, asked us to do was not quit talking about this issue and continue to raise the issue. So I'm thankful for this opportunity today that all members from all sides of the House can continue to raise this issue and talk about it.

I'd also like to thank the new MLA for Kirkfield Park (Ms. Blady) who spoke at that walk last week. I think it was very important for us to have one of our colleagues there who participated in the walk and who was there walking side by side with women who

care deeply about this issue, Mr.—It's not Deputy Speaker; I'm not sure what it is—but I really, you know, want to thank my colleagues in the House for this opportunity to say a few words about this very important issue, and we will continue to work diligently on this file.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Acting Speaker, I have been very fortunate to have, whether it's my current leader or Senator Sharon Carstairs, as leaders that have been very strong advocates for a higher sense of awareness in fighting violence against women.

Mr. Acting Speaker, I'd like to very briefly make comment on what we are talking about is real people. It wasn't that long ago, within two weeks, that I met with John and Diana Kinch, who are the parents of Aynsley. Aynsley was one of the victims. I think that we really need to look on these murders and treat them in the same fashion as we see other individuals that are murdered in society. Aynsley was a wonderful young lady who had her life terminated prematurely and unfairly. The family wants to see justice and who can blame them for that. It's encouraging to see the support from all of my colleagues inside this Legislature for allowing the debate to occur this afternoon. The only point that I really want to make is that these people, these victims need to have justice given to them, and our hearts and prayers go out to the family and friends of the victims.

Thank you, Mr. Acting Speaker.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Acting Speaker, I, too, would like to speak to the matter of urgent public importance.

As a woman, as a mother, as a legislator, as a proud Manitoban, I am truly disturbed to see the number of young women who have faced atrocities such as this, through death, through painful infliction and to the families who have had to work with their children, the young women and their families to get past the pain that obviously has been inflicted upon them.

To see the number of young women who have lost their lives in Manitoba over the last several months, it takes you aback. It makes you realize that not enough is being done in this province to address these issues. Violence against women is not something that is new, but it has been escalating over the last several years, and we need to see some leadership on providing supports to the different

organizations that are out there that are trying to make a difference, organizations that are community-based where they are working first-hand with the young women who need the supports. I had the opportunity of participating in a Hard Night Out a few years back and what I learnt from that experience and what I gained from the experience was an understanding that there are resources available but they're not necessarily meeting the needs of the individuals who need the help.

There are different types of support mechanisms out there but often they close at 10 or 11 at night. Women at risk don't run by that clock. They run by the clock of 24 hours. They often are out on the streets at 2 or 3 in the morning where there are very few resources in place for them. I guess what we need to be doing is looking at what these women face as challenges and provide supports that fit their needs and ways that we can keep them safe.

* (15:30)

Take Back the Night, I think, is an excellent event that brings awareness to the issues facing women who are victims of crime. I had the privilege of attending the one at Brandon that was put on by Brandon University women's group as well as the one in The Pas which was put on by different services or community-based organizations in that community. What I found in parallel and in those presentations presented by the many organizations and women who have been victims or have family members who have been victims, is that they need to have a voice and they need to be believed and they need to be heard. I believe that when women become victims of violence it's important that we, as society, embrace their need to be heard and to act on the recommendations that are being provided, not only by themselves but organizations that are in the community that are working on their behalf.

The Minister for the Status of Women (Ms. Allan) spoke about the Mother of Red Nations. I also met with that group. They spoke of young women leaving First Nations communities or communities in the north, and leaving those communities because of situations that had brought violence in their lives. They ran from those communities. They often ran with their children. But they had nowhere to go. These women live in their vehicles or they live wherever they can find what they consider a safe spot in the city, and that could be in a cardboard enclosure or someplace that they feel that they can find refuge. They could not find supports within the

system to provide a roof over their head. So, in a sense they're leaving a violent situation and coming to a community where they are looking for support, looking for somebody to provide a level of care, and find nothing. So, often, these women have to resort to other means to provide supports for themselves and often their children or their families.

I do believe that a number of the women that are listed, and that were shared by the Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu), were doing what they felt they had to do to survive. I believe that we, as a society, should be ashamed that we have not been able to provide the supports that these women needed and that they had to find their life ending rather prematurely without the supports from our society.

I believe that the *Stolen Sisters* report does provide very strong recommendations on how we, as society, and we, as a province, can be doing better. I believe that there are still a number of those recommendations outstanding. So I encourage the government to move on those recommendations, to continue to work with the Provincial Council of Women and the Mother of Red Nations and to implement not only those recommendations but others that have come forward.

Statistics indicating that Aboriginal women are eight times more likely to be involved in a violent domestic situation, and that three times the women are likely to face death or injury from their partner. These are statistics not to be proud of.

When we were visiting Island Lake, I spoke to a young woman who said our future is being lost. Our future is the children that are growing up in these communities. She begged that there be supports in place to help young people, young women, deal with losses.

Suicide is something that is a major concern within the Aboriginal community. I believe that suicide comes from feeling lost, that there is nothing to live for, that they believe that there is nothing to look forward to in their future. So we need to be looking at ways to reverse that. We need to be looking and partnering with the Aboriginal community to look at ways to move away from a feeling of helplessness and moving towards ways of inclusion and empowerment.

I've visited with Victim Services office in Brandon. Karen Lewthwaite is the contact that I've had in the Westman community. Karen is an

excellent resource for people who have been victims of violence. I think that we need to see more people like that who have a passion for providing supports for victims and providing resources so that people know where to go when they do find themselves in a very bad situation in their lives.

Incidences of violence are continuing to grow in Manitoba and Winnipeg, but also in northern Manitoba. In speaking to the mayor of Thompson, the disparity of people that are living with the economic disparity—I guess the economic disparity within the community of Thompson is causing more alarming numbers of violence, assaults, shootings and stabbings, and we need to be looking at ways that we can work with the individuals within those communities to reduce that.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

The Justice Minister has indicated publicly that he'll offer Winnipeg police additional resources. I encourage him to be looking at additional resources across the board. I believe that the women that were listed earlier by my colleague, the Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu), these women deserve better. Their families deserve better, and I think this government has to be held accountable to providing supports for these families. I will stand in support of this being a matter of urgent public importance and look forward to holding the government accountable to these recommendations and the need for better care of our women within Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker: As previously agreed, that will conclude the MUPI. We have heard from two from each of the parties and the independent members, so now we will move on to Grievances.

GRIEVANCES

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Inkster, on a Grievance?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Yes, Mr. Speaker. Questionable behaviour back in the 1990s led to a public inquiry, even though a couple of years earlier Elections Manitoba had decided not to prosecute the individuals in question. The then-leader of the opposition in the New Democratic Party pushed for the inquiry back then and, as a result, people were found to be guilty of inappropriate behaviour.

The commissioner at the time came up with some recommendations, one of which was the

importance of having a code of ethics for political parties to adhere to.

I'd like to read that particular recommendation from the Monnin commission report. It's on page 65, No. 3, where it states: "That all registered political parties follow the recommendations of the federal Royal Commission on Electoral Reform and Party Financing published in November 1991 (often referred to as "the Lortie Report"), and prepare a Code of Ethics as outlined therein as well as a mechanism whereby such Code or the provisions thereof be strictly adhered to. Someone must have power to oversee the activities of others. If the political parties fail to implement a Code of Ethics by December 31, 2001, that a standard Code be made compulsory by legislation."

Mr. Speaker, the commissioner at the time came up with these recommendations, one of which was the importance of having this code of ethics for political parties to adhere to. From the Monnin report came a Manitoba Shared Code of Ethical Conduct for political participants. The code of conduct states: "All political participants accept the responsibility to act in such a manner as to maintain and enhance public confidence in the integrity of the political process."

Mr. Speaker, the Premier has a moral obligation to comment on the content of Mr. Kaur Singh Sidhu's letter dated September 12, 2006, that was sent to him, and whether or not he believes the person in question violated Manitoba's Shared Code of Ethical Conduct for political parties.

Mr. Speaker, The Elections Act very clearly states in 178(1): "A person who, directly or indirectly, offers a bribe to induce or influence another person to do any of the following is guilty of an offence." If you go to, in particular (c) and (d), "to nominate or refrain from nominating a person as a candidate;" or (d) "to run or refrain from running as a candidate or to withdraw as a candidate."

* (15:40)

Mr. Speaker, I've tabled the letter and I've read the code of conduct. I've talked to witnesses. Members, if they like, can get a copy of the letter that I've tabled. In terms of witnesses, I would turn to a CBC report, back on December 13, 2006, in which a 25—and I quote from the report: A 25-year member and former member of the provincial party's executive said Tuesday that the Premier, his chief of staff, offered NDP member Kaur Sidhu, a Winnipeg

pharmacist, a high-profile position with the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority in exchange for staying out of a nomination race in The Maples constituency. That is a witness to a meeting.

I would ask—I have not been provided any information that has contradicted Mr. Sidhu's letter to date, and until I have been provided proof, I will continue to push for a public inquiry. Further, I would ask that if any one has any information whatsoever that would clear the person in question of any wrongdoing, I would be more than happy to halt any further actions and publicly apologize to those that I have offended.

Mr. Speaker, I would emphasize how important the Shared Code of Ethical Conduct is and cite a couple of citations from it, and these would be specific quotes. Members can download this off the Internet or they can request a copy from myself or their own respective parties.

Under Purpose, it states: "All political participants accept the responsibility to act in such a manner as to maintain and enhance public confidence in the integrity of the political process."

In regards to Application, it states: "Party leaders and candidates undertake to actively promote compliance with this Code."

Under Guiding Principles, Knowledge and Adherence, we read: "Members shall respect and adhere to the principles and rules of conduct set out in this Code and actively promote adherence to the Code on the part of other Members."

With respect to Respect for the Law: "Members shall maintain and promote respect for Manitoba's election laws. This involves complying with both the letter and spirit of the provisions of all elections laws and regulations."

Under Integrity, Mr. Speaker, it states: "Members shall conduct themselves in a way that upholds the integrity of, and the public's respect for, the electoral system."

Mr. Speaker, for clarification on my comments in terms of resignation: A number of reasons, including the Premier's refusal to comment on the issue and my desire to uncover the truth, caused me to state that I would resign my seat if I was proven to be wrong. Even though I still have reason to believe that there was inappropriate behaviour, I should not have said I would resign my seat, and I am sorry for doing so.

Mr. Speaker, I will not resign my seat. I am still going to be diligent in trying to get clear indication as to what has happened. To the very best of my knowledge, there has not been any contradiction of the letter or the witness saying that neither one, either one, was not true. There is an obligation on the House to adhere and respect and enforce the Shared Code of Conduct. I believe my approach is in keeping with what I campaigned on in the last provincial election where I stated two points.

The first point was the Premier told Manitoba that he knew nothing about the Crocus Investment Fund fiasco. A leaked government document that was mailed to my office a few weeks ago proved that the Premier and his government tried to mislead us. The cost of this dishonesty could exceed \$150 million tax dollars.

Point 2: On another issue, faced with allegations about inappropriate behaviour by a staff member in the office of the Premier, did nothing. Elections Manitoba is currently investigating but the election will be over before we find out the truth.

I would like to challenge the Premier or any one of his MLAs to debate both of the above issues in a public meeting. If I am unable to prove my case to the people in attendance, I will publicly apologize to Mr. Doer. So I believe, Mr. Speaker, I am in sync with what it is that I campaigned on in the last provincial election.

Mr. Speaker, I do believe it's important that we recognize the need for getting clarity on this issue. We know what happened in the '90's. Let's not see a repeat of it. We do need the Premier (Mr. Doer) to comment on Mr. Sidhu's letter. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: No more Grievances.

Before we continue I would just like to remind members that when referring to other members in the House it's by their constituency or the portfolio they hold. Just a reminder.

No more Grievances. We are moving on to Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if you might resolve the House into Committee of Supply.

A lot of feedback now. Or I thought it was just me hearing extra voices. Extra three or four than normal.

Mr. Speaker: Your mike's on.

Mr. Chomiak: I was just commenting about the technological innovations in the House with respect to feedback on the microphones and making a reference to my own thinking processes.

Mr. Speaker: The House will now resolve into Committee of Supply.

Madam Deputy Speaker and the other Chairs, please report to your respective rooms to chair your sessions.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

INFRASTRUCTURE AND TRANSPORTATION

*(15:50)

Madam Chairperson (Marilyn Brick): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): With such good news I certainly do. But I just want to mention that, first of all, I won't belabour the points or I won't drag my comments on. I'll try to be very to the point. I know that I want to give the opposition an opportunity to ask questions. I think that's important as opposed to laying out all the good projects that we've done in each one of the MLA's areas, because they're familiar with them more than most people would be.

Having said that, I have to tell you that a lot's been accomplished, but there's more to do as usual. We'll never solve all the problems, quite frankly, in transportation, and I don't believe any government will. But, at least if you have a plan and you have some money to go towards that plan, I think a lot can be accomplished. Just let me, first of all, just say that it's my pleasure to present for your consideration and approval the Estimates of Expenditure for Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation, MIT as it's referred to, for the year '07-08.

There's been some departmental restructuring, as most people know. Infrastructure and Transportation was at one time a department called Transportation and Government Services. There has been a lot added to the department, including a Water Services Board, the floodway, and there are a number of other areas that we now cover. The departmental restructuring took place a while back now. Most people are quite familiar with it. Some people are still asking many questions related to who covers what and those kinds of things. But I think most MLAs are certainly aware of the different areas that now have come over to Infrastructure and Transportation. Very similar, actually, other provinces have similarly named departments. I know Alberta, for example; I know the federal government has Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, I believe it's called. So that seems to be the movement certainly across the country where infrastructure is put in with transportation. Some people are looking at trade and other areas to add. But right now Manitoba has Infrastructure and Transportation and that's the name of the current department.

We've been very fortunate to add some staffing to the department. One could argue that it's never enough. But we are heading in the right direction and a lot of this was because of the 2020 Vision consultation process that took place in Manitoba a number of years ago. The MLAs for Transcona, Flin Flon and Selkirk, those three MLAs participated in this consultation group, and they were able to get a lot of feedback from Manitobans as to what did they want to see with regard to their transportation system, being roads, bridges and everything related. A lot of the feedback we received was you need more money. I believe the outcome was you need \$3 billion more. We've added \$4 billion. I'm sorry, billion, billion. They said you need \$3 billion, we have added \$4 billion.

*(16:00)

The consultation process and people having input into that process said you needed to have advanced tendering and you need to be able to let the construction industry know ahead of time what kinds of projects are happening, and we do that in the fall. Madam Chair, we also are continuing to meet with rural municipalities and many other stakeholders on a regular basis to get input on the kind of projects they want to see and the kind of needs that they feel their communities need to have addressed.

Highway infrastructure. The Government of Manitoba, as I mentioned, made an unprecedented commitment to building a provincial highway network to foster economic and social prosperity in the province. There are many, many different projects under way in the province. We've said that it's going to be \$2 billion over the first five years, and over the next five would be at least \$2 billion. Now I say "at least." As a minister, I am certainly working towards and would like, of course, to be able to tackle all the challenges that we have in our network. At least we have that \$4-billion capital plan, investment plan that we have put forward to Manitobans, and they have accepted that. Highway 75, Highway 16, Highway 59, PTH 2, PTH 68, bridges, for example, in Portage la Prairie, and there are a number of others throughout the province of Manitoba that we've tackled. The investment that I'm talking about represents, I would say, at least probably 85 percent more than the '06-07 capital budget, but a lot of what we've heard from people is that it's just not building new roads and new bridges that is the be-all and end-all. The maintenance and preservation are also really important for our province; and, with having goods and services going in and out of our province, again, that's truly important.

Red River floodway expansion. I mention that's part of Infrastructure now. We are now at the 1-in-300-year level. We will be at 1-in-700-year on time, on budget; \$665 million in partnership with the federal government. The federal government, it wasn't that long ago that Minister Toews and Minister Cannon were here making the announcement at The Forks about how they were prepared to share in that amount of money on a 50-50 basis, and we're certainly pleased that they've done so. When there are occasions of flooding in Manitoba, and we do have that, the projection is that if the flood would ever overtake the city of Winnipeg, it would be anywhere from \$10- to \$12-billion worth of flood damage. In most cases, the federal government, of course, has covered the 90 percent and the province has 10 percent, and this is really an important investment because it will be preventative and it's proactive in nature.

We're fortunate to be able to have a government that I'm very proud of that deals with transportation in the north, in rural Manitoba and in all areas, every corner of the province, and we are continuing to work towards doing more of that. Northern transportation, I believe, in my humble opinion, was

ignored for a period of time. We have now put more dollars into northern Manitoba, which I believe will pay dividends. You have huge amounts of money generated, quite frankly, from the north, whether it would be Hudson Bay Mining & Smelting, whether it's Inco or also the forest industry. Having said that, just dealing with the different areas of the province, we're extremely proud of the work we've done. More needs to be done, and our plan and our goal is to accomplish exactly that.

We've talked about some short-term investments we've made. We also have an eye on the future and moving forward. We have great deals of dollars put forward not only in, because as a department I mentioned to you that it's indeed called Infrastructure and Transportation, but government services still make up a part of it, water services.

We have generated a lot of investment in buildings, for example, in the province of Manitoba through our government services office, and we are planning on doing more.

We also have entered into partnerships with government, and our federal government has stated that they're planning on putting more dollars into the provinces. Under the Martin government, I believe, they gave monies to municipalities, cities, towns and villages, which was important. There is another piece that was missing, and that piece is to the provinces.

Manitoba is not the only province that has spoken out with regard to this issue. All provinces are on board and agree that more funding is needed. I believe the Harper government, Prime Minister Harper, Minister Cannon and Minister Toews are supportive of the fact that the provinces need more dollars from gas tax revenues and return to those provinces where the gas tax monies are derived from.

So I'm just going back to where Prime Minister Harper said in an election, almost two years now, that the money would be coming with regard to gas tax revenue specifically, and those dollars have not arrived yet. We're still waiting for the Brink's truck. I won't be so cynical as to think that the federal government is waiting for a federal election before they roll out the Brink's truck, but we'll take the money whether it arrives today or in a month or so.

I just want to conclude by saying congratulations to all the people that work diligently every day on behalf of Manitobans in the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation. You have a great

many men and women who are dedicated civil servants who don't get enough credit for the hard work that they do day in and day out.

So, with that, Madam Chairperson, I just want to conclude my remarks for Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation.

Madam Chairperson: We thank the minister for those comments. I just wanted to remind all honourable members that the use of cell phones is not permitted.

Does the official opposition critic have an opening statement?

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Madam Chair, I have a few comments that I'd like to make as well. I appreciate the minister's unbiased comments in regard to his portfolios that he represents. I guess, to put those comments on the record, I don't know how much more of a Brink's truck you need than the \$3 billion they're getting from the federal government in transfers, but we won't go there in regard to his portfolio and in regard to the funds that help the government carry on with the itinerary that they have before them. It's no easy job. I would be the last to say that it's an easy job to try to organize these funds in every case.

There are many, many areas that require funds that limit any minister's ability, and any government's ability, to try to take care of everybody's needs. So it is a tough job to divvy out those funds, if you will, in a responsible manner to make sure that you're maximizing the safety and the economic activity in the province of Manitoba for all Manitobans and, particularly, in regard to the safety because, of course, the minister himself alluded to the fact that there was someone had pointed out there was a shortfall of \$2 billion, and \$4 billion. Of course, some of the estimates now are in the neighbourhood of \$8 billion and \$9 billion that will be required to appease some of the infrastructure needs and rebuild the infrastructure needs of Manitoba. That's certainly not all in the area of highways, but a good deal of that is in infrastructure.

I want to, through this Estimates period, ask the minister some questions about infrastructure, certainly, on the Transportation, the government services side of the areas that he's responsible for and look at some of the staffing issues that they have, some of the particular roads and bridges across the province that he alluded to, as well as agreements that they have between the federal government. He

also alluded to those in his comments as well. There are some specific issues that I want to raise on particular notes that I may have sent him in the last while just in regard to some of the needs of some of my constituents in those areas as well. I know that there will be, from time to time, if the minister will accommodate that, some of my colleagues coming in and asking questions on particular issues that are important to them in their constituencies, whether it's roads or perhaps their areas of short-lines and railroads and a number of the mechanisms that are valuable to transportation. There are also issues of our airports in the north and rural facilities as well that the minister is responsible for. I would look at those. Of course, the floodway that he alluded to, he may feel that it was on time, on budget and will be there at a 700-year level, but I might ask a couple of questions around that just for clarification as well.

I want to proceed, Madam Chair, if you will, with the questions that we would go forth with. I've not a lot more to add at this time. I think I'll save the time for the questions that we may have of the minister and my colleagues as well. Thank you.

* (16:10)

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

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the Ministers' Salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 15.1(a) and proceed with consideration of the remaining items referenced in resolution 15.1.

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

Mr. Lemieux: Just on a point of clarification, I know my critic has been very sensitive to this fact that there are people who have to travel in from Brandon, for example, just on the Water Services side, or people, because the department is so diverse, that you're dealing with all kinds of different items. I'm just wondering if there is a way to alleviate this dilemma of having 10 staff just sitting here, and yet there aren't any questions being posed to their particular area. I don't mind going global with any question related to my department in any way, shape or form, but I am just wondering is there a way that we can tackle this in a way.

I know sometimes it gets off-track a little bit, but I don't know if my colleague wants to tackle transportation issues first or how we can do this so it's done in a reasonable way.

Madam Chairperson: Prior to that, I am just going to ask the question then, and then we'll return to having your staff come to the table.

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

Mr. Maguire: Yes, Madam Chair. Thank you, as the minister and I forgot to do that in my own comments.

I would appreciate it if we could go global, but I would be prepared to deal as concisely as we can with the minister's request in regard to making sure that we're not duplicating and having staff sit, you know, take questions today and not tomorrow and maybe Wednesday or Thursday, you have to be back again and we'll try to co-ordinate that as best we can.

Madam Chairperson: With that in mind then, I understand that we will be doing a global discussion with the understanding that you will give some notice as to which division/department you would like to have come forward for the next day at the end of the previous day. Is that sort of what we are agreeing to?

Mr. Maguire: Yes, we'll try and remember to do that as best we can, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairperson: Agreed.

Would the minister please request his staff to join us at the table, and then the minister can introduce the staff in attendance.

Mr. Lemieux: Yes, it's my pleasure to introduce my deputy minister and associate deputy minister. I know that the members opposite know that if we keep, if we have to shuffle staff back and forth it does impede on the time that would be better used for questions, so we will just have to work around it and we'll try the best we can, I guess, to try to zero in on certain areas.

First of all, I would like to introduce Andy Horosko. He's the Deputy Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation, and also Paul Rochon, who is the Associate Deputy Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Madam Chairperson: I just want to return to one point that I didn't mention at the end when we were discussing the decision of going global or going

chronologically, and that is that all resolutions will be passed once the questioning has been completed for a section.

Is that agreed?

Mr. Maguire: Yes, it will. We may be a while before we get to that point, Madam Chair, but once we get into the final sections, we can do that, but I think we will save me working towards that at the end of the Estimates process that we want to work at.

Madam Chairperson: That is agreed.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Maguire: Well, I want to thank you, very much, Madam Chair, and thank the minister for introducing both Mr. Horosko and Mr. Rochon. Welcome.

I also would like to, as the minister did, thank all staff from Infrastructure, Transportation, government services throughout the province of Manitoba.

You know, we've had a few major catastrophes to deal with this year. I know that not all of the members here are involved in some of the Emergency Measure issues, but sooner or later some of these issues hit all departments. I appreciate the work of the staff in all of these areas, and I'll stick to the ones responsible for this minister today for these comments. But it's sometimes a thankless job to deal with catastrophes that happen on short notice, and of course there have been some in this department as well that have had to be dealt with and some of the infrastructure needs on short notice. I trust and know that the staff of the government is doing the best in some of those areas that they can with both the finances that they're able to deal with and the directions that they're given and working with and agreed upon, Madam Chair.

So I do want to, however, just ask a few questions in regard to some of the staff that the minister may have at this point, and perhaps he can help clarify just a few positions. I know that I have the matrix before me in regard to the make-up of the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation.

I guess, first of all, I'd like to ask the minister just if he could clarify on the Infrastructure side before we do get into staffing a bit just some of the issues around that of infrastructure. I know the minister's dealing with the floodway and a number of other areas, but there have been some changes between departments and that sort of thing. I wonder if the minister could outline any infrastructure

projects that he could make us aware of in his department, some of them, say, the half-dozen major ones that are on the go right now in Infrastructure, without the Transportation side, and any other ones that he can make us aware of at this time.

Mr. Lemieux: Well, I thank the member for the question.

There are, as he pointed out, just a tremendous amount of projects in the Transportation side that are taking place in Manitoba and possibly far too lengthy to complete even in a week of dealing with Estimates. But I will talk about other projects that we're doing. I think he's referring to maybe the government services side. The government services side, as the member knows, is responsible for dealing with projects that are essentially the projects of other departments, whether they be the Department of Health, the Department of Education or Department of Family Services. They request government services to be involved in building projects and so on, and I'll give you a couple of examples.

Madam Chair, the Women's Correctional Centre in Headingley. That particular project has been announced, and it's a project that is a new project scheduled for completion, I believe, in 2009 or 2010. That'll replace a 100-year women's correctional facility in Portage la Prairie. It's based on recommendations from a community consultation committee. The new centre is being designed to support opportunities for community integration, including treatment and training, and accommodate a healing lodge for cultural and spiritual support. The design and construction of the new facility will follow green standards for efficiency, including geothermal heating, energy-efficient lighting and reduced water consumption. So that's just one example of other projects that government services do. They're responsible for essentially leading a project that is a direction of another department, and that's what government services has done for such a long time.

* (16:20)

There's also the development of the Brandon Mental Health Centre properties or the North Hill properties and there're tremendous opportunities there, not only a Culinary Arts centre, but also looking at a trade centre and developing the North Hill in consultation and working with the City of Brandon and other partners including the Assiniboine Community College. This is very

important for the MLA for Arthur-Virden and other members from southwest Manitoba.

The Assiniboine Community College has always served the region of the southwest, including, I might add, even going to Dauphin and even further north. So I know there's a satellite—I'm not sure if that's the correct term to use, but I know there's an office, an Assiniboine Community College office and training centre in Dauphin and it does serve a lot of the region.

So that's just a couple of larger projects that the department is doing. That's not related to bridges and roads, but they're certainly substantial, and it's something that we're pleased to go ahead with because they've been needed for a while, and we're certainly pleased to be able to deliver on that.

Mr. Maguire: Madam Chair, I was just also referring to any Infrastructure areas in regard to sewer and water that perhaps may fall under this minister's jurisdiction. Can he elaborate on those, or would they all fall under Conservation or other areas that might be in other portfolios?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, I guess we might as well get off track immediately because the person responsible for Water Services Board is not here today. I believe he's in Brandon, but, having said that, the deputy minister is here and also the associate deputy minister and we'll do the best we can to answer questions related to, for example, Water Services. We will certainly be able to touch on some of the projects that we've done and, again, they are very numerous, but it's something that, again, the person responsible for the area is not here, but we have a listing that I can, certainly, go through if the member wishes.

Mr. Maguire: Madam Chair, it was more just a yes or no answer in regard to—I'm not looking for a listing of the special projects today. We can wait till Water Services comes. Perhaps we could have them on the agenda tomorrow or whatever. What I was looking more for, just some ballpark in regard to the—I mean, I know that Water Stewardship, Environment, Conservation all have projects that they need to look at in those areas, but the Manitoba Infrastructure is set up. There are funds coming forward, so what I'm looking for today is just a general direction from the minister in regard to the sort of sewer and water projects, I suppose, that will fall under—I'm sure some of them will fall under—Infrastructure with him, and if he can just outline to us where that's at.

Mr. Lemieux: Thank you for your patience, Madam Chair. There are a lot of projects to go through. We're building Manitoba as we'll soon find out going through these Estimates on how much work is being done throughout the province.

Just dealing with the water and sewer program, there are a number of different projects which I've been advised are either under way or partially or almost complete. One announcement that has taken place with regard to the sewage treatment plant is in the beautiful community of Gimli, Manitoba. This work is well under way. We're looking also at Lansdowne, the R.M. as well, and Arden is dealing with the sewer and water system. Also, we're looking at the town of Melita, for example there's a reservoir, pumphouse, mechanical and electrical. We're also looking at some work in the community of Portage la Prairie. Now, the work may be carried out by the city in some cases, sometimes it's tendered out by the province.

The R.M. of Springfield, there's a reservoir and, well, the sewer and water treatment system is currently under tender, I understand—not under tender—but, again, this is another one that's well under way. There are also a number of water development projects that have been put forward and that's in the R.M. of Cartier, the R.M. of Grey, the R.M. of North Norfolk, Portage la Prairie is also part of that as well, the R.M. of Wallace, Westbourne and there are a number of projects in the Yellowhead regional water supply area.

So there are a number of projects related to the Manitoba Water Services Board specifically and the other projects related to Conservation or Department of Water Stewardship. The members will have to ask the ministers of those departments for the specifics because I'm not aware of all the projects that they will be coming forward with or ones that are currently tendered or work being done on.

Mr. Maguire: I thank the minister for that and we can get into more depth with some of those particular projects when Water Services comes, and perhaps if he could go ahead we could have them come in tomorrow, if they're not here today as he's pointed out, but we can deal with that before we close later this afternoon.

I just wanted to go back to the chart that I referred to earlier of the ministers in the department and look at it from the government services side. I'm wondering, Madam Chair, if this is Infrastructure and Transportation, and I wonder if the minister can give

us an update on the government services side of that type of format as well.

Can he indicate to me some of the staffing under government services as well or is it—well, I'll just leave it at that, if he can provide that to me?

* (16:30)

Mr. Lemieux: Well, again, Madam Chair, we're pleased to have the Department of Infrastructure and Transportation come forward for these Estimates, but government services is still a working group within that Department of Infrastructure and Transportation, and there are just over 600 employees within Government Services Programs. That can be technical services or divisional support services or security and parking, for example. It can be procurement services. It can be government air services. So there is a wide range of areas in which services are provided by government services. In this document, *Supplementary Information for Legislative Review*, on page 15, it does break down the different numbers of staffing in each area.

Mr. Maguire: I just wanted to ask the minister, just for the record, a couple of questions about some of his political staff, and I wonder if he could just outline to me how many he has of political staff.

Mr. Lemieux: I've been advised that the proper term of it is technical appointments, and technical appointments vary in different departments. In my particular area, there are five.

Mr. Maguire: I wonder if the minister could give us some indication in order of the workload that those five persons carry. Maybe, first of all, he could just give us their names and the positions that they have.

Mr. Lemieux: Well, each person has his or her own job description, and it's very difficult to say which has more work or less, and they all do valuable service for the province of Manitoba. Some the member would be familiar with, as an executive assistant, for example, that works in the constituency or a special assistant that works in the minister's office or works in the department. But also there is also a person who works as an executive assistant to the Lieutenant-Governor, who comes under my area, which is not political, absolutely not political, yet is an executive assistant to the Lieutenant-Governor. But it falls in my area. So there are one, two, three, four, five people that are part of my technical appointments. They do varying jobs, and they all do it to the best of their ability. Manitobans are well served by them.

Mr. Maguire: I wonder if the minister could—and I stand corrected on my terminology in regard to the type of staff, but the technical appointments that the minister has, could he indicate then who his executive assistant is in his office?

Mr. Lemieux: The person who's my executive assistant, his name is Eric Plamondon. Also, I have a special assistant, and her name is Maureen Martin Osland. I believe people around this table are familiar with Phyllis Fraser, who is the executive assistant to the Lieutenant-Governor. That's also a technical appointment. There's a senior policy advisor as well as a program planning analyst that is within the department.

Mr. Maguire: I wonder if the minister could indicate who those latter two are. There's a senior policy advisor and what was the other position that the minister had there as well, an assistant?

Mr. Lemieux: Program planning analyst, and also we have a senior policy adviser Jamie Dumont, and also Siegfried Laser.

Mr. Maguire: Which is which? Which is the adviser?

Mr. Lemieux: Madam Chairperson, senior policy adviser is Jamie Dumont, and program planning analyst is Siegfried Laser.

Mr. Maguire: Madam Chairperson, I thank the minister for that just update. Can he indicate to me how long each of those people has been in those positions?

Mr. Lemieux: Madam Chairperson, I can certainly get the exact dates of these technical appointments and when they were to, you know, within—well, some have been four years, some have been a couple of years and they vary. I'm not sure how long Phyllis Fraser's been with the Lieutenant-Governor. So I'd have to check on some of these to be accurate. I don't want to just guess at the numbers, but I can certainly let you know.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, Madam Chairperson, if the minister can give us a, you know, just a sheet with an update on that, something about, you know, in regard to the time that they've been there. I know that Ms. Fraser was in, I believe, protocol before she went over to the LG, so I appreciate the information there. I know that one's a few years now that she's been there, I believe.

How long has Mr. Plamondon been with you as your executive assistant?

Mr. Lemieux: Madam Chairperson, I'm certainly prepared to give that verbally tomorrow. I'll find out what it is and maybe someone can even get the dates for me. You know between now and by the time we conclude for the day.

Mr. Maguire: Has the minister had other executive assistants than Mr. Plamondon?

Mr. Lemieux: Yes, Madam Chairperson. I was elected in 1999 and I've had a few executive assistants since then. As the member can appreciate, very similar to a constituency assistant, they handle a lot of the workload when an MLA is away from the constituency. In the case of a Cabinet minister, they take on extra workload because often a Cabinet minister will be attending to the details of their department.

So it's a very stressful job, very similar to a constituency assistant's position as well because they do a great deal of work from caseloads to writing letters to meeting with the rural municipalities. It's something that can be stressful at times. I'm sure the MLA for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire) and others around this table would have an appreciation for the hard work that CAs do, as well as EAs for ministers.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, just for clarification, I know the minister's held other portfolios, so pardon me for not clarifying that. I just wonder if he's had another executive assistant while he's been minister of Transportation and government services.

* (16:40)

Mr. Lemieux: Madam Chairperson, yes. Yes, I have previously and I think this is the second person now that I've had in this particular portfolio.

Mr. Maguire: I know that Mr. Plamondon, I believe, has been with the minister for some time now, but can you remember who the previous person was? Can you provide me with that name as well?

Mr. Lemieux: Yes, I certainly can. I've been fortunate to have a few people as my executive assistants. The key person before that was David Popke.

Mr. Maguire: And the position of Martin Osland is which position? It's that of an assistant to the executive assistant?

Mr. Lemieux: Just a quick snapshot. The special assistant in my particular case is working with me in the Legislature and works with the department, and the executive assistant works in the constituency and

essentially handles constituency duties and caseload. The special assistant works specifically more with issues related to the department and works with the deputy minister, assistant deputy ministers and people within the department on the challenges that they may be facing on an ongoing basis. There's no reporting structure between them. They are separate job descriptions.

Mr. Maguire: Just a quick overview of the role of the staffperson, in this case, Ms. Fraser, who works with the Lieutenant-Governor's office. What sort of responsibilities would be attached with that position?

Mr. Lemieux: My understanding, and I've been advised, is that she works on administrative issues directly with the Lieutenant-Governor and deals with staffing and other issues related to the Lieutenant-Governor's office. As the member mentioned, I believe he's correct in saying she has been there for a couple of years with the Lieutenant-Governor's office, but I'll find that out and I'll be able to give the member the specifics on that.

Mr. Maguire: I appreciate the minister being able to provide me with that list of those positions and staffing and the dates that they came in and that sort of thing, so I appreciate that.

I wanted to just ask that, in regulation to the staff people that he's named, I'm assuming they're all full-time equivalents, or can he clarify any part-time persons that might be there?

Mr. Lemieux: There aren't any part-time people working for me.

Mr. Maguire: Okay. I thank him for that. Can I just ask the minister then: These are all of the people then that would be working in this office at this time that he just listed, or does he have other persons that would work in his office as well?

Mr. Lemieux: Most offices, I would think, are made up of very similar staffing where you have secretarial staff and you have staff that are government services staff that work in the office. No matter what political stripe, they are part of the civil service and they work in the office, so the staff I've mentioned are staff that are listed as technical appointments to me. I've gone into some detail on some of the positions. As I mentioned, there are civil servants that are involved doing the day-to-day work that they normally do.

Mr. Maguire: I appreciate the minister's comments on this, and I just have a few more questions in regard to the technical staff that he has. Ms. Martin

Osland, would she have worked with him for some time or has he had other special assistants in that role as well in this department?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, Madam Chairperson, Maureen Martin Osland has been my special assistant since January 2002, and has been through a couple of different departments. Phyllis Fraser was—her appointment date is in May '04; Ms. Dumont was in January '07; Eric Plamondon was November '05, and Siegfried Laser was March 2000. These are the dates I mentioned to the member that I would get back to him on.

Mr. Maguire: Madam Chair, thank the minister for those times. In regard to Ms. Martin Osland's, Maureen's previous role, the minister indicated that she'd been in other departments. Does he know where she was before she came to his department?

Mr. Lemieux: To the best of my knowledge, I had interviewed for the position and she was the successful applicant. She had previous employment outside of the Government of Manitoba to the best of my knowledge.

Mr. Maguire: Can he outline the same kind of question that I had for the previous one for both Dumont and Laser, just the previous employment of Ms. Dumont and Siegfried Laser or whether they were from the department before or wherever? Just the employment of Ms. Dumont and Siegfried Laser, whether they were from the department before or wherever?

Mr. Lemieux: Just to clarify, for example, Maureen Martin Osland, I mentioned that I interviewed her, but because she has been with me since '02 I've had a number of different positions and different portfolios, so she has been with me through Education, for example, and Transportation. So, when I changed departments and I was appointed by the Premier to a different ministry, to Transportation and Government Services and then Infrastructure and Transportation, she has been a consistent factor through as a special assistant going from department to department.

Mr. Maguire: Maybe it's not available today, but I would just ask the minister if he could find it for me, just where she came from before she was in, if it's available, prior to January of '02.

Mr. Lemieux: Well, I certainly don't have any information with regard to that, but I just know that in '02 I interviewed her amongst a number of other candidates and, in fact, it was in Culture—I believe I

was the minister of Culture at that time—and that's when the interview process took place, and she was a successful applicant out of a number of people that had applied for the job.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, well, Mr. Dumont would be much—just having been appointed in '07, I wonder if the minister can indicate whether he'd come from other departments as a senior policy advisor or what his previous experience was.

* (16:50)

Mr. Lemieux: Well, Madam Chairperson, I'm not trying to skirt the question, no pun intended, but Jamie-Lynne is female, as opposed to male. But, you know, if people are working outside of government and so on, I think that's probably confidential information for them. I just know that they've applied for the jobs and they've been successful. They've gone through the whole interview process, in the case of Maureen and Eric and others. Being technical appointments, there are Orders-in-Council in place and they've been appointed. It's, you know, how many jobs they had before, who they worked for, those kinds of details. I certainly don't have them at my fingertips, but even if I did, I'm not certain whether that's relevant to necessarily why we're here today. But I know that all governments have special assistants and executive assistants working for them, and each minister does, whether you're in the federal or provincial governments. We've tried to provide the member with their names, their dates of appointments, essentially what they are doing, and I think that should satisfy the member.

Madam Chairperson: Just for the information of all members sitting in the committee, I just wanted to remind you that it was agreed in the House that we would sit until 6 o'clock tonight in light of the MUPI that was considered.

Mr. Maguire: You know, I appreciate the minister's frankness, and, of course, as soon as I made the comment about "he," I recognized that one should never be presumptuous. So I stand corrected, but, I guess, I just wondered because the person was just hired within the year, if the minister can indicate to me whether they actually came from government or another department. I don't think that's very much of a secret, or shouldn't be at this point. I just thought I'd get some knowledge as to where the persons came from. It was my only reason for asking some of those questions. It's a senior policy adviser, program planning analyst; these are important positions in the minister's department, and I know he needs advice. I

certainly would have if I was in his shoes, and he has indicated that in the past, so that could take place. I am wondering if he can just give us a brief, you know, with regard to Siegfried Laser, March 2000, some time ago. He's obviously been through different departments with the minister here as well, if that may be the case, or has this person been in Transportation and Government Services since March of 2000?

Mr. Lemieux: Just with regard to Jamie-Lynne Dumont, I should've used her full legal name and then that might have helped. But the member is correct. Jamie is also a male first name.

But, just with regard to these positions, Siegfried Laser has been in Government Services since 2000, I'm sure, at least from that particular time, and he worked in Government Services at that time. Jamie-Lynne, I can find out. As the member pointed out, there's nothing secret about this. When people apply for positions and are interviewed, that's my particular way of conducting my particular office or my special assistants or my executive assistants. I interview many, and as I'm sure the Member for Arthur-Virden would do as well.

They are very important positions in a minister's office, and you need very good people. They're hard to come by because there are a lot of jobs out there that good people are always being attracted to and people are always recruiting and after them. You feel very fortunate to have good people with you and working as part of your team. I can certainly see what's available, but I don't have the specifics. There is nothing secretive about this. These are technical appointments, as I mentioned before, and you just want to be able to be forthright and open about it. I mean, they're paid by the public purse, and we've certainly tried to be that way with regard to your questions. There's nothing secret about any of these appointments or what they do.

Ms. Jennifer Howard, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Maguire: So the minister has clarified that Mr. Laser was in the department when he came, in Transportation and Government Services, and has been since March of 2000. In the case of Ms. Jamie-Lynne Dumont, who has just come in though in January of '07, he would have interviewed that person. Did she come from within government or outside?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, thank you. I will, Madam Acting Chairperson, certainly endeavour to find out more information, and, without giving the member the person's resume, I'll certainly try to give you a bit of a recap of the person's background and kind of—

Mr. Maguire: Well, thank you, Madam Acting Chairperson, and I want to welcome you to the Chair's position.

Ms. Howard and I have exchanged political views in the past, and I welcome her to the Legislature and this particular forum as well. I remember running federally in 1993 when she was very active in the party with the federal election that was going on at that time. So I welcome you to the House in a formal manner as well. You did a very good job before and look forward to your assistance in the House as well.

So, in regard to the new position that you've just taken over from the previous member, I would just like to also then ask questions of the minister in regard to his departmental staff as he referred to earlier. You know you have the two divergent parts of the staffing. If he could just provide us with the departmental staff that would be, of course, obviously, the deputy minister and others, but if there are other staffpersons within his office, could he provide those to me?

Mr. Lemieux: I would also want to second what the Member for Arthur Virden mentioned, that it's indeed a pleasure to have you in the Legislature. Young, energetic people are certainly always needed and welcomed, and I can tell you that we're so fortunate to have elected many women to the Chamber. We're so fortunate to have that and it will put a different perspective, possibly, on this Chamber and have a positive influence. I know many of them well.

There are a number of, if I can call them executives within the department, and that's including the two gentlemen here with me today. There are also Tracey Danowski, who's an assistant deputy minister in Supply and Services; Geoff Bawden, who is Assistant Deputy Minister of Accommodation Services. We have Rich Danis, Director of Transportation Policy; Gerry Bosma is Executive Director of Administrative Services and Ron Weatherburn is Executive Director of Construction and Maintenance. These are people who would normally be sitting here beside us today going through the questions related to the department. Mr. Bosma would have the information

with regard to administration and financial aspects of the department. Each of these people has their own particular areas that they have an expertise in and would be able to assist me in answering many of the questions. A number of them are here today, if there are questions related to Supply and Services or Accommodation Services, but I'd certainly welcome any questions from the member.

* (17:00)

Mr. Maguire: It's, I guess, maybe a more global question in regard to staffing. Madam Acting Chair, can the minister indicate how many total staff his department would have? *[interjection]* In all three. I know he indicated earlier and believe that there were 600 in government services. Maybe he can give us an indication of the total number.

Mr. Lemieux: There are 2,572 staffpersons, actually almost 2,573 staff people; 2,573. Sorry, that's staff-years.

Mr. Maguire: I know in the positions that he has here as well in Human Resources. Is it Morris, Jenny? I better get the connotations properly here as well. Is that John Spacek as well? He's been with you for some time. So these are assistant deputy ministers in those roles?

Mr. Lemieux: Just to confirm, yes, Ms. Morris is a director, and Mr. Spacek is an assistant deputy minister in the policy area.

Mr. Maguire: It's Motor Carrier Safety and Regulation and Transportation Policy, according to the flowchart here that you have of assistant deputy minister Spacek as well, and I believe Vigfusson would be Engineering and Operations, that's also an ADM position? I believe the answer there, Madam Acting Chair, was yes.

So the Canada-Manitoba Infrastructure Secretariat, as Ms. Vogan, is that Mr. or Mrs., and in regard to the position of that as well.

Mr. Lemieux: Jill Vogan is a director, Canada-Manitoba Infrastructure Secretariat. Mr. Lance Vigfusson is responsible for Engineering and Operations, as you mentioned, and Lance is ADM as well, assistant deputy minister.

Mr. Maguire: Yes, I know in regard to the Compliance and Regulatory Services, Transportation Safety and Regulations, is the Transportation safety board, that's a different area, I believe, in the flowchart. I want to go back to some of the boards that the minister has, and I wonder—I know there're a

number of them there. I see seven on the flowchart on either side. I wonder if he can tell me who would be the lead person in his office who would deal with providing him information in regard to the Floodway Authority.

Mr. Lemieux: The Member for Arthur-Virden, just for the record, of course, is going through the flowchart that's in our document that deals with supplementary information. But it doesn't list the people. For example, Floodway Authority, the contact I have is Mr. Ernie Gilroy, who is, I think his title is CEO of the Floodway Authority. The Water Services Board, I believe the member knows Mr. Dick Menon. The Licence Suspension Appeal Board is Linda Taylor. These are the boards, the chairs. The Taxicab Board is Lou Harries; Al Rivers is the chair of the Highway Traffic and Motor Transport Board. Medical Review Committee, I believe there has been a change. I'll have to get the person's exact name and same with Land Value Appraisal Commission. We'll have to make sure to get the exact name so the member has it.

Mr. Maguire: I'm assuming then from the minister's comments, if he could just give me the name of the person in the Highway Traffic and Motor Transport Board chair again.

Mr. Lemieux: His name is Al Rivers.

Mr. Maguire: Madam Chair, I'm assuming that the minister can do this. I've gone before on some of the Web sites of these people. Are the board members listed on those Web sites?

Mr. Lemieux: I believe they are. If you look on the Web site under those boards, it will list who the chair is of each board. I think it will also list who—we'll double-check this, but I think it lists who the staffperson is because there are Civil Service staff that are associated with each board that provide the administrative or technical support to these boards. Boards are volunteers and as these chairs are. You need technical staff to supply them with information, and so on.

But Land Value Appraisal Commission, I believe, was Cameron Harvey, from the law school, I believe, was the chair. I'm not sure if he still is or not. But we're double-checking that for the member.

Mr. Maguire: Part of my question was in regard to the flowchart on those. I think the minister's referred to the staff of each of those boards would be named on a Web site, but I'm assuming that the actual appointed board members would be as well.

Mr. Lemieux: I've been advised that the Medical Review Committee chair or lead is R. Bright. It's Dr. Bright. Without getting into the male-female, I'm not sure; I just have Dr. R. Bright as the person that is the chair.

Mr. Maguire: Madam Chair, my question then, and I thank the minister for that. I know he'll get the Land Value Appraisal Commission chair to me, but the question I had was the actual—and I know he indicated that the staff people would be on the Web sites, but are the actual board members on the Web sites as well, the appointed board members of each of these boards, are they are on Web sites?

Mr. Lemieux: I'll have to double-check because I'm not certain whether they are or not. They're certainly welcome to go onto the Web sites and see if they're listed, but I'm not sure if they are or not, and I'm not sure if other departments list all their boards and who the board reps are or the chairs. I'm not certain. I'll have to double-check that.

Mr. Maguire: I know that if I was diligent and had kept all of the reports that come out weekly or monthly in regard to that and gone through them and listed them all I'd have that list. If the minister could confirm that then that would be appreciated, and if they're not on the Web sites I wonder if he could just supply me with a list of the board members on each of these particular boards.

Mr. Lemieux: Well, I thank the member for the question. I'll endeavour to look to find out whether or not the names are on the Web site or not. We try to provide as much information as possible for people who want to go on to Web sites, whether they be the Taxicab Board or other boards, to determine who the board members are. I will certainly look into finding out whether they're listed or not and get back to the member.

* (17:10)

Mr. Maguire: Just to backtrack a bit, the minister indicated that he has department staff in his office and he had named a few of them: Mr.—not Denning—Danis, Rick Danis, Weatherburn. Are those persons working in the minister's office as well, or can he just elaborate as to who might be directly in his office from the department other than the deputies that are here today and Mr. Rochon?

Mr. Lemieux: The way that Infrastructure and Transportation is laid out, it's the deputy minister's office that works with the department, with the

ADMs and the directors and so on. So Mr. Danis is in the policy area, but he doesn't work in the minister's office or the deputy's office. He's within the civil service and is someone that is within a branch of Infrastructure and Transportation, more so related to the Transportation side.

Mr. Maguire: Can the minister indicate who the staffpersons are in the deputy minister's office for me?

Mr. Lemieux: Can I ask the member to repeat the question?

Mr. Maguire: Yes, pardon me. I just was wondering if the minister could give me the names of the persons working in the deputy minister's office.

Mr. Lemieux: Thank you. I will have to ask the deputy minister for those names of staff, but I will certainly endeavour to do that.

Madam Chairperson: Honourable Minister?

Mr. Lemieux: Thank you, Madam Chairperson. There are a number of people who work with the deputy minister in his office and at another location. We have a Marlene Troop, Debbie Draward, and Anne Lenius, as well as Wendy Van Loon who works at 215 Garry, I believe, and these are support staff for the deputy minister.

Mr. Maguire: I appreciate the minister's comment on that and I'll pick that up.

I guess the minister has alluded to this earlier, but I just wanted to know if he could indicate to me if the positions that he had in his technical appointed area, technical appointees, were they hired by competitions or appointments?

Mr. Lemieux: By virtue of the positions they have been essentially, they're Order-in-Councils. There are one, two—just a second, please.

Madam Chairperson: Honourable Minister?

Mr. Lemieux: Thank you, just wanting to clarify. I just wanted to clarify this with staff, just to make sure the MLA for Arthur-Virden is aware of the breakdown of staff within the deputy minister's office, that they're civil servants and have gone through competitions as well as the civil servants in my office. The technical support people have gone

through interviews as well, but they are Order-in-Council appointments.

Mr. Maguire: Can the minister indicate, well, first of all does he or his staff have a number of vacant positions that are in the department at this time?

Mr. Lemieux: I've been advised that the vacancies are 191.75 vacancies in the department.

Mr. Maguire: Madam Chair, just a question. I know there're thousands of persons in the department as the minister's indicated, so that's a proportionate number. Are these a number of part-time positions or how many would be full-time? Can you give me any kind of a breakdown on that as to how seasonal it is?

Mr. Lemieux: These are all regular, full-time positions.

Mr. Maguire: Madam Chair, I want to just look quickly, I guess, at the different types of contracts that the minister may have throughout the province. But more or less can you give me any indication of how many staff have been hired in '07-08?

Mr. Lemieux: We can try to figure it out. I certainly don't have that at my fingertips because people come and go and leave within and many have been civil servants for 30 years. Others have been within the government for three years or three months and then they find something else and move on to a different position. It's very difficult to pinpoint, but I certainly don't have that at my fingertips on how many have come and gone in total.

Mr. Maguire: I guess I should narrow that down because it's a huge department. I wonder if he could just provide me with a list maybe tomorrow of any indication of the number of people that have been hired in '07-08 as I said in regard to his offices which he's given me, I believe, deputy ministers, and any of the deputy minister's offices more or less on the administrative side. I'm not looking for who's been hired to hold flags on the highway sort of thing in this particular year. I know those are seasonal positions and I'm more interested in just the flowchart of those types of positions. If he could supply me with that tomorrow that would be great.

* (17:20)

Mr. Lemieux: Well, I thank the member for clarification because it would have been a bit of a task to go into the department and you know, start looking at seeing who's coming and going and you

know, who's done that, who has not. To make a long story short, to narrow it down to kind of the executive support in that area, I think that's a fair question to ask. That's something that can be done. It'll take some time to do it, but we don't have it right now, but we can certainly look at getting it.

Mr. Maguire: Can we come back to some questions on this later, my honourable colleague from Portage la Prairie (Mr. Faurshou) has a couple of questions in regard to some points there that he wants to deal with. I wonder if I could just have him ask a few.

The Acting Chairperson (Ms. Jennifer Howard): Sure.

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): Madam Acting Chairperson, I would like to follow up on the earlier mention of the women's correctional facility that government services are progressing with. I believe the minister said 2009 as a completion date for that project just to the east of Headingley and north of the Trans-Canada.

Mr. Lemieux: I may have mentioned that, but I just want to make sure I'm accurate with regard to the date and so on. So we're going to make sure we look into that to see what kind of completion dates we're looking at because there're been a number of different dates with regard to tendering and so on. So I just want to make sure I clarify that date to give you accurate information as well.

Mr. Faurshou: Madam Acting Chairperson, I ask this question because there are a significant number of employees that will be affected by the move down the road with the facility. I also want to ask of the minister that there was, in fact, recommendations by the committee that he referred to earlier in the committee of Estimates regarding healing centres as well as a healing lodge and transitional centre, the two terminologies that needed construction and implementation of programming, and wonder whether government services has intention of making those announcements fairly shortly or is that a question for the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chomiak)?

Madam Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Lemieux: Well, Madam Chairperson, as the member knows, let me just conclude, I guess, on my previous comment with regard to completion dates, a caveat I always put in with regard to roads is that weather permitting. The member knows this very well. You know, it's not meant to be a flippant comment or a loophole, but weather has a huge

impact on projects and that's why—as do other issues. So I just want to put that caveat in as that no matter what dates I will give, I can tell you there will be a caveat there because there're often different circumstances that affect different projects, so.

But, with regard to a project like the Women's Correctional Centre, the member is correct; there were consultation and in-depth consultation with stakeholders that made recommendations. But again, what government services does, we do this in consultation with departments with regard to tendering and so on.

We work with other departments and I know the member is aware of this, but I just want to make sure it's on the record. Those departments ensure that staffing and all of those kinds of things are dealt with from their departmental level. It's not government services that has an impact on Justice, for example on their staffing and people who've moved from Portage to Headingley. That's something that, those questions have to be saved for the Minister of Justice (Mr. Chomiak).

Mr. Faurchou: Yes, Madam Chairperson, the minister knows that I'm a practical person and the other components are essential to the completion of what is the government's intention to provide for women that come in conflict with the law. These other two centres, there is a possibility of Portage being the preferred site for those institutions. Again, the persons we're looking to continue to be employed with the government and the Department of Justice and maybe, potentially, if these were done in tandem that you wouldn't be moving a lot of families to Winnipeg out of Portage la Prairie in order to staff the now, I would say technically, the Winnipeg-located women's correctional facility. So I just leave that with you because I want to bring it up.

Madam Chair, the other consideration is, has the Department of Justice asked the government services department as to whether or not the women's correctional facility that exists in Portage la Prairie that is of the century old age could potentially be retrofitted or redeveloped as a central regional remand centre for the Department of Justice, and I ask this question on the basis of an extraordinarily overcrowded situation in the Remand Centre here in Winnipeg.

Mr. Lemieux: It's Justice that makes the call with regard to a lot of those issues. We talked about the consultation process that's taken place on this particular issue and a lot of those recommendations

came to government or to the Minister of Justice and they've taken a look, you know, closely looked at this whole issue.

Just to comment on people travelling from Portage la Prairie moving, there are a lot of people that commute every day. There are schoolteachers that I know that live in Portage la Prairie, but they work in Winnipeg and they drive it every day, so there's a lot of that that may be taking place as well, people commuting. But your point is well taken with regard to staffing, and I'm sure that's something that Justice has looked at with regard to their complement that would be needed in Headingley.

Certainly, I'm not privy to, you know, discussions that have gone on or have not gone on with regard to what about the facility in Portage, what happens after; the people move, the inmates are women that are in a situation where they're incarcerated and what happens when that move takes place and what happens with staffing. I'm certainly not privy to those discussions.

Mr. Faurchou: I'll just try to make the question simple: Has the Department of Justice consulted with the department of government services as to whether or not there is a potential redevelopment of the current women's correctional facilities into a remand centre for central regional-located individuals that come in conflict with the law?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, the easy answer, I guess, is no, at least to the best of my knowledge. I've been advised no.

Mr. Faurchou: I will ask the Minister of Justice those questions. Government services have been charged with the \$40-million redevelopment plan for Manitoba Development Centre located in Portage la Prairie. I wonder if the minister could give a synopsis of where that 10-year, \$40-million redevelopment plan is in very capsulated form, or if he wanted to respond in a different fashion as a written response, I'd be open to that as well.

* (17:30)

Mr. Lemieux: I'm just wanting to touch on a couple of areas that the work is being done with regard to where government services have played a role and what is happening at the centre. The work that we're looking at, for example, for this year would be replacing bus loops, the bus loop steps and mainly life safety upgrades that are taking place. I know the member is aware of this.

Also we're looking at a possible redevelopment of Elm Cottage. We're looking at doing that. But a lot—at least my understanding is and I've been advised that we are looking at safety-related issues, you know, whether they be electrical or areas like that, with regard to the cottages at the centre. To the best of my knowledge, that's the status right now as I know it. Certainly, the member can ask the Family Services Minister for more specifics with regard to that area and to get more specifics as to what their direct plan is.

Mr. Faurshou: I appreciate the minister's update and I will do so with the Family Services Minister. As far as Transportation, just on a global, we've been touched in Portage la Prairie by the significant need for reinvestment in our roadways here in the province of Manitoba with the closure of the Trans-Canada Highway just on the east side of Portage la Prairie for the last year.

I would like to ask the minister as to what the department estimates is the wear and tear on our roadways that is incurred in an annual period of time. Are we keeping up is where the bottom line is? I know that about three years ago it was estimated that our roadways incurred about \$348-million worth of wear and tear in a year. With inflation and with the increased traffic flow, do you have an updated figure that also is inflation adjusted?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chairperson. It's very hard to determine the wear and tear on your infrastructure. Well, I wouldn't say it's impossible to calculate, but it's very difficult to calculate wear and tear on highways or on bridges on an ongoing basis. We know that, just based on certain structures, and infrastructure is based on—you know, there are age factors, but also we have technical people that are able to look at bridges or look at roads and determine what kind of a life they've had by virtue of age and the kind of traffic that travelled on it and so on and material it's been made of and all those kinds of things. But I've certainly been advised that it's almost—well, it's very, very difficult to do and we don't. We don't track the kind of ongoing wear and tear.

But, as the critic from Arthur-Virden mentioned before, that a number of years ago people were saying that the wear and tear or that kind of need that's out there on our infrastructure was in the hundreds of millions. Now people would argue it's in the billions now because of not only the cost of asphalt and concrete or steel or the prices have been

driven up substantially. I would just say that, with a \$4-billion 10-year investment, I think we've taken steps in the right direction. I believe right across the country there is an understanding now that the importance of our infrastructure is not only for cultural reasons but for trade, and that has a huge impact on our economies and quality of life, and I believe there's an understanding from the federal government through the provincial governments, through the municipal governments, the importance of transportation infrastructure, whether that's bridges, or the preservation that's needed to take care of what already exists. People often think of twinning highways and how important that is or building new. The fact of the matter is that there is a huge need out there for preservation. In other words, my definition in a simplistic way is taking care of what you've got. There are a lot of roads now that need a lot work and bridges that need work as well without necessarily building new, and I believe that's going to be the challenge on all governments across the country. It's the preservation side that people are really going to have to take a serious look at in days and years to come.

But \$4 billion over 10 years, as I mentioned earlier, there was a consultation process that Vision 2020-consultation process that said \$3 billion over that period of time would be sufficient, but, as has been pointed out by the MLA for Arthur-Virden, you know, that was a couple of years ago—that was a number of years ago. That has changed even since, so I just wanted to reiterate that we've taken steps in the right direction. You can't predict what's going to happen necessarily in years to come, but I believe that that has really been a step forward in the right direction. It's been quite a bold step taken by our government to do this, and it's very, very costly, as the MLA for Portage knows. Even the project, for example, in Portage la Prairie, if I might, that project is something that has been, you know, it's near completion on all aspects of it. I have to say that the co-operation of the town of Portage la Prairie and residents of the area has been phenomenal. We have a very good working relationship with the city, I should say, of Portage la Prairie, and we do appreciate it. I know they appreciate the working relationship we have with them trying to address not only Saskatchewan Avenue but also the bypass. That was very difficult for that community to have that kind of traffic either going through or around.

Anyway, I'll just conclude by saying that infrastructure needs have grown tremendously over

the years, and I'm not going to look in the rear-view mirror and point back at previous governments. That was then; this is now. But we have really taken a bold step by putting this kind of amount of money into infrastructure, and I believe that's recognized by Manitobans everywhere.

* (17:40)

Mr. Faurichou: I couldn't agree with the minister more. Yes, in past, the federal Liberal government absolutely walked away from our infrastructure, without returning the millions upon millions of dollars generated in fuel tax revenue that filled the federal coffers while our roads needed desperately for repair.

I want to ask one final question here in regard to the Lands branch of government services moving to Portage la Prairie. There is a new building under construction, I understand, with pending lease to the government. But I would like to ask the question in regard to, if the government building did not have sufficient enough space, I'm curious as to perhaps the location of the new building as there is available office space in close proximity already to the government building where the Lands branch effectively could be much more easily accessed by departments. We do have our e-mail and all of our electronic communications but, again, physical proximity to the government and government departments would, I think, have been preferred rather than at a location that requires some type of transportation.

Mr. Lemieux: Well, let me answer, kind of, the first question or statement the member made first of all with regard to gas tax revenues. I mean, we were the only province in Canada that brought in a Gas Tax Accountability Act with regard to Infrastructure. Without being too partisan, I have to tell you that we dedicated those dollars straight to Transportation. I mean, let's be fair about this. So we as a government, again, have taken bold steps to try to address our infrastructure needs and we are headed in the right direction and moving forward.

If I might ask, Madam Chairperson, in the House, in the Chamber, we have four chairs, usually around the table, and you have four staff. This might be a good opportunity to ask for that, even if we had a couple of chairs back because I have staff here that would be able to answer many of these questions and we're trying to do the best we can to answer the questions directly, but if we had even a couple of chairs that would mean that instead of just the

Deputy Minister and the ADM here we could have other staff, a couple of other staff from government services area and they would be able to assist us in Accommodation Services, for example, or Supply and Services if they were allowed just to sit here. We could certainly ask them more directly. We could get a fuller answer for the questions that are being asked, because this is an important issue with regard to Land Management Services being brought to Portage. I mean, the Auditor was the one who recommended this take place with regard to ensuring that when we're dealing with land that the taxpayer in Manitoba has to be assured that the process is not only deemed to be fair, but looks to be fair, and that's why it's really important that we moved ahead on this particular issue.

Now, there were concerns raised in Neepawa, for example, and Minnedosa with regard to staffing, and I understand that a lot of that has been whether people have moved or have relocated or are commuting that there have been agreements amongst the majority of the staff, and if I could ask a couple of the staff, Mr. Geoff Bawden and Tracey Danowski certainly, because they're dealing with this issue specifically we could better answer the questions, and so I just want to ask that staff be allowed to come to the table.

Madam Chairperson: Just before I recognize the honourable Member for Portage la Prairie, with the intent that that would help answer the question, we're going to bring up the other staff and—honourable Member for Portage la Prairie?

Mr. Faurichou: Yes, I should clarify my question: Very specific, is the process to which, when relocating another department and accommodating that relocation, what is the process in finding office space, for instance, in this particular case, or in general? However, I don't want to debate the merits of the move or anything of that nature. I'm just looking at the process to determine office space.

Madam Chairperson: I am going to ask the minister to introduce the staff who have joined us at the table.

Mr. Lemieux: First of all, let me say thank you very much to members around the table as well as to you, Madam Chairperson, because it is really helpful to have the staff here that deal with these issues on a daily basis. So I appreciate it, allowing Mr. Geoff Bawden, the Assistant Deputy Minister of Accommodation Services, and Tracey Danowski,

she's the Assistant Deputy Minister of Supply and Services, to join us at the table.

This particular space, I'm sure the Member for Portage will not disagree with having to tender out for space. I mean, that's giving essentially the best bang for the buck for the taxpayer of Manitoba. Essentially, that is my understanding in this particular case of what we've done. I think the member would agree that that's—

An Honourable Member: That was just the question, what was the process?

Mr. Lemieux: Yes, and that's the process; it's a tendering out, to tender out for space. Even though it may not be right next door, sometimes you have to take a look at the price and what you're getting for what it's costing the taxpayer. That's the case. You know, you tender it out and you try to get the best price possible, and you hope that it works out for the taxpayer. In this case that's exactly what we did.

Mr. Faurichou: I do appreciate that answer. I just wanted to confirm that that is the process, the standard, and it was followed and this is the result. But I do appreciate that.

Again, the number of jobs that are being moved to Portage la Prairie I guess are still yet to be determined, or do you know how many positions that you are going to have to accommodate, or are planning to accommodate in Portage la Prairie?

Mr. Lemieux: Just to answer the question as concisely as I can, the staffing—and this is not—a case was trying to be made at one time about how this was removing jobs from rural Manitoba somehow to where? To rural Manitoba? I mean, I've always considered Portage la Prairie rural Manitoba. So those positions were going essentially to a rural community, from a couple of rural communities to a rural community.

Out of the 55 FTEs, or 55-and-a-half, 23 jobs have been relocated to Portage la Prairie; eight from Minnedosa, 12 from Neepawa, four from Winnipeg. There're, for example, four jobs from Winnipeg going to rural Manitoba. Of these positions, all classifications fall within this clerical component of a collective agreement. Having said that, people have not lost their jobs. Some people chose to look for other employment. So some of these numbers are not in exact movement of staff, but everyone has been accommodated. At least that's what I've been advised. That was the goal; people were trying to be accommodated.

I guess the bottom line for me, and this is something that I heard from the mayors of both communities, they said, Mr. Minister, please do not take these positions out of the community because they are volunteer sports coaches, they help out at the high schools, they help in many different ways, boy scouts, girl guides, those kinds of things. Many of them have not left those communities at all. I just want to make that point, because those individuals are still there.

Actually, the department should be congratulated for really trying to work as closely as possible with many of those individuals to accommodate them. That was the goal and that's the way it seems to have worked out, which is really important.

* (17:50)

Mr. Maguire: I know that you wanted to have some indication of where we'd be at tomorrow, and if we could have some of the staff at Water Services come tomorrow, sort of the beginning of the session, that we could probably get most of the questions I think in around Water Services at that point if they're available to come in at that time. I think the rest of the day would be dealt with regular highway transportation administration, that sort of thing, more of the staff. If there are other staff that have to come from a distance, then the minister, he can inform me of that as well. That's, of course, the largest one, I believe. We can work with him on that. But if we could have them available tomorrow to start the session off that would be great.

I just had a couple of questions. I know our time's limited here for the day. There's a number of paving programs I know that the minister has around the province and different projects and it is getting near, it is near the end of September. A year ago I wrote the minister in regard to some particular types of machines that were being used for making pavement in the province and the emissions that were coming out of them and that sort of thing. I wonder if the minister can give me an update on whether there's been much done on that. How many projects, how many different companies or department machines are on the go at any one time in the summer?

Madam Chairperson: Honourable Minister for Infrastructure and Transportation, if you could also include in your answer the name of the individuals who joined us at the table. Thank you.

Mr. Lemieux: I'd be pleased to, Madam Chair. Ron Weatherburn is Executive Director of Construction and Maintenance, and many people will know him throughout Manitoba because he is Mr. Asphalt to a lot of people. Asphalt is flowing everywhere in every corner of the province, so we're doing a tremendous amount of work. Now, on any given week, there will be approximately 12 plants working. I know the Province has—we have three small asphalt plants, but essentially they're used for patching. Now there are three major paving companies in the province and they've got about six plants that are working. Then you've got other companies like Zenith Paving, I believe, that they're out of Brandon, and they will have a plant.

So, at any given time you'll have approximately 12 plants in operation in the province. Obviously, when you start adding billions of dollars to your infrastructure, you're going to have a lot of asphalt, a lot of paving and a number of bridges being repaired and so on.

Mr. Maguire: I guess just a question in regard to—I know there was some issue. Particularly, I know the minister is familiar with it; it was the one at Virden last year that had some black emissions coming out of it, floating over the town and that sort of thing. I think it was the location that they had. We called in, I know the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers) perhaps dealt with it a little bit as well, but can he indicate to me if anything has been done in regard to filtering some of those types of machines, or if they're still in use?

Mr. Lemieux: Well, an educator always likes to get educated on occasion, and this is one. When you're talking about asphalt, and I'm certainly not an engineer or someone who has made asphalt or participated in it, but you learn something every day about the kind of particulates that are given off as a result of asphalt. I believe the term is "bag-house" that catches particulates. The one that is located in the asphalt job, is going to take place to complete that job from Virden to Saskatchewan, is going to be having that as part of it. So that's been addressed, I understand.

But the member raises an interesting question because if you take a look at greenhouse gases and what's happening throughout North America with the amount of need there is with regard to asphalt and construction, I believe governments should be and are looking at, quite frankly, as we are. When you're looking at the kind of emissions that take place as a

result of all the work that's taking place throughout the province but also through every province and every state, you have a tremendous amount of work that's happening. Something that's often forgotten in this equation is the actual asphalt that's being made that goes on the roads, and that's something that has not gone by us, quite frankly. It's something that we take very, very seriously, and there's going to be a tremendous amount of work going on in Manitoba over the next 10 years.

Mr. Maguire: While we are in that particular location—I say, while we're in that particular location, maybe the minister can give me an update on where No. 1 is at—No. 1 west, the twinning, I should say.

Mr. Lemieux: Well, No. 1 west stretches from Winnipeg all the way to Saskatchewan, for the member. The part that's being worked on, we've stated that we were hoping to have it completed by this fall and weather permitting. As I mentioned in my earlier comments, I preface any kind of announcement with the preface that weather permitting you're going to be able to complete things much quicker. So, hopefully, the weather will co-operate from now until November and that particular stretch of road will be completed, and we all look forward to it, not only because of safety reasons but tourism reasons and trade. A lot of trucks travel on our roads and people are really looking forward to having this completed.

I know that we have co-operated with Saskatchewan and they opened up a portion just for a brief period of time to let extra traffic through. Essentially, we're working co-operatively with our neighbours to the west to ensure that we're jointly going to be opening up that stretch of road. I know the MLA from the area is also looking forward to that because I'm sure over the years, he's received a number of calls with regard to that stretch. It's cost a lot of money and we're also pleased to have worked with the federal government, quite frankly, I should note that, on stretch of highway. Not huge dollars, but they've contributed some to that stretch of road, and we look forward to many other projects to be able to work in a co-operative manner with the federal government to get a lot more done for Manitobans.

Mr. Maguire: I thank the minister for his response and, you know, he's right. There is a tremendous need for the backlog of development in the infrastructure, not just in water and sewer, but certainly in the highways department. That's where

we'll be spending most of the time on, I think, with him. I appreciate it. I know our time is limited today, but there will be other questions that we'd like to ask him in subsequent days in regard to that, and the huge infrastructure needs that there are in the highways department throughout the province of Manitoba.

I wonder if he can just give me a quick update on the No. 10 bridge. I know it's open, south of Brandon in what's called Riverside, if I could, north of Boissevain, north of Minto, in that area. I've been through it a few times in the last while. I know the red lights at the bottom of the hill are down, and I wonder if he could just give us an update on that particular location.

Madam Chairperson: As previously agreed by the House, the time being 6 p.m., committee rise.

AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND RURAL INITIATIVES

* (15:50)

Mr. Chairperson (Rob Altemeyer): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Yes, I do.

Mr. Chairperson: Please proceed.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, honourable members, I am very proud to stand before you and outline the tools my department has used this year to strengthen our agrifood industry and our rural economy. Specifically, we are focussing on farm profitability so Manitoba's farming sector can continue providing the most fundamental and important product in the world while remaining economically sustainable.

We look at ways to assist young farmers in order that they, too, can achieve economic stability in the rapidly evolving agrifood industry; rural development and ways to add value to our rural produced commodities; environmental sustainability, so that our agrifood sector can continue to contribute to Manitoba's reputation as one of Canada's greenest provinces; health and wellness, which includes development of nutraceutical food products; a focus

on animal health issues and programs to ensure the safety of Manitoba's produced foods.

Under farm profitability, I am pleased to note that an increase in crop prices have put our producers in a better situation than they have been in several years. Input costs are still very high but the weather co-operated in most of the province, and combined with the rise in crop prices, the short-term picture is definitely brighter than it has been for some time. This being said, I note that there are segments where income support is still needed. These include the livestock industry that is paying high prices for feed and is competing with the global demands for grain.

Our business risk management programs, including production insurance and CAIS, are our first line of defence in situations such as this where farm income is reduced by situations beyond the farmers' control. We have budgeted an increase of \$13.1 million in contributions to these programs. I note that we have also reduced costs for farmers through our education tax rebate on farm land. This year, we have increased the rebate from 60 percent to 65 percent, and we plan to continue in 5 percent increments over the next three years until we reach 80 percent.

Young farmers represent the future of our industry. This is why we have budgeted over half a million dollars in initiatives to assist young farmers and this includes an increase from a maximum of 10,000 to 15,000 per young farmer in rebates on loans through the Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation. As well, we have raised the maximum amount lent to young farmers through the Bridging Generations loan by providing up to 90 percent financing.

These loans can be instrumental in helping farm families transfer the farm from the retiring parents to the next generation of farmers. We are also introducing an interest payment only feature on the first five years of Bridging Generation loans in order to assist young farmers with their cash flows. We are also introducing the Young Farmer Crop Plan Credit and the young farm women training programs which build on our Bridging Generation loan programs in support of young farmers getting started. Most importantly, my department continues its strong commitment to providing production, extension and technology transfer services throughout rural Manitoba.

Rural development and value-added activities: As you know rural depopulation has become a fact

all across Manitoba. We must work to find ways to make rural communities sustainable so they can attract people to work, take up residence and raise their families. My department, through its Growing Opportunities initiative which was introduced in 2005, took a major step towards putting resources into communities that will help them help themselves.

In addition to our ongoing programming in rural economic development, further steps will be taken in this physical year. We will introduce a new co-operative development program to provide support for rural co-operatives because very often it is a co-operative that will succeed in a community where attempts to establishing and growing traditional businesses have not come to fruition. The program will provide support for co-operatives from concept to implementation and will also provide simplified and time-sensitive approval processes for funding of business plans and professional consultation to raising capital.

* (16:00)

Mr. Chair, through our new young Aboriginal entrepreneur initiative, we will provide funding to young Aboriginal business people and to community organizations seeking to create employment opportunities for Aboriginal people. The funding structure supports training for both entrepreneurs and employees that will provide them with transferable skills. These two initiatives I have just outlined are estimated to cost \$400,000.

Mr. Chairperson, we have also realigned our operating and program resources to put \$110,000 into community economic development resources through our growing opportunities teams. Building partnerships is a vital aspect of community economic development and these funds will also enable us to participate with federal-funded Community Futures Development Corporation in helping communities find and build on their strengths.

Another area of rural economic development, Mr. Chair, is through value-added activities and our food development centre is a world-class facility for developing new food products from Manitoba-produced commodities. It has just completed the criteria for certification in the internationally recognized Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point or better known as HACCP's safety program and we have allocated \$120,000 to maintain the equipment and the facilities needed for this certification. HACCP is providing consumer assurances in

Manitoba, Canada and the United States and abroad that foods produced in this facility will meet stringent safety requirements.

Environment and sustainability; from food safety, I want to move to environmental safety and protection and to tell you that we have allocated \$2.5 million in this budget to assist farmers in upgrading their manure handling facilities. I believe it is well deserved support for an industry that is providing leadership to the rest of the country in environmental sustainability. This money is in addition to loans and the funding we provide in partnership with the Government of Canada to help producers adopt sustainable farming practices they have identified in their own environmental farm plans.

As part of this government's overall effort to help create and support sustainable energy, we are providing loans at competitive prices to enable rural individuals and groups to establish small scale biodiesel ethanol and wind enterprises. This is a win-win situation because it will create rural economic activity while providing local residents with low income energy. At the same time, it will help reduce fossil fuel dependence and in the case of ethanol and biodiesel products, it will create a market for locally produced crops.

Our markets for locally produced crops include the nutraceutical and function of food industries. Through support of the Richardson food centre, we have put Manitoba as a national leader in the development of food products. We know that today's consumer is very health-conscious and is looking for many of these new products. Mr. Chairman, I did not realize that I was restricted in my time, but I want to say that we have also taken many steps in the food processing and the food inspection section and have budgeted for the costs of meat inspection. We have recently been working on avian influenza and looking at how we can work on these. We have developed such strategies as hiring a disease surveillance veterinarian, a veterinary epidemiologist and we have upgraded our diagnostic labs. In this budget, we have allocated \$684,000 to advance testing and related—

Mr. Chairperson: Time has expired. Recognizing that there are—*[interjection]* Ten minutes.

Recognizing that there are two critics for this particular area, who will be speaking first?

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Madam Minister. I would like to put a few brief comments on the record before we move to a broad examination of the Estimates.

Mr. Chair, Manitoba's agricultural community continues to experience what can only be politely described as interesting times. The weather, high input costs, trade issues and others continue to create challenges for our producers. After more than four years of waiting, there finally seems to be some positive developments when it comes to moving over-30-month cattle and other beef products across our border. At the same time, we've seen the Canadian packing plants struggle to remain viable in the face of stiff competition from U.S. plants, the effects of the rising Canadian dollar, labour shortages and costs associated with the enhanced feed ban.

In light of this challenge and the slaughter environment, I would be very interested to learn more about the activities of the Manitoba Cattle Enhancement Council. Producers have asked many questions about the council's continued collection of a \$2-head tax on cattle and its lack of announcements about how it intends to invest their hard-earned money.

Manitoba's hog producers are also weary, eyeing the markets as prices are not at the desired level and are having an impact on their bottom line. Producers are anxiously awaiting the report of the Clean Environment Commission. I note that the minister said in a public forum earlier this year that the report would be delivered by the end of November and we're interested in seeing this promise met. It is very important that this sector has a clear idea of where the current government is headed when it comes to the future developments of this multimillion dollar industry.

The minister had talked about young farmer initiatives. Although it is very important, I think it should be noted that the new farmers should have the same initiatives regardless of age.

Manitobans would like some answers to this government about its mismanagement of the stubble-burning issue. One has to question how the government could not recognize that its hastily enacted ban would have the unfortunate outcome that we saw earlier this September. No one condones illegal stubble burning. We have to find the most effective ways to manage crop residue so that there is the least possible impact on people with respiratory

problems and to the environment and so that smoke does not pose a hazard to motorists. More research is needed in defining ways to use straw for other purposes so that only minimal amounts need to be burned each year. Some value-added opportunities related to straw would be welcomed by producers.

During the Estimates process, I look forward to hearing the update of the next generation of farm programs going forward. Producers are hoping that this program will be more receptive to their needs than the CAIS program. It is important to note that the provincial government makes a meaningful commitment to this program. I'll also note and look forward to hearing an update on the crop losses and the damage sustained by Manitoba producers as a result of several bad storms. I plan to touch on many of these issues during the Estimates process.

In closing, I'd like to take a moment and thank the department staff for all the work they do on behalf of Manitoba producers and in promoting our products around the world. Their work is certainly appreciated. With that, I'm prepared to move forward through the Estimates in a global manner. Before that, I would like to have the opportunity for my colleague from Russell, who is the critic for Rural Initiatives, to put his opening remarks on the record at this time. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: I thank the critic from the official opposition for those comments. I recognize the honourable Member for Russell.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Mr. Chairman, first of all, I want to indicate to members at this table that I'm pleased to be back in the role of having to be a shadow Cabinet minister, if you like, to the Minister responsible for Rural Initiatives. Let me say that this is an area that is near and dear to my heart because I live in rural Manitoba, and that is the place where my family lives and the place where we make our living along with our neighbours and friends.

Mr. Chair, I want to say at the outset that I feel that the staff in the Department of Agriculture, Food and rural development is very professional in their approach. I want to thank them for the work that they do on behalf of rural Manitobans and farmers to ensure that the programs that are needed in rural Manitoba in fact are delivered in an appropriate fashion.

* (16:10)

I turn my attention, though, to the minister and to the government of the day, and I guess express

with some degree of sadness that a department that was once very prominent in the part of Manitoba that I live in has now been dismantled and has become part of a Department of Agriculture, which in my view, is a large enough department to be a department of its own without having to absorb another fairly significant department, and that is the Department of Rural Development.

We've lost something. The government has indeed lost an opportunity. Manitobans have lost an opportunity to be able to sustain the growth that was prevalent in rural Manitoba in the late '90s. Communities don't need handouts. That has been the hallmark of this government. It's little grants that are handed out to communities to keep them at bay rather than giving rural entrepreneurs, rural small business, a hand-up to ensure that they can survive and carry on business in their communities. And we have seen, sadly, the depopulation of rural Manitoba as a result of that.

I remember very vividly when Ms. Friesen was the Intergovernmental Affairs Minister who carried on with the rural development initiatives and the rural forums that she continued under her watch. These were thriving opportunities for young businesses to gather together and to express and to showcase their success stories.

That, Mr. Chairperson, has largely gone by the wayside, and today, Rural Forum is, I'm ashamed to say, a sham, and not nearly what it could be and should be. That has no reflection on the people who try to put Rural Forum together; rather, it's a reflection on the resources that the minister is prepared to invest into that activity. This was a position where people would come together and showcase what they had achieved over the course of the past year and beyond. It was an opportunity to share those success stories and to share, also, the education that led to the establishment of fledgling businesses that later became significant in this province.

I only refer to the one that's just recently been sold that comes from my community and that's Pizzey's Milling, who started out with a loaf of bread and grew to an enterprise that was employing more than 50 people, doing about \$2-million worth of business per month. Unfortunately, today, that business is large enough that it sold to foreign ownership, and we're hoping that it will continue to operate in our community.

But, Mr. Chairperson, I can go on and on and talk about rural initiatives and rural opportunities that have been lost because of the policies of this government, and we will get into talking about some of those as we examine the estimates of the minister because, instead of taking a department from where it was and growing it into something that could benefit rural Manitobans, unfortunately the policies of this government—and I don't blame this minister in particular because she was handed a responsibility and has done as good a job as she can in the circumstances—but it's the policy of government that has not allowed rural Manitobans, rural families to live in those communities and to ensure that those communities are successful. That reflects on health services, it reflects on education, and today we see the consolidation of things like education facilities, health facilities, and why? It's because of depopulation. Why is that? Because we have a government that really doesn't care about what happens outside of the Perimeter.

Mr. Chairperson, no province is healthy if one part of it is weak. If we want a strong province, we have to ensure that the urban side along with the rural side is healthy and strong, and to that extent we have to put an emphasis on those initiatives that are needed in rural Manitoba. If we had only a third of the kind of effort that we see in the city of Winnipeg extended to rural Manitoba, we would see a very vibrant rural Manitoba.

I remember that in the late '90s when the census was taken, rural Manitoba actually outgrew the city of Winnipeg in terms of numbers for a given period of time. There were more people who took up residency in rural Manitoba than there were in the city of Winnipeg. Now, that may not speak well to the city of Winnipeg, but in an overall sense, it talked to the strength of our communities in rural Manitoba. That's what we need to return to and that's where I feel that we have to put some emphasis in terms of questioning the minister and asking her to be accountable for the kinds of programs that have disappeared. We wonder why they have disappeared when they were working, and those that have really been relegated to an unimportant stature in the government's portfolio and in this minister's portfolio.

So, to that extent, Mr. Chairperson, I think we've got a lot of work to do in asking the minister some very pointed questions about where we are going, and I refer to such enterprises as the livestock enterprise. Look at where we are in Manitoba with

our livestock processing industry. How many years has it been since BSE came along and has gone, and yet we were supposed to see expansion in our slaughter capacity in this province and it was needed. Today, we are still dithering. We still don't have significant slaughter capacity in this province for the numbers of cattle that are produced in this province.

I go to another enterprise in the government's own back yard in Dauphin, and that is the hemp initiative that was started. Again, because of government dithering, that initiative has been lost, too. The hemp processing has now closed its doors because there has been no commitment by this government to that initiative.

Early in October, I will be attending a sod-turning for an ethanol plant in our province, and that, again, has been done without any, any support from this government because this government continues to dither on projects like that. This Friday, I'll be attending another expansion of a DHI plant that is starting its operations in my area. Once again, there has been some government support of that, both federally and provincially, and I acknowledge that, but it has taken three years to get to this point. That discourages people and it makes people move on to a different area.

Why do we have two canola-crushing plants being identified for Yorkton, Saskatchewan, when one of those should have been in Manitoba? If you ask the proponents why they are in Saskatchewan, it is because of the lack of attention given to those kinds of initiatives by a government that really doesn't care. Now, the minister says that's not true, and I know that she has extended some effort, but her hands are basically tied because those decisions are made beyond her department as well.

So, Mr. Chair, I know I have been somewhat negative in my opening remarks. I don't intend to be that throughout the course of the discussions, but I do want to have some answers to some questions. Perhaps we can give the minister some assistance in moving ahead, so that rural Manitoba is not completely lost like some other parts of this country are in the rural settings, so that we can continue to grow this province totally, not just in the city but, indeed, outside of the city boundaries as well. There are lots of initiatives, lots of opportunities, out there. All we have to have is a government that is prepared to give a hand up to those people who need it, give some assistance, provide some infrastructure, and let's get the growth of this province going.

With those few remarks, Mr. Chair, I will stop now. Then we can get on with some detailed questions for the Estimates that have been tabled. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the critic for the official opposition for those opening remarks.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the Minister's Salary is the last item considered for a department in Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 3, subsection 1(a), and proceed with consideration of the remaining items referenced in resolution 3.1.

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

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, if I could, we have had the tradition in the past where we will do the corporation, Manitoba Agriculture Services, first. I wonder if it would be acceptable to the critic to do that first. Then that staff is able to leave, or we can just go line by line as you have suggested.

Mr. Eichler: Normally in the past we've been going on a global but last year we did, because of the short timing that we had. We just had one day of the Estimates process. So we prefer the global route rather than the line by line.

Ms. Wowchuk: In fairness to staff, I think that, rather than going the global route, we'll just start line by line. What I was suggesting was that we take one section at a time and start with the corporation, but if that's not the case let's just go line by line as you have suggested, Mr. Chairperson.

* (16:20)

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Chair, I'm wondering whether we might consider a global approach to the Estimates this year. I ask that humbly because of the split role that we have as critics. The Member for Lakeside (Mr. Eichler) is responsible for the agricultural side, whereas I have responsibility for the rural development initiative side, which does overlap. To that extent, there may be questions that overlap from time to time and I don't want to be cutting in. I'd rather have the critic and the minister deal with their sections and then perhaps move to the rural development section, which may, in fact, bring us back to some of the other sections.

If the minister is agreeable—and I'm not going to put pressure on the minister to have all her staff here all the time because I know that the deputy is very

capable of answering most of the questions anyway. It just allows me a little more flexibility, and that's what I'm asking.

Ms. Wowchuk: We've always had that. I think we have to have a bit of some order here that we are passing things along, but if somebody comes back later and asks a question on something that's already been passed, then that's not a problem for me either. I agree with the member that if the staff isn't here, then we can get an answer to him later. But what I was looking for was for the Manitoba Agriculture Services Corporation to go first. But, if that's not where we want to go, I'm looking for your direction, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Eichler: Then we'll proceed with our general questions at the beginning. We do have a few on policy, and then we certainly have no problem moving forward on the MASC and with the assurances that we normally have had. I know the minister has worked with us in the past in regard to having questions on departments even though we have talked to them. We have a number of rural MLAs, as the member knows, that agriculture is a very strong part of opposition, and we need to make sure that each of our colleagues has an opportunity because there are two other sets of Estimates going on, and some of my colleagues can't be here today, and I'm sure there will be some tomorrow and the following day. So, as long as it's understood we can move forward in that manner, then we're certainly prepared to do that, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: The Chair has not yet heard a clear statement from the parties involved as to whether we are going in a chronological or line-by-line process. Would someone care to make a proposal and see if we can get that officially on the record of which one we are doing?

Mr. Derkach: Well, I think I heard the critic indicate that he would like to ask a few questions on the first section which is, I think, on the policy side. Then we could move to the corporation and ask questions of the corporation, allowing those staffpersons to return back to their desks. If we need them later on, we could give notice, I suppose.

Ms. Wowchuk: That would be basically the order of the Estimates, and I'm fine with that. If the opposition is willing, I'll introduce my staff this year, then we'll move forward.

I'm joined at the table here by my Deputy Minister, Dr. Barry Todd; Mr. Lorne Martin, who is

Assistant Deputy Minister of Policy and Management Division; and Mr. Marvin Richter, who is the Executive Financial Officer.

Mr. Chairperson: It seems that we do have a general agreement, but just for the absolute clarity of the record, will we be passing resolutions section by section or will we be doing all of the resolutions at the end.

Mr. Eichler: All resolutions will be at the end.

Ms. Wowchuk: Whatever. Let's just move along.

Mr. Chairperson: Minister, you agree with all resolutions at the end?

Ms. Wowchuk: Yes. Let's just agree with that and let's just move along.

However, I would like to pass the corporations so that we don't, when we get to that line we deal with the corporation, and we know that they don't have to come back. But I don't want to spend a lot of time arguing or discussing this if there is no agreement on the corporation, then let's just proceed, and we'll see how far we get.

Mr. Chairperson: Is that agreeable to the official opposition? [*Agreed*] Thank you.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Eichler: I wonder if the minister could provide us a list of all the political staff, including the name and position of the employees and whether or not they're full time.

Ms. Wowchuk: I have my special assistant, who is Kaila Mahoney, who works here and is full time, and in my constituency office I have an executive assistant. His name is Ken Munro, and he's full time as well.

Mr. Eichler: I thank the minister for that. Also, we would like a list of the staff in the minister's office and the deputy minister's office. Has there been any change in the past year or are they status quo as far as the staff is concerned in those two offices?

Ms. Wowchuk: I believe we have the same staff that we had last year, and in my office we have Barb Burton, Kristine McCallum, and Elizabeth Babiain. In my office and the deputy minister's office we have Pam McCallum, Sharon Seddon and Mandy Johnson, and I believe that's the same staff that were in that office last year.

Mr. Eichler: The names of the staff that have been hired in 2007, and whether or not they were hired

through a competition or whether they were through an appointment, have there been changes there that the minister could update the committee on?

Ms. Wowchuk: The only change in my staff is Kaila Mahoney, and, as you indicated, that's political staff, and that hiring is through an internal process, not open competition.

Mr. Eichler: I know last year, Mr. Chairman, the minister did have a political staffperson that was working with her. Has that person now moved into permanent staff with the department or is she outside the department, and is that position now a permanent position?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, the position was vacated, and that was the position that Kaila Mahoney has now filled, and the individual who had that position is not in the department.

Mr. Eichler: Is she a permanent employee in the other department then? Was that job tendered out, or was it an appointment?

Ms. Wowchuk: The individual that the member is referring to is not in any department. She is presently in the government policy group.

Mr. Eichler: So then, so I have to understand this correctly, that it is a political position, not a permanent position of the government?

* (16:30)

Ms. Wowchuk: She was in a political position and has moved to another political position.

Mr. Eichler: Transfers within the department, have there been transfers that the minister could highlight the committee on that have either been reclassified or any position that's been made for political reasons to move one person from one area to another?

Ms. Wowchuk: If the member is asking whether we've moved any political staff into government positions, no, there have not been any.

Mr. Eichler: Is there a number of vacant positions now within the Department of Agriculture or Rural Initiatives that are vacant at this particular point in time? Is the minister in a position to tell us where those are located?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, the percentage of vacancies right now is at 8.83 percent, and there are various locations throughout the department. There are job postings that are out and that varies. For a

while this summer, the vacancy rate was down to about a little over 5 or 6 percent, but you have some retirements, you have people moving, and they are distributed to different regions of the province. There's no one area that has a significant amount; it is just basically general turnover and new positions that are waiting to be filled. There are competitions that are being posted now to fill some of them.

Mr. Eichler: The term "new" positions, are there some positions that are being created or is the minister just referring to positions that have been vacated rather than actually new positions? Is that something that she misspoke on?

Ms. Wowchuk: There was one new SY created in this budget. There were some that were created in the previous budget, and it is that one new position that is being filled, but the majority of these are vacancies that we are looking to fill.

Mr. Eichler: I was wondering, Mr. Chair, if the minister would tell the committee the details of how many and what type of contracts have been awarded directly and what is happening with these contracts. Are they going to tender or are they appointed through Orders-in-Council, and what is the requirement for these tenders?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, I wonder if the member could clarify. Are these employment contracts that you're asking about or tenders on work?

Mr. Eichler: Actually, we would like both, employment and contracted work.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, there is quite a bit of work that is done under contract in this department and we do emphasize tendering. There is some consultant work that would be a smaller part of the contracts that we have, but we have things like covering new ground which is application-based. We have veterinary contracts that are tendered. We have contribution agreements such as the REDI. These are application-based. Our irrigation program is under contract and those are application-based.

Where there is the ability to tender, that is done, but, really, when you're filling out an application, that is very similar as well because there are guidelines for that.

Mr. Eichler: Out of the contracts the minister refers to, there're a large number of those. Do we have any indication of the number, the amount that is actually tendered or the number that is actually applied for? If

she could clarify those for us, it would be very useful.

Ms. Wowchuk: This would take a little while to go through, but I guess I would ask the member, are you looking for specific things? Are you looking for irrigation contracts? Are you looking for what we do under REDI? Are you looking for what we do with veterinarian?

If you're looking for all of that, we would have to put that together, but I'm not quite sure which tenders or which contracts the member is looking for.

*(16:40)

Mr. Eichler: What we're trying to do here, Mr. Chair, is to make sure the government is held accountable, and the way we do that is through the Estimates process. I do realize this is a large amount of work, and I think if the minister would go on the record to give it to us at a later time that would be fine.

I would like to know what contracts are actually out for tender and those contracts that are actually made through by application. I think it is important for this committee and the people of Manitoba that we have those at our disposal. We can certainly get those at a later date if it's easier for the staff.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, certainly we can put something together, but I can say to the member that, under tendering, there would be purchases of supplies for our diagnostic services. We could sometimes tender services for training. We could do that. Government services would be responsible for tendering of any renovations that we might have to do. Under the application side of it, there would be things like the REDI program, Covering New Ground, the irrigation, and ARDI. Those are some of them, but we can certainly put together a more detailed list of what programs go under tendering and what are by an application based.

Mr. Eichler: That would be fine. If the minister would advise her staff that, say, anything over \$25,000—I'm not really concerned about the other contracts that are under that—but, certainly, I think, over \$25,000—\$25,000 and over would be fine. That would be fine with me.

Ms. Wowchuk: We'll make our best effort to get that information to the member.

Mr. Eichler: So we have her assurances that it will be done, and just her best efforts, just for the record to make sure.

Ms. Wowchuk: I give the member my assurance that we will get him the information he is seeking.

Mr. Eichler: Time is moving along very quickly and I had hoped to be through this first part already so we could maybe jump to MASC. So I have just a couple more questions before we do that, and we'll then call up the MASC board, or the committee and the staff.

How many positions have been relocated in 2007? The reason I ask that, as you know, the number of questions come from my colleagues regarding movement of positions from the Souris area, from the Neepawa area, from the Dauphin area, and various areas of the province. I know the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) was talking about rural initiatives and growth. It's certainly not given the stability that we like to see within the province in these departments. It certainly has caused a hardship for a number of those people.

I was wondering if the minister would be able to tell us those positions so that we do have them on record, and why they actually were moved. What were the government's intentions when they decided to centralize a number of these positions, and where?

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, I would just like to correct what the member is saying or clarify when he says that we are centralizing jobs. I can say that under our Growing Opportunities Initiative, we have actually increased quite substantially the number of staff outside of Winnipeg. There are approximately 30 additional positions outside of Winnipeg. Some are in Brandon. Some are in various communities.

We have hired eight additional economic development officers in addition to the three that were there, so that now each GO centre, each area, has an economic development officer. We've moved the 4-H from Winnipeg to Brandon. The rural policy branch is moved to Brandon. A livestock specialist has moved to Pilot Mound.

So there are a variety of jobs that have been moved out of Winnipeg, out to rural areas, and additional people have been hired in rural areas so that we can continue to provide and enhance the services for this department and to provide services to rural people in the area, not only in primary production but in value-added and in economic development.

Mr. Eichler: With respect, before I move on to MASC, the positions that were moved, in particular

from Souris and Neepawa, I know the minister received a number of calls and letters from the mayors and reeves, from various people in that area. Is there any feeling from the government to move those positions back in a short time, or is there going to be some type of another relocation of another department back into those areas, because I know certainly that it has a large impact on the way those communities grow and develop and prosper.

A lot of those people are leaders in those communities. We feel it's very important that we have some type of stability rather than move these people from outside their area which they're very comfortable in and do a great job in.

*(16:50)

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairperson, part of our review of the department and the change of the department to include food processing and rural initiatives was to look at how we could best serve people in rural Manitoba.

The member talks about Souris. I can indicate to him that, before we did the reorganization of the department, we had two staff in Souris. We now have four. I was very happy to be in Souris just on Friday to officially open the office and I think that there is an excellent office. People have moved into a much better facility than they were in prior to this reorganization and new facility. In Neepawa, we did not move anybody from Neepawa. In fact, there is one vacancy in Neepawa, and that's a new position because we are adding a value-added specialist to that area. So there is no reduction in jobs in Souris or in Neepawa.

Mr. Eichler: Because of the number of jobs and positions that were uprooted and moved from one area to the other and the relocation of those jobs, could the minister or her staff provide us with a list of their policy with regard to upcoming changes within her department, and what we might be able to expect as far as new positions being created within any of the areas, or will it be status quo for the upcoming years? Can those people be assured they will be able to stay within their communities, or will there be some other changes within the department?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, the member talks about how people were uprooted and uncertainty was created. I want to assure the member that there was a lot of consultation, and staff played a very important part in reshaping the department as did communities. I talked about the value-added specialist that was

rehired in Neepawa. This is what the community said they needed, and that's why that position is created there. Staff is aware of all the positions that are being moved into rural areas. Yet sometimes it doesn't mean that somebody is going to move. It means that somebody will be hired into the new position that is being set up in the rural area.

As we were doing this reorganization, there was a three-year time period for individuals to make their decision as to whether they wanted to stay in the job or whether they wanted to move, or whether they wanted to look for a new position. But there was, in my opinion, very little disruption with regard to staff in this department when we did our reorganization. There are new positions that are being created, and we are looking for new opportunities where we can enhance services in rural Manitoba.

Mr. Eichler: I thank the minister for that, and I do want to go back. The minister said with respect to Neepawa that they actually had no cutbacks, but have those positions all been filled, or is there a vacancy there, because I don't think we're quite up to par on that particular issue?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, there were two positions in Neepawa that were vacant. One has been filled, and the other that I spoke about, the value-added specialist, is being recruited for now.

Mr. Eichler: So during the re-allocation, as far as the departments are concerned, during this three-year period, the minister said that was done through consultation with the staff, and I'm sure that it was. What positions are outstanding during that three-year period that have not been transferred or relocated? Could the minister indicate to us, to the committee, on those positions that are still outstanding, that have not been either transferred or relocated at this particular point in time, or are those positions now all been filled and looked after or either resigned?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairperson, I believe that there is one staff member who was not able to make the transition, and my staff is working with her, it was a full-time position, looking for, and this individual's—was a part-time position? Part-time position, and they are working with her to try to find another place, another thing, that would be more—but on the whole, when you think of the kind of reorganization that we did, with one staff member still outstanding, I would say that that's not a too bad a position to be in.

Mr. Eichler: No, I certainly can agree with the minister, Mr. Chairperson, in regard to that, if there is, in fact, just one position left. I know that the minister did mention in some of her comments in regard to losing some staff that did not want to move, wanted to stay in their particular area, unfortunately we'll miss those people. Is there a cost involved? Was there a cost to the department for buyouts for these particular individuals and how much money did the government pay in order to have these people leave the employment of the government?

Ms. Wowchuk: I hope I didn't lead the member astray when I said that we lost some staff. There was very little staff that did not take part in the transition and there were no buyouts. If an individual decided that they didn't want to continue in the position that they were in, then they went to other employment and those positions have been filled. So there are no vacancies because of that.

Mr. Eichler: I would like to, even though we only have an hour left, it will give us a very good start on MASC at this particular point in time, but I don't know if we'll get through it today or not, but we'll certainly do our best. I know the minister does not want to bring the staff in tomorrow, but we will do our best to move forward. So—

Ms. Wowchuk: Just to clarify, Mr. Chairperson, it's not that I don't want to bring staff in. If there is a certain section that people want to ask questions on, we will have the staff here or we will get the information. But it's not that I don't want to bring them in. I just said if we could organize it in a way, then we wouldn't have to have staff waiting. But any questions the member wants to ask, we are prepared to answer.

I think if we are going to the corporation, then we will bring forward staff from the corporation. I'm sure everybody has met before Neil Hamilton, who is the president and chief executive officer of the Manitoba Agricultural Services Corporation; Charlene Kibbins, who is senior vice-president of Planning and Lending Programs; and Jim Lewis, who is vice-president of Finance and Administration. Thank you for joining us.

* (17:00)

Mr. Eichler: At this time, I would like to thank the staff who joined us and all the hard work that you do. On behalf of the farmers and the ranchers and the people of Manitoba, we certainly do appreciate

everything you do. I know that we've seen hardship around the province from different areas, from year to year, and I know that can be an undertaking of its own, just to try and stay ahead of that but, having said that, we do have a number of issues. It's a big department now with the amalgamation, and so we have a number of issues that we want to try and get as much input from you as we possibly can in regard to the Estimate process.

I know the board last year or the committee, it helped us in regard to the BSE loans that were made, and I was wondering if we could get an update on the BSE recovery loans. How many, I know that, I believe. I think last year, according to my notes, there were 1,700 of those made in the amount of roughly \$68 million in the first year, and also, if I remember correctly, there were approximately half of those that were paid back and the rest went onto a rollover loan. So, if we get an update on that and how many defaults, if any, as well, and also what the current interest rate is on those particular loans.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, under the BSE loans, there were 1,656 loans that were made for a total amount of \$61.7 million. In total, there was—if I could correct that, there was a total of 1,815 loans made for an amount of \$70.2 million. Of that, there are now 1,656 loans that are out there now for a total amount of \$61.7 million. All except 116 have been rolled over into part 2 loans.

The member asked about the interest rates. The rate varies based on timing of the loan's approval, but they're in the range of prime plus 2. Right now, there have been five write-offs up to this point. Arrears on part 2 loans are at about 2.8 percent.

Mr. Eichler: Actually, Mr. Chairperson, it's worse than I had thought. I certainly hoped that a number of those might have been paid off. It certainly shows that BSE is alive and well within the province of Manitoba. It just shows the hardship that is out there for the producers.

When I look at those numbers, I find it quite alarming. I know that we have asked the minister to look at the interest rates on these particular loans. I was wondering if the department, even though you only wrote off five loans, when I look at the debt that's incurred by the BSE and the cattle prices that are out there, is the staff or the committee or the department looking at some way of trying to relieve some of the pressure on the producers out there that, unfortunately, moved into these loans some four years ago. I think in light of the interest rates that are

being charged, even the prime rate being charged rather than prime plus 2, because I know the government borrows at a significant rate much lower than prime.

So I would like to hear the minister's response to that particular issue.

Ms. Wowchuk: I may have not answered that question correctly because, as the member says, the Province can borrow at a significantly lower rate. What the producer is paying is the borrowing rate of the Province plus 1.5 percent.

Mr. Eichler: Just for clarification again, so I make sure I have it right, the borrowing rate of the Province—and if she could give us that rate. I know it varies. It's usually based upon 1 percent below prime or 1 percent above or 2 percent. So it's the borrowing rate of the Province plus 2 percent. So what would the current rate today be?

* (17:10)

Ms. Wowchuk: It is not 2 percent. It's the borrowing rate plus 1.5. That varies on a regular basis.

For the first year of the part 2, the established rate was discounted at 1.5 percent, with young farmers receiving a further discount of 1 percent.

The member asked what the interest rate would be if they were borrowing today. They have to either go through a five-year or a 10-year loan. For the five-year, it would be 6.75 percent, and for the 10-year, it would be 6.750 percent.

Mr. Eichler: So the conditions of the loans when these were taken out, I know I had a number of calls on this particular issue. They had to give up the home quarter in order to have that as part of the terms, in order to borrow the \$50,000. Is that requirement still there? What security is MASC asking for collateral on this loan?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairperson, when these loans were first put in place and they were loans that were desperately needed by the producers, farmers were very strapped because of BSE. So the first loan was a general securities agreement. Then when they had the opportunity to move into the long-term, they could move it to a five-year loan, which was also a general security agreement, or if they went to a 10-year term, it could include some real property that was also included in it.

Mr. Eichler: In the preamble to this particular question, and in regard to the minister's department

or her staff, the interest rate that's being charged—and I know that the hardship that's out there within the cattle producers hasn't gone away and, certainly, doesn't look like it's going to go away anytime soon—in respect to that, I know the department has within their mandate that they certainly can take some type of a leeway to forgive some of that interest and is in the minister's judgment, or the staff, that we need to have a look at the interest rates being charged in light of the current dollar, where it's at, and also the lack of any type of real income coming from the cattle producers. We certainly don't want to lose it all to Alberta.

I think it's a very important industry and, certainly, is proven to be an important industry. It's under such stress now. Whether or not the department is looking at that particular initiative?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, I guess when we look at these loans, when these loans were put into place when they started, they were probably—most of them were at a lot lower rate than what I gave the member opposite as to what they are now. So some of those loans are at a very reasonable lower rate compared to those that are—you know, when I talked about 6.75, some of them are quite a bit lower than that.

There are some arrears and the member talks about how horrible the situation is, but when you compare this to the other areas, the amount of arrears is comparable. Our staff work very closely with the clients, and we continue to monitor and work with producers on this very important issue and in this industry.

I would also say to the member that this is one program, and there are other safety net programs that are in place. If the profitability is eroded in an industry, then the other programs that we have will help to cover off some of it but not all of it. With regard to the level of interest being charged, it is lower than—because they were negotiated some time ago. I want to assure the member that our staff continues to work and monitor the programs that are there and work very closely with producers.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Chair, I do have a couple of questions for the minister with regard to this whole issue of the loan program that was afforded to cattle producers then and where the cattle industry is today.

I think that we're seeing an industry that is back under an extreme amount of pressure right now, and

many of those same cattle producers that took those loans are facing pretty tough times right now. In the last couple of weeks, there's been a significant drop in cattle prices again. Cow prices are down, and I think we're going to find that in the next short while, these types of producers are going to be back asking for some help, and legitimately so.

This is an industry that this province needs to protect and needs to sustain. I don't have the answers and I don't think any individual does have all of the answers in terms of how this industry can be saved and sustained for the future, but it's an important industry, and until we live out this whole BSE period of time—and I think it's probably going to be the full seven years before we see any movement in terms of borders being open—we have an industry that is in real danger of collapsing.

I know I speak to a lot of producers in my area who are at the verge of giving up and selling off their entire herds because they see no light at the end of the tunnel. They've been struggling for the last four years; matter of fact, they've been losing ground.

The loans that are out there right now—I remember arguing this point in the House, that this is probably one area that we didn't need any more loan capacity in. We needed to have some form of programming that really assisted these farmers rather than the loans. Did we have the answers? No, and I wouldn't say that we did, but I think we predicted what would happen with these loans and that prediction has come to pass.

* (17:20)

There has to be a longer term view of this industry than just the five years perhaps, or the seven years that it's going to take to recover some of these loans, or the 10 years. The problem I think is, and what I'm hearing from my constituents is, that they have no capacity to be able to repay these loans right now.

A man who has 150 cows, whose cows are selling at that \$500-600 range right now, just doesn't have the capacity to be able to look after the feed supplies, the fuel costs, sustain the pastures and then pay back the loan in a short period of time. So there has to be a different approach taken. My way of thinking is that if the government has any capacity to forgive some of the interest on the loans—and I know interest has to be charged, but it shouldn't be charged at prime plus 2 percent, because the government borrows money far less than that—and so there has to

be, I think, a way of perhaps reducing that interest rate to a zero point and at least getting the capital back, and then the government or the department has at least contributed that interest amount to that industry.

I wanted to ask the minister whether or not the department, along with her government, has developed a long-term policy on how we can get out of this dilemma of these outstanding loans which, I think, we're going to see more and more of these go into default because of the circumstances that the cattle industry is facing right now.

Ms. Wowchuk: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and, again, I want to correct the record in that, although I did say prime, what I meant to say, and I have put on the record again, is that it is not prime plus 1.5 percent; it is the provincial borrowing rate plus 1.5 percent, which is quite different than prime and that was my mistake. But I say to the member, that is the rate that the corporation gets their money plus 1.5 percent, so that is—*[interjection]*

But, Mr. Chairman, you know, the member keeps talking about how difficult it is out there. There's no doubt this high dollar is hurting the industry right now, but if you look at the amounts, the borrowing rate in comparison to other institutes is a reasonable borrowing rate. The rate of default is comparable to others, so we don't see this as a high rate of default. But I want to say that you talked about whether you work with the clients. Of course, they work with each client. If there is need to defer payments that can be done. It is not as if you set this and that's where it has to stay and there is no working. The corporation does work closely with the clients and there is the ability to negotiate different terms or negotiate a deferral of a payment if that's what's needed.

Mr. Derkach: Well, the minister did not enunciate a long-term plan in terms of how this whole area will be resolved in the future. I just want to take her up on a couple points. She put on the record that the money was being lent out at the provincial borrowing rate plus 1.5 percent. That cannot be the case if it's 6.75 percent because the provincial borrowing rate is not anywhere near that. If the corporation's borrowing rate is 6.75 minus the 1.5, that's a different story, and that, I guess, is what we are stuck with.

But I want to highlight to the minister that this approach is not one of a bank. I know MASC has

certain guidelines that they have to work within that are struck by provincial policy, but in this particular case I think government and particularly the department has a responsibility to make sure that this industry is not lost. I think that it's important that policies be established to assist this industry, give them a hand up, until such time that the markets and the conditions that they have no control over change.

The BSE conditions are more the fault of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency than they are of the producers, and, therefore, the producers have borne the brunt of the cost of this, and the result has been that many producers are facing pretty severe circumstances as we speak.

I'm wondering whether the government, the department, the minister has looked at how we can approach this whole industry and develop some programs that will assist this industry to survive over the course of the next two years, because I really believe that it's the next two years that are critical for this industry. If we don't, then we are going to have a disaster on our hands in terms of the livestock industry in this province, and nobody wants to see that.

Now, we haven't established a slaughter facility of any kind in this province, and it's not up to the government to do that. I recognize that. But government has a responsibility to set the climate for the development of that industry, and that's where government needs to become much more proactive than they have in the past.

But that's only one small puzzle of a fairly large problem. I am asking the minister, because we would like to know as MLAs who represent people who produce cattle what message we can take to them, what message of hope there can be for the future and whether the department is really thinking about long-term solutions for an industry that is really suffering right now.

We want to see these young farmers, these young ranchers, survive, but if we don't put programs in place that will assist them—I go back a long way and I remember the cow-calf program that was developed back in Bill Uruski's day. In my view, although the program was wrong-headed and put the emphasis on the wrong age of the animal, nevertheless it was a program brought in by government to assist in a difficult time and whatever the results were, they were. There was another program that was put in place in terms of loans that

were given to producers. Again, it had to be written off because loans don't work when you don't have any money. The cow-calf program, I think, by and large, worked for the cow-calf producer. It did the opposite to our feedlot producers unfortunately.

But I think that we need to have a program in place for Manitoba. We can't just simply point the finger at the government federally and say, well, it's largely their problem. We have an industry in this province to protect and, yes, we may have to take resources from other places to protect this industry, but I want to know from the minister whether she has a plan that will not only help these, what is it, 1,700 producers, 1,600 and some producers who now have outstanding loans and are facing another round of difficult times, but other producers who aren't perhaps under this umbrella right now who are facing the same kinds of circumstances because they have outstanding loans with banks and institutions.

* (17:30)

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, the member covered a wide range of things starting out with the need for young farmers. If you look at the programs that we have—we have many programs and we have changed a lot of programs to support young farmers and help them transition. So that's the one area.

With regard to slaughter capacity, certainly, that's one that I would like to see happen, and we'll still work at it. I think that part of the solution for us is to have slaughter capacity in our own province so that we're not completely dependent on other facilities.

We meet regularly with the Manitoba Cattle Producers Association. We participate with the industry in the beef roundtable to develop a long-term strategy for the industry. We also have a lot of resources that are there to support the producers in their production, whether it's grazing or in other types of production. I think that's an important role that our department plays in supporting the industry as they work through difficult times and are faced with high input costs. So how do we work with them to make some changes to their industry to help reduce those costs?

Then there is the whole other set of programs that is out there, the safety net programs, what is now CAIS. The member knows that we are in discussion and looking at new programs. The AGRI invest program is something that producers have been

wanting. So there is a variety of programs that are being developed but in consultation with the industry.

So I would say that our department works very closely with them, and works with them to sustain this industry and carry it through. It is a very important industry for us and there have been some real challenges. BSE is one of the biggest ones that we're facing and there are after-effects of it. Border closures are things. There are a lot of places to look for how we could find solutions.

Mr. Derkach: I thank the minister for the history lesson, although I may not have needed it. I acknowledge the fact that the department has—*[interjection]*

Mr. Chairperson: Order. The honourable Member for Russell has the floor.

Mr. Derkach: I acknowledge the fact that the department has come out with some programs that are of benefit to producers, but what I'm telling the minister, I think, is a reality that is out there, that she has to be aware of, and that is that there is a looming crisis, if you like, in the cattle industry right now that is looking at us. Reacting after the horse is out of the barn isn't a good way to do things.

So my question was with regard to future programs. I'm told by my colleague from Emerson that 30 percent, as high as 30 percent of producers, are facing a problem this year. If that's the case, the department needs to be aware of that and needs to be prepared to deal with it. I'm wondering whether the minister has had discussions with her colleagues in government to develop strategies that are going to sustain this industry for the long term. I'm not talking about slaughter facilities. We talk about two aspects of this industry. One is the primary producer who raises the product. The other part of it, of course, is the slaughter end, but I'm more concerned about sustaining that primary producer side right now for the next two years. We know that we can't have a slaughter facility built in this province in the next year or two. It's going to take longer than that.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, there is no doubt that the beef industry is facing challenges right now. We continue to work with producers, but the member is looking for a new income program that he is looking for us to put in. I can say to him that the whole federal-provincial programs that are being talked about right now and are being changed are intended

to stabilize industries through a difficult time like this. That's the intent of them.

Through the CAIS program, there are targeted advances that can come forward which the beef industry has used before. We have to work with the industry to ride through this difficult time, and those are the kinds of programs. I agree that there are many producers that are facing challenges this year. I have talked to them, but there are others. I look at the rates of the programs, the amount of arrears that are there, arrears at 2.8 percent is not a high level of arrears.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Chair, I just wanted to underline for the minister something that the Member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon) and I were just talking about.

If you look at the cattle industry right now, one of the many reasons that the industry is having difficulty is because of the high feed costs. If you want to buy a bushel of barley to feed your animal on your farm today, or a bushel of corn, you're paying an inflated price for that product right now because of what's happening with the ethanol industry. It's a known fact that there's a huge demand for feedstocks for the ethanol industry which, in fact, are the same feedstocks that are used for finishing cattle. Therefore, the cattle producer today is having to pay artificially higher prices because of a subsidised ethanol industry, an industry that I would suggest is still in the fledgling stages in terms of its cost effectiveness and that sort of thing.

But, nevertheless, the world is going that way, and so we can't go against the trend. What we have to do is ensure that those who are using the same feedstocks are not treated separately or differently. We're subsidizing the ethanol industry which is buying the same feedstocks as the cattle producer is, and yet the cattle producer has to pay the full cost of it.

So I'm asking whether there is a strategy by this government in terms of how the cattle industry is going to sustain itself so that we don't have fewer feedlots in this province, we have more, and so that we can continue to grow our cattle industry as we should be in this province.

* (17:40)

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, as I listen to the member, he talks about how we might help the beef industry. We know that higher prices are partly driven by ethanol, partly driven by lower production

in some parts of the world. We are in a world market and this is what drives our price up.

We have to always remember that we are exporters, and if we start to look at programs that will subsidize the cattle industry, you know and the member knows full well that we are going to end up with a challenge from R-CALF, just as we have had reviews on the pork industry where they have had countervail challenges because of support programs.

The member keeps talking about a strategy. What we have to do is look at the whole picture and look at, not only how you might be able to offer a subsidy in one sector, how is it that it all fits together.

I would say to the member also, he's talking about the high cost of feed because of this product going into ethanol; there is also a bi-product that comes off of ethanol that can be used as a feed source and quite effectively used as a feed source. What we have to do is continue to work on research and development, on how we can use this product so that the energy can be captured but we can still have it as feed stock for producers. It may not be available in every part of the province, but I know that the product is available here in Manitoba. It's being exported because it's not being used here. I toured some facilities in the United States and the DDGs are used quite extensively as a feed supplement.

So there are various issues and we have to, as a department, look at how all parts of the industry move, and we have to be very careful that we do not put a subsidy in place for one sector that will cause us to have a countervail on the other side.

Mr. Eichler: I don't think that anybody on this side of the House is looking for a handout. We're looking for a hand up, not any type of a subsidy whatsoever was ever mentioned. But we do want to make sure that whatever we do establish and this government establishes, that it's done in consultation with the industry in order to move it forward in order to sustain it.

I know that, if you look at Lakeside, Interlake, Ste. Rose, Russell, Emerson, Virden, this is very important to those particular areas, and as we all know, sixty cents out of our dollar comes back to urban Manitoba, into the city of Winnipeg and to Brandon. Brandon, in particular, it is a large factor of their growth and their economy, and without the cattle industry I think we're going to see a strong downturn within the province of Manitoba.

So the minister talked about safety net programs. I know that when the BSE loans were taken out, I believe the minister, the department, had said that the money was taken out of the rainy day fund in order to get that established for a short term and then paid back, but some of the issues that are out there now that you're talking about in the safety net side of things, is it my understanding that the ministers under the Growing Forward program that this is part of the negotiation process that's taken place in that program? Is that what she's talking about for safety net? Because if it is, that doesn't come into effect until next year and by then a number of the producers will be long gone. The cows will be out of the gate.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, the member talked about consultation and working with the producers. The changes that have been made to the federal-provincial program are changes that have been made because this is what the producers were asking for.

The program, the AGRI invest and ag stability programs are in effect for the 2007 year. So the payment will come in 2008 but they are in effect for this year, this income tax year. So those changes have been made because that's what producers asked for. They asked for some predictability, some stability to the program. Some of those changes have been made.

Mr. Eichler: That actually is good news for the producers, but do we have any indication about how much money will be flown back to the producers? Has there been a calculation done by the department in order to assure that some of that money's going to be coming back, in fact, to the producers?

Mr. Chair, the money that's actually going to be coming back that is going to be funnelled back through the CAIS program we know that timely accountants get done actually probably late in 2008, which again I think is going to be too late. So is this a separate flow of cash that's going to be coming to the farmers in a different manner?

Ms. Wowchuk: If the member is saying that this money isn't flowing fast enough, it's not going to come; the industry can request a targeted advance, an interim advance payment. They can get that. We've done that once before for the cattle industry. That can happen. But the other programs, the changes have been made in consultation with the industry and at the request of the industry that these changes are made so that money will flow more quickly, but if

you're talking about needing cash immediately, well, then, that's something the industry can request for a targeted advance.

* (17:50)

Mr. Eichler: So then the MCPA and KAP, in particular within the province of Manitoba, and CCA is also a great resource, so the targeted advance that the minister was talking about, what kind of dollars are we looking at that would be available to the producer on a readily available basis? Is there interest charged on the targeted advance in the terms of repayment?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, a targeted interim advance would be made at the request of the industry. There has been no request from the industry for this to happen.

If the industry felt that this was something that they needed, they could make the request. It's based on 50 percent of the expected draw that you would be getting from CAIS, and it's also based on a 50 percent drop in your margins.

The member asked if there was interest applied. Interest applies if there is an overpayment. If the overpayment is not paid back, then there can be interest on that. But, as I said, there was an advance made like this once before, when the industry asked for it.

Mr. Eichler: So, if the member would clarify for me, this is the advance payment program for livestock, or is it something else?

And the interest that she talked about that was being charged if there's an overpayment—I mean, we've all heard of the stories out there in regard to overpayments. I know that we were just talking about an individual in the Russell area who got \$5,000 one year and the following year was asked to pay it back.

Is there interest charged on that particular payment, too, then, or is this just on this particular program?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, if there is an overpayment made, it has to be paid back after a certain amount of time. You negotiate on your interest but arrangements can be made for repayments, and there have been cases when the interest has been raised.

Mr. Eichler: I thank the minister for that. So this, again, going back to the program, is this the advance

payment program that she's talking about or is this a different program entirely?

Ms. Wowchuk: This program is part of CAIS. It's completely separate from cash advance. It is an element of CAIS where commodity groups can ask for an advance. It is not part of the cash advance.

Mr. Eichler: So we have the advance payment program, the targeted advance program—and the targeted advance program, just for clarification now, is that a federal-provincial shared program? Or is that an individual program put on by the province as well as the advance payment program, I believe, is just that of the province of Manitoba? Is that correct?

Ms. Wowchuk: It's really an advance payment on your CAIS, when there's a cash flow problem and you want to take an early payment, it goes by commodity group. They make a request for it, but it's separate. Cash advance is a completely separate thing. This deals with CAIS, and the commodity groups can ask for an advance on their CAIS payment. The commodity group asks on behalf of the farmer, so as Manitoba Cattle Producers would ask on behalf of the cattle producers that an interim payment program be put in place.

Mr. Eichler: Let's just talk about the MCPA then. If they were to ask as a commodity group for the targeted advance program under the CAIS payment, then for that particular advance it would be based on a per head basis, then, and would every producer qualify for that, regardless of where they're at financially?

Ms. Wowchuk: It's based on the producers in a particular sect, let's say the cattle industry, and it's based on the margin per unit and it's based only on the cattle. So, if a farmer has other income on the farm, this is when you could get an overpayment because you could get a payment for your cattle based on your margin but when you complete the whole application and there are other parts to your operation, this is where you could end up with an overpayment situation.

Mr. Eichler: I could see the complications coming forward on a targeted advance program because if a producer takes the advance payment program based on the numbers that they're anticipating, then you go on the margin side of it, definitely that producer would be setting himself up for financial disaster. Plus he'd also be having to pay a penalty as far as interest is concerned on that cash advance. So, really, that's a real flawed program the way it's set up. I

mean, it's setting the producer up for failure the way it's—and into more debt that he's not going to be able to actually handle.

Ms. Wowchuk: The cash advance is a federal-only program. This is an advance on your CAIS, which is a federal-provincial program. But that's why commodity groups, Manitoba Cattle Producers, are very careful about asking for this program because of the way it is calculated and they did ask for it. They did use this program in 2004. It was used before and they can use it again to draw money from CAIS in advance.

Mr. Chairperson: As previously agreed in the House, the hour being 6 p.m., committee rise.

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

* (15:50)

Madam Chairperson (Bonnie Korzeniowski): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will be considering the Estimates of Executive Council.

Does the honourable First Minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Yes, thank you, Madam Chairperson, just a couple of points. I've been through the Estimates before with members opposite. Many of the items that we discussed and debated have been discussed and debated in the election campaign, and, ultimately, the people have judged upon the merit of our arguments. So I'm sure the Estimates will be quite short in their duration because the people are always right. Even when I didn't agree with them, they were always right, and that's the essence of a democracy, but I welcome the questions that might happen.

The Estimates are fairly straightforward. We have a 2.8 percent projected increase. Last year, we came in at 1.5 percent under budget because some salary lines were not filled right away. The staffing levels are comparable to previous years. We have increased the Manitoba Council for International Co-operation's funding in the Enabling Appropriations, which is administered by Executive Council. We increased the grant from \$500,000 to \$750,000.

I know that some of the projects were visited by my predecessor when he was in Rio at the Rio conference. I haven't had the opportunity of visiting any yet, but, certainly, I know that Premier Filmon was quite positive about what he saw for the investments and the amount of leverage between the

public investment and the private investment, particularly the work done by many of the grassroots charities. Charitable organizations of Manitoba, I think, are a real tribute to this province. Even today, there's work going on post-Katrina by the Mennonite Central Committee and the Enns family with different trailers and different support being provided, and, certainly, we acknowledge the great work the MCIC does on all of our behalf.

This previous year, we had an additional \$200,000 for natural disasters that took place in the Philippines and Indonesia, and, of course, we felt—first of all, we try to identify if there's an organization on the ground to administer the funds, and so far there has been, just like the tragedy of the tsunami that took place the year before. Again, we are well served by the MCIC, and we certainly respect the ability to make a difference for people in tragic circumstances. So that is my report.

As I say, my job as Premier is one that you always get up every morning and have the privilege of working on behalf of Manitobans. I'm sure the Estimates will be a process that includes issues that range, and that doesn't mean I have to answer them, but I'm sure the questions will range. I welcome, again, the great privilege the people of Manitoba have bestowed upon our government with the May 22 results. It's an honour, and it's a point of humility for all of us in this Chamber to be re-elected in whatever role because being a member of this Legislative Assembly is still the paramount role of anyone in this Chamber. Thank you very much.

Madam Chairperson: We thank the First Minister for those comments.

Does the Leader of the Official Opposition have any opening comments?

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Very briefly, Madam Chairperson, I just want to acknowledge and confirm the indication of support for the work that's being done by MCIC. This is something that was commenced under Premier Filmon and, I know, has been carried on and expanded by the current Premier and government. They certainly do excellent work. The funds that have been set aside are expended in a way that does generate leverage in terms of the contributions from other sources outside of government, sources outside, other than Manitoba taxpayers. I just want to acknowledge the good work that's being done in that area.

We certainly take note of the result that came about on May 22. Well, we may not particularly like the outcome; we certainly respect the decision of voters. But I would say, in response to the Premier's comment, that they elected us with a mandate to ask questions, so we certainly look forward to spending several hours asking questions, even though, as the Premier has acknowledged, he may very well not answer them. We will certainly take note of those questions that he chooses not to answer and I guess attempt to arrive at whatever inference one might reasonably arrive at when a premier refuses to answer a reasonable question, because all questions that we will put will, of course, be reasonable and constructive.

So that's all I have for an opening statement, Madam Chair. Do you want me just to start with questions?

Madam Chairperson: Under Manitoba practice, debate on the Minister's Salary is traditionally the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall defer consideration of line item 1.5 (a) and proceed with consideration of the remaining items referenced in resolution 2.1.

At this time, we invite the minister's staff to join us in the Chamber, and once they are seated we will ask the minister to introduce the staff in attendance.

Mr. Doer: Yes, we are joined by our reliable team, the lean, mean, competent team: Maria Garcea, who the former chief of staff would know full well from his previous career, she has all the numbers and all the stuff; Paul Vogt, the Clerk of Cabinet, who was ably trained by Mr. Eldridge who has lots of time on his hands now because his son has just received a scholarship to Harvard, which certainly surpasses his record of only getting a scholarship to lowly Princeton. So those are the two staff that have joined us today. He has lots of time to answer any questions. We can go on till midnight tonight if you'd like.

* (16:00)

Madam Chairperson: Does the committee wish to proceed through these Estimates in a chronological manner or have a global discussion?

Mr. McFadyen: I would prefer a global discussion.

Madam Chairperson: A global discussion. Agreed?

Mr. Doer: Yes, I will be very global in my discussion.

Madam Chairperson: We will have a global discussion as agreed, and the floor is now open for questions.

Mr. McFadyen: I, too, want to just thank and acknowledge the staff that are here today, and certainly we appreciate the many hours that they put in. I want to congratulate the clerk on the achievement of his son. I know that there will be many with associations to Princeton who will be offended by the comment the Premier (Mr. Doer) has just made. I'm looking forward to clipping that Hansard and sending it to all two people that I know who have had associations with Princeton.

But there was a comment made in last year's Estimates about a good debate which the Premier wanted to have after the election about the role of the civil service, the public service, the role of political appointments to the public service and the balance between the permanent civil service and the natural desire and, I would argue, the right of any elected government to make certain appointments to certain positions in order to carry out the mandate that they've been democratically provided with. I know the clerk will probably have some of his own thoughts on that in light of his own experience and background.

As well, I want to just acknowledge Maria for the great hospitality that we had at Folklorama at the Italian pavilion this year in addition to all the other great things that she does. I don't know whether I will ever forgive her for getting me up on the stage, dancing toward the end of the late performance on a Thursday night, but that is one of the hazards that one always encounters when you go to Folklorama. It was a great night. The hospitality was great. La dolce vita was alive and well, and it was a very good evening. I thank Maria for that.

I just want to come back and revisit one point that arose from last year's Estimates and which I at the time just chose not to pursue, but a matter of just clarification on staff numbers and budget for Executive Council. The Premier had indicated that there was a total of 44 positions in Executive Council when you included Protocol and some of the Intergovernmental Affairs staff, and that some of those staff were transferred out, which left a total of 36 staff years within the department.

Can I just get an indication as to whether the budget for the department was adjusted downward accordingly, and what was the decline in the budget for the department between the year that it was out of 44 staff level and the budget of the department in the year that it went from 44 to 36 with that transfer?

Mr. Doer: I will get the specific numbers of the budget. The answer is that, in the reconciliation numbers that are presented in the budget documents, the reductions were clearly transparent and the additions were clearly transparent. It was my feeling that the Protocol Office and the people in it were underutilized in government. Oftentimes they hosted people with dignity in this building and maybe events just outside of this building, but their organizational skills and their ability to assist different efforts, particularly in Trade when you have a lot of business people on a trade mission or last week in Ottawa, where we had a political delegation and community delegation, that their skills were being underutilized. I thought they should be closer to Trade because you're not always having a royal visit or a visit from an ambassador, and I think that the bottom line is that the staff years were reconciled. The number was deleted here and increased there, and the answer to the question was that the staff years weren't increased in the Executive Council by decreasing the staff years that were transferred or FTEs that were transferred to Protocol.

I do believe that they do work with the Premier's office from time to time. They work with the Lieutenant-Governor from time to time, yesterday being an example of the Order of Manitoba. But I've added the job of particularly trade delegations because if we have 15 or 20 businesses on a trade mission, they're able to provide a lot more organizational support and meeting support. Sometimes they're in countries, and I noticed this with India, they're in countries that have a lot of protocol requirements along with business. Obviously, if you go to some places there's not a need for it, but if you go to other places, there's both. Protocol is good business. So they're skilled in that area.

I also would say that one of the protocol officers has been doing work in south Australia sort of as an exchange, and he's obviously a person that the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) would know. He's obviously very skilled, and we're fortunate to have him, all the people in Protocol. But I have expanded the role, and I think it's made the

job more interesting, quite frankly, for them. But that's my biased assessment on it. When you add more work to somebody, you always say, it will make your job more interesting.

Mr. McFadyen: I'm going to come back just to the effect of that transfer, but I thank the Premier for that response.

I want to ask just for the record and to provide some explanation for what would appear to be on the face a discrepancy between Public Accounts and what was budgeted last year for the department but which I know has some explanation and some breakdown on page 3–17 of the details of operating revenue and expense in the Public Accounts that were just released for the year ended March 31, '07.

Madam Chairperson, that discrepancy is that it shows actual expenditures for the department of \$3,500,328 but shows a budgeted amount of roughly two and a half million. There's a million-dollar difference and I know that there's a breakdown provided at page 3–17 which shows a main Estimate transfer and some other items: transportation of \$53,173, communication of \$119,211.

But I wonder, just for the sake of providing some clarification, if the Premier could just expand on that, what would on the face appear to be a discrepancy between what Public Accounts is showing as actual expenditures and what the budget had provided for last year.

Mr. Doer: Yes, I believe the number is contained within the enabling vote and then transferred in the Public Accounts into Executive Council for MCIC, and that would include the \$750,000 plus the \$200,000 additional for the two disasters. I'll double-check that. That's my understanding of it.

Mr. McFadyen: That provides at least a partial explanation. I would appreciate just the rest of the detail on that. I thank the Premier for that undertaking.

On the issue of staffing within the department, I know in looking at a staff list that was provided to my office for the department, I certainly recognize some names of people there, particularly those who continue to provide great public service, those who are permanent civil servants within the department. I certainly recognize some of the names of the "political" appointments within the department. By my count with the list provided which in the bottom

right-hand corner says, effective September '07, by my count a 15 what we call political staff Order-in-Council appointments.

* (16:10)

I wonder if the Premier can just indicate how many of the individuals, of those 15 political appointments, joined the department within the past 12 months, and if he could provide the names of those who have left Executive Council in the preceding 12 months.

Mr. Doer: I'll look at this number, but the majority of them would have been working prior to that, but I'll double-check the numbers. The majority of staff—there have been some resignations or retirements on the administrative staff and I will get a number, but it'll be about two or three in each side of the administration and the political side. But the question was on the specific political side, and there have been some staff moved in from other departments, but I will get the specific amount of people that have come in in the last 12 months or the last two years. I just want to be accurate.

Mr. McFadyen: In addition to the number of people, would the Premier also provide the names of the individuals who both left and joined on the political side?

Mr. Doer: Yes.

Mr. McFadyen: Madam Chairperson, just with respect to Mr. Balagus and his role in the Premier's office as chief of staff, I just note that there was an Order-in-Council appointing Mr. Balagus to his role in 2003 and that Order-in-Council provided for a starting salary of \$103,133, and that Public Accounts for 2006-2007 indicate total compensation for that year in the amount of \$135,000 roughly, just over \$135,000. That's a \$32,000 increase over the span of—or what would appear to be a \$32,000 increase over the span of three years. Roughly \$10,000 a year or in the range of between 9 and 10 percent if you were to annualize the percentage increases with CPI. Most Manitobans having their income increase closer to 2 to 3 percent and certainly with retired teachers in the range of less than that in terms of their annual increases, I wonder if the Premier can explain what it was about Mr. Balagus's performance that entitled him to raises of close to 10 percent a year over the past three years.

Mr. Doer: I'm pretty sure it's all merit increments and general wage increase, pretty confident it's the

same as Mr. Sokolyk when he was chief of staff, and I'm not sure whether his successor, Mr. McFadyen, as chief of staff received an increment. I'll double-check. I'll go back. The records are still there.

An Honourable Member: It won't be 10 percent.

Mr. Doer: Well, no, if you had a wage increase, a general wage increase plus an increment, it might be close to that, and it might not be 10 percent on a base that's higher, but we didn't—to my knowledge, there's no bonuses there. It was increment and general wage increase. I think it's pretty close to what happened in the past with Mr. Sokolyk, who is a person that is known to the member opposite.

Mr. McFadyen: Madam Chairperson, of course, when you look at numbers that show a jump from \$103,000 to \$135,000 over a three-year period, it would appear to be something close to 10 percent, so I certainly look forward to the explanation for those increases.

Coming back to the issue of the transfer of staff to the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs dealing with protocol and intergovernmental matters, can the Premier also indicate whether the budget for travel, for missions and other intergovernmental work was also transferred to the department and out of Executive Council?

Mr. Doer: Just back to Mr. Balagus, I do believe when he mentions 2003, I'm going by memory, but if I recall correctly, we did not have a settlement in 2003 in the public service, and therefore we did not adjust the executive salaries in 2003. So probably in 2004 for senior staff, or late 2003, there would have been the increase, you know, from the retroactivity of one increase back to April 1, 2003. We are certainly not going to advance that to any person in the senior staff.

On the issue of delegations, specifically, we're trying to use the Alberta model of putting a number out for the Premier's travel in a press release right away, which we did in India and will do of any other trade missions when they arise. I believe we did one in Los Angeles as well, San Diego, when we had that trade mission. I think the member opposite would know that in previous years the Davos membership of \$30,000 a year was contained within the Industry Department and the travel was somewhere else.

We do reconcile that with the numbers we give out, and there are some things that come out of Executive Council and some things that come out of

Intergovernmental, for Trade, but I think it's important that, on a forward basis, the travel be indicated on any mission before I go away, because we should know within reason what they are.

So, just coming to the specific point, I thought the practice that Premier Klein had in Alberta, where he says: "We're going to India. This is how many business people we're taking, or we're going to Jalisco, or we're going here. This is how much we're taking and this is how much the travel of the Premier is," sort of, or to some degree, dealt with that issue right up front, because sometimes you go to an event and sometimes it's part of a trade mission, sometimes it's a meeting with a political official, sometimes it's something else. So it's sort of in different designations, but it's all reconciled.

The travel budget, there is a travel budget in Intergovernmental Affairs, there's a travel budget in Trade, and there's a travel budget in the Premier's office, and there's a travel budget for an MLA, and there's a travel budget for travel in Manitoba. A lot of times you get asked what's the travel outside of Manitoba; there's travel in Manitoba, and we're working toward disclosure each year with those numbers and disclosure before the fact on trade missions for my particular travel.

I think that is, to my way of thinking—if, for example, we joined the Davos, whatever it's called, and it was \$30,000, then we would have to have full disclosure up front, and we think that's a little more transparent than other arrangements that do go between different departments, as the former chief of staff would know and the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) would know. I think one of the media asked us for travel last year and we broke it down into expenditures that took place in Trade and expenditures that took place in the Premier's office specifically.

Suffice to say we buy economy airfare, as the member knows, and the odd time we get upgraded at the gate and the odd time we don't. Anytime out of Winnipeg you don't get—you know, you're at the back of the bus, and that's okay because that's appropriate. The travel, we try to be as careful as the previous government on travel, but a little more transparent on memberships like Davos that we haven't joined. I think that was \$30,000 a year. I go to Montana.

Mr. McFadyen: Some might say a small price to pay for an economic strategy, but we'll leave that debate for another day. I said some might say.

I just wanted to, just for clarification on the issue of travel say for the record that, of course, it is an important responsibility of any premier to travel and represent the province in various ways. We certainly don't have any issue with that, with the need for that to take place. Without commenting on any specific trip or any particular expense, Madam Chair, I just wonder if the Premier can just confirm, in terms of where the expense is coming from, that some expenditures, those that may relate to a mission or something related to intergovernmental of his travel expenses, would be paid by the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs, and others that would be paid from Executive Council.

*(16:20)

Mr. Doer: Yes, I can confirm that.

Mr. McFadyen: And can I just ask the Premier: Are there any other departments or Crown corporations or government agencies that cover the Premier's travel expenses?

Mr. Doer: I can recall one occasion where the—I'm pretty sure that Hydro had an event at one of the communities, I believe Nelson House, and invited me up, and I believe, I'll have to double-check, but I believe they paid for the plane which, I can't remember whether I drove up and flew back, I can't remember that. It didn't make sense to have an empty seat in terms of the announcement Hydro was making. I have to take as notice other departments. At the end of the day when we get asked for it, we bring it together and disclose it in terms of public information, public transparency.

We're actually going to improve that, I think, this year with full disclosure of everyone. We're also even looking at how we can refine it even more next year to just move this along. But the answer on a Crown is I do recall a Hydro plane because I know I very rarely take the government jet, as you know, but I do remember that they did have a Hydro plane chartered, and I remember being on that. That's the only time I can think of. I'll double check that, but I do remember being on, it might have been two years ago. If I was on a jet with a private person, I would disclose it, but I haven't been. There was only one where a businessperson came up and we went back, and I disclosed it fully to the ethics individual. Obviously, full disclosure is necessary.

Mr. McFadyen: Thank you, and I thank the Premier for undertaking to get back on the issue of other

departments, Crown corporations or agencies that may cover travel expenses.

The Premier just made a passing reference at the end of his response to the issue of private parties, or parties outside the Government of Manitoba and its various Crown corporations and agencies covering expenses. I wonder if the Premier can just indicate again whether any of his travel has been covered by parties outside the Government of Manitoba and its Crown corporations and agencies.

Mr. Doer: I'll take that as notice just to make sure that—I do recall the Hydro, as one example, and I'll double-check that. I certainly know that Hydro from time to time invites us to events, and they already have transportation, and we take advantage of it rather than having—it wouldn't make any sense to have a government plane go up to an event and a Hydro plane with empty seats, so we try to use common sense.

Mr. McFadyen: Thank you, I thank the Premier for that response.

I wonder if the Premier, just coming back to positions within Executive Council, can indicate whether there are any positions in the department that have been reclassified in the past year.

Mr. Doer: I'm not aware of any in the last year, but I'll double-check on that. They're nodding no, but I'll get them to double-check. A nod doesn't cover me in Hansard. I trust my staff, but I always like, I'll double-check. I can't recall taking an Order-in-Council to Cabinet, and I think I would need an Order-in-Council, and you would have that actually. Your handy-dandy research staff would have that right at your avail. It would have that right at your avail. They would have that bullet loaded in the gun and shoot it at the appropriate time. So I'm assuming that your people wouldn't miss it, and I'm assuming my staff won't miss it, but I'll double-check. I don't think so.

Mr. McFadyen: I just note from the staff handout we've received that the Director of Communications, Jonathan Hildebrand, was listed as, I think, Acting Director of Communications. Can the Premier indicate whether that continues to be the status of Mr. Hildebrand, or has that become a permanent, non-acting appointment?

An Honourable Member: I don't want to be picking on rural Manitoba here with Mr. Hildebrand from—

Madam Chairperson: The honourable First Minister.

Mr. Doer: Sorry—

Floor Comment: Crystal City.

Mr. Doer: Crystal City, yes. He's from Crystal City, that's not far away from Snowflake, Manitoba. I can't believe he's still acting director. I thought he was permanent. I think his friend Mr. Vogt has let him down, so I'm going to immediately require the two of them that I thought played on the same hockey team, you know come from—if Mr. Hildebrand is listening, which I doubt he is, but if he was listening I do so apologize. It was no offence to southern rural Manitoba. I expect Mr. Vogt to make sure that these things don't happen so we'll correct this shortly. It's my intention to make it permanent, so I apologize to Mr. Hildebrand, and thank you for that question.

Mr. McFadyen: Thank you, and I know Mr. Hildebrand will appreciate the fact that I asked the question as well. If there are any other members of the Premier's staff listening right now who are in an acting capacity feel free to pass me a note and I'm very happy to ask a question about it.

How can I begrudge somebody from Crystal City? It is a great community, very close to Cartwright actually, in addition to Snowflake. So they're good people; they're good people. I don't know where he went wrong along the way, but we certainly hope he can be redeemed, and maybe after his appointment becomes permanent we can do something about that.

I wonder if the Premier can just outline in terms of major—let's not limit it to major—contracts that the department is currently in with outside parties for services to the department.

Mr. Doer: I'll have to double-check Public Accounts, and we also have to have full disclosure. I don't think we have any specific contracts that wouldn't be civil service-wide or Treasury Board-wide. There are contracts for systems that were entered into, for example: telephones is a contract; Shaw Cable is a contract; SAS, SAP—Scandinavian Airlines, no—SAP is a contract, all of which were let by the previous government that have been retendered and reauthorized. There's coffee that comes in there, but I only have one cup, so if that's in the interest of full disclosure, I'm not sure who takes care of the water, but I normally have it right out of the tap or wherever they're getting it from here. So

there are some contracts that I can think of off the top of my head, but nothing—you know, we don't have anything with OlyWest for bacon or something. I'll double-check, but I don't think there's anything untoward.

Mr. McFadyen: One contract that we noted from 2007 Public Accounts is with a company called Goldin & Company Ltd.; last year it was for \$33,067. I wonder if the Premier can indicate whether there continues to be a contract with that company and just indicate what that contract is for.

* (16:30)

Mr. Doer: I was told that that contract was signed at the beginning of time so that would be in your era, but I'll double-check the timing. It's for pins, that's what it's for, and I can assure the member there's lots of requests for pins in that office. The member would know that, but, apparently, if it's the beginning of time, that wouldn't qualify me as the person that authorized this, but some would argue. Of course, you had me up to 10 years in the election campaign. I know that you didn't mean to be unfair to me in terms of how long in the tooth I really was, but I'm forever young, and, apparently, this contract was before my time. In fact, you might have signed off on it yourself when you were chief of staff, but I'll double-check that.

Mr. McFadyen: Well, I don't know how the Premier defines the beginning of time. I'm assuming it could go as far back as the Howard Pawley-Gary Doer government of the 1980s. I don't know if it goes back that far, but that would even predate the beginning of time. According to the Premier's definition, it would be pre-beginning of time if that is the case. But, in any event, I appreciate that comment.

Our curiosity was piqued by that contract. It was \$33,000. It was one of the larger contracts. I know how much demand there is for pins in political offices. We give away a lot of them. Part of the curiosity was piqued by the fact that Goldin & Company, which I'm sure is a very, very good company—their Web site describes them as makers of plush toy mascots, so you can appreciate why our curiosity would be piqued. They've got pictures on the Web site of Goldie and other mascots that I think they manufacture in large quantities on behalf of other clients. But pins make a lot of sense. I'm glad I asked the question, and I appreciate the answer.

Madam Chairperson, I want to just come back to some of the appointments that have been made to the

civil service. I wonder if the Premier can just indicate whether there was a competition for the position that's currently occupied by his former communications director, Riva Harrison.

Mr. Doer: I don't believe that position is in this department. She was hired directly by government, and she is a competitive person—I can attest to that—and so she was appropriately hired and qualified.

Coming back to mascots, I'm sure the member opposite was curious. I was greeted by a mascot in the middle of the election debate. Curiously, I had a Conservative chicken appear at the steps of the CBC. The problem is there are doors at the CBC. The problem, of course, for the member opposite, the next election campaign, if he's going to have that kind of tactic, he probably should get two chickens if you've got two doors because you could just go to the other door, but I don't know whether the member opposite used that company to hire. I know the co-chair of the election planning committee is there, her successful campaign to bring back the Jets and bring the chicken. But it was a direct appointment similar to how—let me give you another example, the same way that the former ADM in Family Services was hired who was a staff member of the government for a number of years. He was hired directly. There are two sections of The Civil Service Act, and we used the comparable section to David Langtry. We used the same section of the act there which, of course, you can do from time to time.

Mr. McFadyen: I'm not going to take the bait on the chicken, Madam Chairperson. We may have time to come back. We do have eight hours after all, so there's a lot of time to come back to those sorts of issues.

I want to just ask the Premier if the assistant deputy minister in the department of industry and trade who is named on many of the invoices that were submitted in connection with the Spirited Energy campaign, Patricia Britton, is the same Pat Britton who used to be the executive director of the NDP of Manitoba?

Mr. Doer: Yes.

Mr. McFadyen: I wonder if the Premier can just indicate in terms of other initiatives and just moving from specifics to some broader issues.

We had a discussion in last year's Estimates on a couple of issues which are broader and more relevant to the Premier's general role, not quite so specific to the structure and budget of Executive Council. One

of those points that we discussed was the issue of Public Accounts Committee. The Premier made a comment about the evolution in the ways in which the Public Accounts Committee operates. There has been a lot of debate on the issue, a lot of discussion in certain circles in the province over the last couple of years on the issue of the Public Accounts Committee. The provincial auditor, Auditor General of Manitoba, currently Ms. Bellringer, has commented, certainly to us on several occasions, about some of the deficiencies in our current Public Accounts Committee process.

I know that the Member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik), the Opposition House Leader (Mr. Goertzen), along with the Government House Leader (Mr. Chomiak) and others travelled to Saskatchewan recently to have a discussion with people in that jurisdiction about the way Public Accounts works in Saskatchewan and, I think, came back impressed with some of the things that have been happening there.

We also know the federal level of Public Accounts is regarded as a reasonably effective committee that has as its focus, not so much a political mandate, but a focus on more administrative and financial matters. What characterizes the committees in places where the committees are successful is the ability to have officials provide information and respond to questions and the ability to meet more frequently than what we've had our Public Accounts Committee meet. I have some appreciation for my relatively brief experience in this House for what I would assume would be the benefit of being able to ask questions directly to your officials and get responses rather than sometimes to have to put questions through ministers and elected politicians.

I wonder if the Premier is still committed, as he was last year in Public Accounts, sorry, in Estimates, to modernizing our Public Accounts process here in Manitoba and would be supportive of, subject to negotiation of the details, but supportive of the principle that we move toward a Saskatchewan or a federal model when it comes to Public Accounts Committee.

Mr. Doer: Well, I would appreciate the Public Accounts becoming a body that is more thorough and less political. I would note this summer that there were comments on the Public Accounts Committee not meeting after we wrote a letter to both parties offering to meet on a certain date that

would be consistent with what the law was purporting to do and then received—and I don't know whether the media asked for comments from us, but when you ask for a meeting at a certain time that would be consistent with the law and then have the criticism that you're not calling the Public Accounts, I guess that's just a free cheap shot, in my view, and I just think that it's unfortunate. I think we've moved from having less Public Accounts when we were in opposition, I know, to more Public Accounts in government. I don't have a lot of knowledge about every public accounts committee in Canada, so I don't want to comment on that, nor do I have a lot of—I have noticed the Public Accounts Committee in Parliament. I think that I'd like to see the advice of the Auditor General, who is an independent officer of this Legislature, and I'd like to continue to evolve with her advice and with the government.

* (16:40)

I believe that Public Accounts, the review of the government spending and revenues are extremely important. I do believe that it requires, I think, some maturity on all sides of the debate to move it along, but I am not going to tell the Public Accounts Committee what to do because they are, in essence, a committee of this Legislature, with a chair that is made up of a member from the opposition and members of the committee who establish rules with their own committee and how to operate. I do believe that some of the committees of the Legislature should operate under their own authority and through their own consensus rather than the premier of the day being involved in the committee or on the committee work.

We were getting frustrated, I can say, as a government when we proposed dates that weren't convenient for people, one of whom was in Hawaii, and somebody else was somewhere else. So we'd propose all these dates for Public Accounts, get them rejected, get them rejected, get them rejected, and then we get a press release that says the Public Accounts Committee won't meet. So we said, well, we'll put out legislative minimum six meetings a year. We're willing to meet at least six times a year; we'll legislate it. We'll legislate ourselves to meet.

Part of that is because we feel that—it's not something the public is waiting with bated breath—but we do believe it does serve the public interest to improve and evolve the Public Accounts Committee. Part of it is going to be that you don't refuse to have a meeting for three or four times in a row, then say, oh,

the government refuses to meet. It happened again this summer after we'd written a letter. The Member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) is a nicer person than I because I thought, he writes a letter, says, let's meet. They say, we'll get back to you. Then they put out a comment saying, oh, the committee won't meet. So there are two sides to this story, but I would like to evolve with the Auditor General.

Mr. McFadyen: Thank you, and I'm pleased the Premier's acknowledged that there are two sides to this story because I know that, if we go back and take a look at what actually happened, there have been various times where it has been government party MLAs who haven't been available. Other times, it has been opposition MLAs.

But the fundamental issue is the fact that I think there is consensus that the committee doesn't work very well when it does meet. So we need to get the committee working when it does meet, with the ability to ask questions of officials, with the objective of depoliticizing some of the discussion that takes place at that committee. I'm glad the Premier is in favour of that principle, and I'm pleased that he's on the record saying that the committee should operate on their own authority, which would be a significant step forward toward that.

But we need to get the committee with the sort of rules that allows it to operate effectively. When we go to Public Accounts Committee meetings and we get the sort of non-answers that we got back in April when that committee met subsequent to the leak of the Crocus Cabinet document, it certainly feeds public cynicism, media cynicism and a sense among members of the committee that it doesn't work very well when you have ministers who are able to sit in that committee and give non-responses to questions, with really limited ability on the part of opposition committee members to get straight answers.

In fact, I recall the Member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik) putting forward a motion at that meeting that members of the committee, those who were testifying, including the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) and the then-Minister of Competitiveness, the former Member for Brandon West, to go under oath. That motion was voted down by the NDP members of that committee because—well, we can only speculate as to reasons why they didn't want to have to go under oath to respond to questions about Crocus. But if you look at the answers that were given and the questions that were

asked, clearly, there was recognition the Member for Minto (Mr. Swan) led the charge. There was certainly recognition of risk on the part of those responding to questions that if they answered in that way under oath that the consequences might be more severe than just contributing to cynicism.

So we have a real problem with that committee. It doesn't work very well. That's part of what creates the dynamic of MLAs not moving heaven and earth to establish meeting dates, because the experience of members has been that it's not a very effective committee. So it needs reform on every level. It needs reform in terms of the frequency that it meets the ability to put questions directly to officials, the ability to put people under oath in appropriate circumstances and a focus on administrative and financial issues that will allow for greater transparency to the public of how their hard-earned tax dollars are being spent. I think that the public would certainly welcome a major step forward.

I acknowledge the Premier's comment that I don't expect there's a large audience salivating over the thought of watching the committee meetings, but we do know that if those committees work well that information will, from time to time, come to light that serves the public interest and that the public will have a genuine interest in. Currently, not very much information arises from that committee, and a lot of it, I would suggest, would be of benefit to the government and not just opposition for political purposes, but benefit to the government.

So the Premier said that he thinks the committee should operate on its own authority, that we should depoliticize it. Does he support the idea of allowing officials to testify, making it a matter of routine that witnesses or people testifying would go under oath where it's appropriate, and more frequent dates for meetings? My understanding is that when the House is sitting in Saskatchewan the committee meets on average twice a week, which is significantly more than what we have here in Manitoba. Would he support those kinds of reforms to make the committee work better?

Mr. Doer: Well, thank you. I'll allow the committee, as I said before, to develop the rules that they will operate under. There has been, again, some evolution from the time the deputy ministers did not testify at the committee up to the time that they are present before the committee, and that has been a change in terms of officials. We do live in a parliamentary democracy where this is not the American system.

There is ministerial responsibility, and, certainly, we want to provide deputies that access to the committees.

The bottom line is that the committee is charged with the responsibility. As I said before, evolutionary changes, I think, are in the purview of the committee, and I'll allow them to work accordingly.

Mr. McFadyen: Thank you. I thank the Premier for that commitment. I know that that will be a welcome comment from the perspective of committee members to permit them to pursue the establishment of rules. I hope that it goes beyond merely taking a passive interest in allowing them to do it and that there's some active encouragement for real reform of that committee, which, I think, would argue and suggest that would be a great step forward in terms of the way our parliamentary system works here in Manitoba. It would certainly be a good element of the Premier's agenda and legacy.

I want to just move on from Public Accounts, reserving the right always to come back to it later if I think of points that may have been missed or when I'm reading *Hansard*, but I wonder if we can just come back to the issue of the Premier's chief of staff, Mr. Balagus, and if you would comment on the fact that allegations were made, as he knows, concerning the nomination process in The Maples.

Mr. Kaur Sidhu came forward with allegations about a discussion that he alleges took place with the Premier's chief of staff, that there's been significant amount of discussion of the issue. Since then, the matter was taken up by Elections Manitoba who then, because of the act, issued a statement that they had no basis to, or it was their decision not to proceed with the matter. It was left for people to speculate as to what was the basis for that decision, what evidence they heard, what their assessment was of the credibility of the people they heard from. So we're left with this lack of resolution on an important issue. I wonder if the Premier could shed any light on his conversations with Mr. Balagus about Mr. Balagus's interactions with Mr. Sidhu, because I would assume that, in the face of such serious allegations against his chief of staff, the Premier would want to know whether there was anything to them or not.

* (16:50)

Mr. Doer: The member will know that the law was changed post the vote-rigging exercise in the Monnin report. The law that was brought in by the Chief

Electoral Officer and recommended by former Chief Justice Monnin was a law that was supported.

I would point out to the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), he may not remember his words on the record, but the law was supported by all three political parties at the time. The Conservatives were obviously in extreme damage control from what happened in the Interlake. The Member for Inkster, who obviously has forgotten his own words, and it doesn't surprise me, also supported it. The Chief Electoral Officer and—the Monnin inquiry recommended the power of subpoena, the power of independent investigation, the right to seize documents, the right to follow financial transactions, the right to take statements, the right to charge people with perjury if they so commit, and, I'm talking generally now, it also provided that investigations would take place in an appropriate way.

One of the weaknesses pre-Monnin was the fact that the former Conservative Party or the Progressive Conservative Party was able to go out and rip up cheques and not be subject to the rules of perjury and the rules of financial disclosure. Of course, you had that situation aided and abetted by the inability of—you know, Elections Manitoba went in to investigate, but the Conservatives ripped up the cheques. So therefore there was no paper trail going back to the donations that were made into the Conservative Party and out to a candidate running for the alleged Aboriginal party, I forget the exact name of it.

So Monnin recommended a number of changes, and Elections Manitoba provided the advice to the former Premier, Premier Filmon, and we passed those laws and supported those laws with the existing provision that was recommended. We put those in place. The financial disclosure provisions are a lot tougher now than they were before. In fact, the member opposite will know that personally in terms of the challenges of running a party on time and to constituencies on time.

In terms of issues dealing with nominations in our party constitution, it is not the chief of staff nor the Premier. Some political parties like the Liberal Party have the ability of a leader to sign a nomination paper. In our party it's the Executive which has the authority to ratify any nomination or reject any nomination. For example, you could have a situation where a person who commits a serious crime could organize people to get nominated. The Executive has the right, in our party, to have people

run that hopefully reflect the values, not only the values of our party but also the integrity of candidates.

I actually thought it was interesting, in Québec, in the last provincial election, there may have been four or five candidates who had to step down from political parties, from running, who were duly nominated. I don't know how you operate in your party. I've heard stuff about what happened in various seats, but that's okay. That's the internal workings of your party.

We have a situation where there is not a leader-driven but an Executive—which is made up of people elected across the province—scrutiny. I don't apologize for that for one moment. Even all the allegations made by the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) fell apart like a house of cards when another individual won the nomination in a free and uncontested basis. The three candidates that were running were not in any jeopardy of, for example, being in contravention, say, of the law. That would be the first thing that would happen if this person was nominated and was in contravention to say they are a convicted—and you fill in the blanks. The media would be demanding that that person not run.

I know the Liberal Party could have, as the case with Mr. Dion, a really democratic process in Outremont with the various results. That's the system—the member opposite stands up here like an inflated member of this Chamber in terms of the integrity issues, and he's in a party that has leaders visiting him that can appoint, like a bishop, a candidate to run. That's the party he works in. That's not our party. When the allegation was made, the member opposite should put his seat on the line like he promised. He has no integrity.

An Honourable Member: Show me a piece of paper.

Mr. Doer: Yes, well, I've got a tape. I guess your words—

An Honourable Member: Show me a piece of paper.

Mr. Doer: Yes, I've got the tape.

An Honourable Member: Show me the tape.

Mr. Doer: Yes, well, you could listen to it. Your integrity is in tatters and it belongs that way.

Having said that, Madam Chair, when the letter came to me, I immediately had it sent to Elections

Manitoba through the provincial secretary of our party. I acted instantly. When I had it, I had another allegation of somebody wanting this in exchange for that. I sent that to Elections Manitoba. Elections Manitoba has done their investigations, has had the authority to do their investigations and has come to the conclusion—I had two cases, by the way, Mr. Bellan and Mr. Balagus, in terms of the letters. They went to Elections Manitoba. Both people were investigated—*[interjection]*

Madam Chairperson: I caution at this time for all members to please have the courtesy of listening to whoever has the floor.

Mr. Doer: The member opposite had his former House leader make allegations about people. It wasn't true and we've carried on. The party is taking care of it in a democratic way. We took care of an allegation that would affect government, and I sent that to Elections Manitoba, as I should have. I feel I've operated completely as I should. When an allegation is made, I sent it to an appropriate body. I didn't keep the letter in the bottom of my desk or I didn't rip it up or anything else. I sent it to Elections Manitoba. I would quote the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) in 1998 when he said, he trusts Elections Manitoba to be an independent body, and he would always find the independent office of Elections Manitoba to be a credible body with integrity. That was then; this is now.

Mr. McFadyen: I note an observation that the longer the Premier's (Mr. Doer) answers, the worse, the lower the quality—there's a very direct correlation. He gives his best answers when he's brief. When he doesn't have a response to a question, he rambles on and on. That response was absolutely unresponsive to the question.

He likes to go back over history which has been well documented in terms of what happened under the previous government. But, if he wants to be honest about it, he'll have to acknowledge that an inquiry was called. The former premier had the courage to call an inquiry and get to the bottom of what happened and take action, which is a far cry from what has happened under this Premier, who doesn't want to have an inquiry into this issue, doesn't want to have an inquiry into Crocus, We know the reason for that because where there's smoke, there's fire, Madam Chair, and there's a lot of smoke in this situation.

You know, we have a situation where we've got reports from Mr. Gill who's confirming what Mr.

Sidhu had said, where we've got a meeting which has taken place between Mr. Sidhu and Mr. Balagus. Shortly thereafter Mr. Sidhu drops out of the nomination race and then makes public his version of what happened. This is a highly suspicious situation. Elections Manitoba did not take a position definitively on what the facts were. They simply said that they were not going to move ahead and determine whether there was a violation of the act. So we have significant allegations from people. There's a chronology which seems to line up and make sense. So the suspicions seem to be well founded.

* (17:00)

So I want to ask the Premier, rather than being diverted by a process around nominating candidates in his party and everything else, the question relates to a member of his staff who reports directly to him who is paid by the people of Manitoba to the tune of \$135,000 a year in their hard-earned tax dollars. I wonder if the Premier feels any obligation to the people of Manitoba to find out whether any amount of that \$135,000 salary is being paid to somebody who is offering inducements to somebody else to drop out of a nomination race. Why wouldn't he ask Mr. Balagus directly and why won't he report to us on what Mr. Balagus said in response to his questions?

Mr. Doer: You know, the members opposite are again impugning individuals. I find it regrettable that after the members opposite's House Leader made certain allegations and asked for a delay of the election, you know, which I assume was directed by the Leader of the Opposition, asked for a delay of the election pending the Elections Manitoba report. So then the Elections Manitoba report comes out and they don't like the findings and now they're raising all kinds of speculation.

Elections Manitoba has received a letter from me. It has ruled on the matter. It investigated all the matters available to them with the authority, by the way, that was granted by the former premier in the Elections Act amendments in 1998 when the member opposite was the chief of staff. All three parties supported that. They supported the act changes, post-Monnin, and the decision is made and that is the end of it.

Mr. McFadyen: The Premier still doesn't want to answer the question that's been put to him. We know all about legislative amendments. We also recall the Premier, when he was opposition leader, being

completely dissatisfied with the option of referring the earlier allegations to Elections Manitoba and concerned about their capacity to deal with the allegations that came forward at that time, calling for an inquiry, and now has done an about-face on the issue of whether an inquiry is the right thing to do and who also, I recall, made comments to the effect that the premier at the time had a scandal that came right to the door of the premier's office. In the Member for Concordia's own words, that the premier had an obligation to check into it and to come forward with what he knew and not just try to slough the matter off to a process that he, at the time, thought was inadequate, which is exactly what this Premier's now doing, sloughing it off to a process where—and this is not a criticism of the individuals but under the framework—clearly has a deficiency, where we can't get any information made public on the basis for the commissioner's decision to not lay charges.

So what we have is essentially a vacuum of information coming out of Elections Manitoba, but the one person who has absolute, direct and personal knowledge of what happened or didn't happen has never come forward publicly to make a statement about what happened or what didn't happen. That individual is Mr. Balagus, who reports directly to the Premier.

So I want to ask the Premier again: Has he had a conversation with Mr. Balagus about the allegations? I'll stop at that and then we'll move on to the next question after we see if we get a response to that one.

Mr. Doer: Yes, I referred the allegations to Elections Manitoba appropriately. The bottom line is that the law—you know the member opposite talks about one law, pre '98, as the issues that dealt with the vote rigging, and the post '98 law. They are two different laws. The authority and power to investigate was dramatically changed. If he's saying that Justice Monnin's recommendations that were in his report to allow Elections Manitoba to have the authority, he came to the conclusion that Elections Manitoba did not have the authority and legal access to be able to go after ripping up cheques. He came to the conclusion that Elections Manitoba did not have the power of subpoena; it did not have the power of investigation; it did not have the issue of perjury available to them. In fact, he wrote in his conclusions about the member's predecessor that he's never met more liars in his life in any investigation. He came to the conclusion that not only was this a wrongdoing, you know, enticing somebody to run, this was

immoral and unethical to run to split off candidates. That it was run out of the former chief of staff's office, aided and abetted by prominent Conservatives, that it was hidden from accountants, and, of course, there were sanctions taken by the accounting bureau, it was also—cheques were ripped up by the former head of Treasury Board; that's well documented. Just as Monnin said, you've got to change the laws. The laws are inadequate; it did not give Elections Manitoba the tools, the legal tools to go in and investigate allegations. We, this Legislature, you're actually basically saying that the former premier brought in laws that are inadequate to deal with the Monnin report. You're basically saying as chief of staff you brought in laws that were inadequate because you had a majority then, inadequate to deal with the authorities needed to investigate any kind of allegation.

Quite frankly, I think that all parties, if you look at *Hansard*, said these laws flow from Monnin's recommendations; they flow from the inadequacies of Elections Manitoba, and they were supported by the former premier. If you read his speeches, he basically said it would deal with matters such as the incident the member raised. I think it's very important to make a comparison on the authority of Elections Manitoba with the pre-Monnin laws, which are absolutely inadequate in my view for the fact that these are post-Monnin laws.

Are you saying to this Chamber that Mr. Filmon brought in laws that were not able to deal with the recommendations by Justice Monnin and the recommendations that Elections Manitoba made to this Chamber? I do not believe that in 1998 Premier Filmon brought in laws that did not deal with Justice Monnin's findings. In fact, he did. That's why the law has the ability to—if somebody is inducing somebody, that's obviously something that was investigated because its inducement is, obviously, a serious crime. There are people skilled to do this, and they did it, and they had all the authority post-Monnin to do it. I think that that's very important.

Mr. McFadyen: We have a situation where we have allegations made, an investigation undertaken, and then a media report, not a direct, written conclusion with reasons or a report, but a media report coming out on August 30 of this year saying that an investigation had been concluded and no charges are being laid. It leaves open a lot of questions about what happened. It doesn't really matter and it's not particularly relevant to say that certain laws were passed in the past. The fact is that members of the

public are left to wonder what took place in the course of these discussions between Mr. Balagus and Mr. Sidhu. When such allegations are made and somebody drops out of a nomination race after such a meeting, I think the public has a right to know what took place and to hear from the parties that were privy to that conversation. That clearly hasn't happened. So, if there's a way of improving on what has been passed previously, then we should look at ways of improving on it. But the fact is that we can save ourselves a lot of time and trouble if the individuals involved just come forward and say what happened.

So why doesn't the Premier short-circuit the process, since it's his chief of staff and, presumably, they've discussed it, and just share with us today what he discussed with Mr. Balagus about his conversations with Mr. Sidhu?

Mr. Doer: Well, you're making connections that are not connected to the nomination, and the timing and issues that are dealing with matters that are just not true. So you're just not right and you're not accurate and, therefore, your preamble is wrong.

* (17:10)

Besides that, Madam Deputy Speaker, the leader of the party is very careful about nominations. I would just say I'll keep my care on nominations. But I referred it to Elections Manitoba and I fulfilled my duty in this regard. Elections Manitoba fulfilled their duty in this regard. The members opposite, like they always do, make allegations, and they make them over and over and over again. You know, over and over and over again they make allegations. Nine out of ten of them are wrong, and this is just another example.

Mr. McFadyen: We have simply stated the facts which nobody's disputed that there was a meeting that one of the people came out of that meeting saying he'd been offered an inducement and he then dropped out of the nomination race. But the Premier says, I've got the chronology wrong. So I wonder if he can just outline what the chronology was then of events.

Mr. Doer: The issue of decisions are made by our executive, and the executives of our party operate under the rules of our party. Elections Manitoba has investigated all of these allegations, has investigated every issue and they have concluded, contrary to the press release issued by the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) and the Member for Steinbach (Mr.

Goertzen) who just put their hand on the horn and don't care who is affected.

They've made their decision and I respect their decision. I respect the job that Elections Manitoba has performed and I respect the authority under which they have to do it.

Mr. McFadyen: The points made by the members arise from allegations not made by them, but were made by Mr. Sidhu. So I wonder if the Premier is saying today that Mr. Sidhu is a liar.

Mr. Doer: Madam Chair, Elections Manitoba has dealt with that issue. I'm sure the member opposite knows that they have the right to determine those issues, and I find it inappropriate—if the member opposite wants to apply for a job at Elections Manitoba to be an investigator, be my guest. You know the bottom line is that they've done their job and I respect the work they've done. The allegations made by the Conservatives and the Liberals are wrong and proven to be wrong by an independent officer of this Legislature.

Mr. McFadyen: The Premier is wrong. They haven't been proven to be wrong. What we've simply got is an indication from that independent officer of a decision not to lay charges and that decision could be based on any number of things. So the Premier is clearly not going to disclose his conversations with Mr. Balagus, but I wonder if the Premier will agree that Mr. Balagus be given the opportunity to attend a committee meeting and respond to questions.

Mr. Doer: Well, I believe there are lawsuits in the works, and there'll be lots of opportunity at that point to have good proper cross-examination.

Mr. McFadyen: Madam Chair, I want to just move on to a decision that was announced today by Manitoba Hydro to run the Bipole III line along the west side of the province adding hundreds of millions of dollars in cost to that line, and, in addition, the indication or suggestion that was made that the decision was made at the political level.

I wonder if the Premier can indicate why he is directing Hydro to, in effect, spend hundreds of millions of dollars needlessly when the environmental impact of running a line down the west side of Lake Manitoba, the number of trees that will have to be removed, and the environmental impact of the line loss which is dramatic and which requires significantly increased generating capacity at the northern generating stations, which has environmental impacts on communities in the north,

I wonder if the Premier can indicate why he ignored the advice of Manitoba Hydro officials and proceeded with a political decision that's going to cost ratepayers hundreds of millions of dollars.

Mr. Doer: Well, first of all the decision is subject to the Clean Environment Commission hearing, and I believe it will be cited in the Public Utilities Board. So the Premier does not have the final authority in this matter, and I think it's very important for the member to know that.

Mr. McFadyen: That is not at all consistent with what was said by the Premier in the election campaign who, in the course of several debates, took the position that it was a political decision on his part to route that line in the direction that it was going to be routed. I know what the arguments were.

I wonder what environmental studies the Premier has to support the proposition that running the line, a significantly longer line, down the west side of Lake Winnipegosis and Lake Manitoba, how that has a lesser impact on the environment overall than running the line down the shortest possible route.

Mr. Gerard Jennissen, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Doer: The shortest possible route is actually the Interlake route. Hydro has had before it for years three routes. Interlake is the shortest route. It is the cheapest route. The east side was recommended to the former Conservative government in 1992-93. They did not proceed with it. I suggest that some of the same complications that we are aware of were the factors leading to the former government not proceeding down the east side, and I would also point out, I'll have to obtain the exact number of kilometres and miles but the west side has greater access in the sense of existing Hydro rights of way and existing highways than the east side. There's no question that Hydro, as I say, did not take the shortest route, which is the Interlake route.

I remember when I was Crown investment minister, they were talking about the issue of nuclear war being one of the issues of reliability in the Interlake route. There are factors that do, on a sociological and environmental issue, change, and Hydro was also studying a number of those factors, but I made my preferences well known to everyone in the election campaign. The member opposite made his opinions known. I think the Liberals didn't have a position, or not one that I could discern. I

think it was kind of wishy-washy. I'm not sure whether they were for it or against it, but I made my opinions known, and we as government made our opinions known as well.

A line that is of shorter distance, the Interlake line is by definition cheaper, but if you can't build it, it doesn't provide the reliability and market sales. Or if it's going to take numbers of years to build because of other factors, then it can be a problem.

Now, I'm not sure when the Hydro committee's meeting next, but certainly, we made our opinions known in the election campaign. We were very upfront about it. I assume that was part of the decision-making made by citizens because we had a very clear difference between us. That's the wonderful thing about a democracy. The people ultimately have the right to decide at the end of the day what are the policies and principles under which a political party is going to be elected or defeated or, in this case, re-elected.

There was no ambiguity about our preference based on two factors. One is the environmental issues on the east side, and two, based on what we believed to be the protracted, if any, licensing process that would take place on the east side, and Hydro also had similar reviews that raised similar questions to them over the time of 1992 to the present because this is an issue that affects not only—their straight engineering costs are obviously cheaper with the Interlake line because it's a more direct line, but that it raises issues of reliability. The east side raises issues of ecology and licensing, and protracted licensing processes cost Hydro money as well.

Madam Chairperson in the Chair

All these factors will be put before a quasi-judicial body. They will have to be justified in front of a quasi-judicial body. It was never put before a quasi-judicial body in 1992 to 1999, even though it was recommended to Hydro by the engineers at that point. Maybe the former premier had some of the same concerns that I had. At least all I can judge is he didn't go ahead.

* (17:20)

Mr. McFadyen: Madam Chair, this is obviously a major decision for future generations of Manitobans, given the dollars involved in this very, very significant project. It has many dimensions. Security is certainly one of them. The matter of security can be taken care of by running a line down the east side, which would be well away from the two existing

bipole lines that run between the lakes. So that certainly is not enhanced in any way by this decision.

So then it comes down to really two factors which would be the most important ones. One is finances and economics and the other is environmental. Mr. Brennan, today, the CEO of Hydro who has served under successive governments with distinction, made a comment on CJOB today that the management of the company thinks straightforward economics would suggest we come down the east side. Having said that, we're having a lot of time, trouble getting that approved, and the longer we go without a line the harder it is for everybody. So Hydro staff are going to get on and get this bill as soon as we possibly can.

I wonder, given that economics dictate that it goes down the east side, security would be taken care of by going down the east side, what is the evidence that the Premier has right now, before he goes and spends hundreds of millions of dollars, what is the evidence that he's got that a much longer line, which will result in cutting down forest and running through a variety of different kinds of properties, adding to the line loss and the extra capacity, what environmental science does he have to justify that there is an environmental case that overrides the fact that everybody agrees that straightforward economics would suggest we come down the east side?

Mr. Doer: Well, I noticed the member opposite missed out the term First Nations in his question.

An Honourable Member: We'll get to that.

Mr. Doer: Yes, well, you missed it in your question. With the economics and environment, you didn't deal with the issue of First Nations. I am not surprised he missed it because, obviously, I remember how offended some First Nations communities were during the election campaign when he made the statement in the campaign that he was going to take money from the north to the south. In fact, the Thompson newspaper did an editorial that said you're not even welcome in this community again, and you're not fit to be premier, when you made that comment in the Arthur-Virden constituency in the election campaign.

We did have hearings of people, elders, not consultants, elders, chiefs, youth. We took three to four months listening to First Nations people, and we also dealt with how much money would be available or how much investment would be available from a

Hydro line to the development, the ongoing economic development opportunities on the east side.

Contrary to a myth that was established and confirmed by Hydro, there was never an intent to build a \$400-million road—that would change the numbers, by the way, in terms of the question the member opposite was asking. It was never the proposal to build a \$400-million road on the east side of Lake Winnipeg as part of the Hydro transmission line. It was a very few amounts of dollars after the transmission line was built for brush clearing and people knew that. People knew this in many communities. So the member opposite does not raise the question of First Nations.

You know, I will acknowledge that the economics of building a straight line are better than building a longer line. The Interlake line is the cheapest route. It is the most direct.

There is also the issue of the amount of area that's already accessible to Hydro on the west side, in terms of a right-of-way already obtained, versus the east side. The vast majority, according to a Hydro briefing, is available on the west side and not on the east side.

So I would strongly urge the member to—it's not just—you know, he mentions the environment and, you know, there are strong views on people on the environment. There are wildlife issues; there are issues of the ecosystem; there are issues of will this line ever be licensed? A line is not licensed, Madam Chair, it is not going to be a cheaper line or more reliable, and I'm assuming that when the Hydro authorities recommended to the former Filmon government that they proceed along the east side, and I believe the date was 1992—I'll double-check that date—that they did not proceed with it.

So there are a number of factors to be looked at, but I would not diminish the issue of, and negate or forget the people that live in the area, and I'm talking people that live in the area. I'm not talking about consultants. I'm talking about people that live and reside in the area: the elders, the youth, the band councils, the chiefs, and the people. We had ministers going out and listening to people for months before we raised that as a very serious issue for any possibility on a going-forward basis in terms of the east side option.

Hydro did its own reviews and commissioned—it certainly did its own reviews, because I can say to

you that conditions are changed; it's not 1992 anymore. The world has changed on environment; the world has changed on wildlife; the world has changed on First Nations' rights, at least as long as we're in government it's changed. It's changed dramatically. And it's changed on people's views. Now Mr. Brennan was also asked where is the money going to come, and there are export opportunities that we're negotiating in Saskatchewan, in Minnesota and obviously in Ontario. There are the reliability issues, but I certainly believe that we expressed our view honestly in the election campaign. The member opposite expressed his view in the campaign. If we had taken an opposite view, he'd say we're flip-flopping. He'd be saying we're flip-flopping—

An Honourable Member: A cheap flip-flop.

Mr. Doer: I beg your pardon.

An Honourable Member: A \$500-million savings

Mr. Doer: Well, if you don't build the line, there are no savings. There's no reliability. And these factors will be examined. You know, if the myth was there that you would build a road as part of this, you'd then be even on the two lines. But Hydro never proposed that. And so I know that when we came into office, Mr. Praznik was proposing east side line and a free road. I know that. We had to go to community; we said to Hydro, okay, how much money are you putting into this line? Is it \$400 million? Is it the road? And they said no; it's no more than \$50 million for economic development on the east side. Then some other people came back and said, well, we'll own it. Hydro will be told to sell it to someone. That's a proposal from some consultants that are there.

Now I have a great deal of respect for the Member for Rupertsland (Mr. Robinson) and I have a great deal of respect for the Member for St. Boniface (Mr. Selinger) and a great deal of respect for all our caucus members—obviously, I don't want to start going down the list—and our Conservation Minister (Mr. Struthers) and the Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Lathlin) who did consult with people. There have been two consultations with people: one directly on the east side, which I consider to be a very important exercise, and a second consultation with people was, you say I'm against it because it costs more money, against the other option. You say you're in favour of the other route. We say that that route might never be licensed. It might never be licensed with the people

living in the area with the boreal forest and the other factors that arise. You don't get any reliability with no line. You left us with no reliability. Your legacy in 1999 was not to implement the report in 1992, and, quite frankly, Manitoba society and the public of Manitoba and the First Nations because the east side transmission line out to Island Lake was built, agreed to by the Pawley government and agreed to by the federal government of the time, I think, Bill McKnight. That was built.

* (17:30)

There was a lot of concern about what its benefit was at the end of the day. But we were pretty clear in the election campaign, and that was based on meetings in every First Nations community in Manitoba affected by the line on the east side. There are lots of other issues Hydro has raised as well on their own, not with our preferences obviously stated in the election.

Mr. McFadyen: We're talking about a \$2-billion expenditure. This is one of the largest projects in recent memory to be announced by a government, and it is more than twice the budget of the floodway expansion. We're talking about significant resources going into this project, and Mr. Brennan's comment today when asked the question, where are we going to get the \$2 billion, was that we'll go to the market and get it in our traditional ways, which presumably means reference to the debt market to finance it.

So we are talking about a \$2-billion addition to debt, financed and paid off ultimately by sales of power which come about in part through rates, but there's no clear indication that this decision is driven by increasing sales. The sales are going to come whether you build down the east side or whether you build this route. The added cost, the added debt to future generations of Manitobans is going to be imposed by this Premier (Mr. Doer) and this government on future generations; a massive amount of debt, hundreds of millions of dollars in debt which didn't need to be incurred because of a decision to add to the length of the line and add hundreds of millions of dollars to the cost of the project.

So the rationale given in response is that there are people, and there are people who have expressed opposition, but I would also point out to the Premier that there are people, First Nations people, who have expressed support for the idea of having the line run down the east side. We know that there have been members of the communities at Island Lakes, including our candidate in the recent election who

supported the idea. Our support was based in large part on the support of individuals, and the Premier took a few cheap shots in the course of his response. Setting aside the shots aimed at me, he made a derogatory comment about consultants, and I take it that that reference is to Elijah Harper, the former Member for Rupertsland, and if that was the intent of his shot at consultants, I would just say that the Premier should be ashamed to be attacking a former member of his caucus, Mr. Harper, who has played such an important role in the history of our province, who is acting as a consultant to Island Lakes, who is acting as a proponent of an east side line with all the development that comes with that.

I respect Mr. Harper. I've listened to the case he's made for an east side line. I've listened to the people at Island Lakes and other communities, and Mr. Brennan clearly has as well because he acknowledged today on the radio that the response on the east side from First Nations communities has been mixed. It's not unanimous; it's mixed in their response. And what do you do when confronted with a mixed response to a project as you negotiate in good faith, and you do what is in the interests of the entire province? And if the Premier's position is that any opposition to the construction of a line through a community is going to stop the line from being built, I wonder if the Premier will confirm then that if there are any opponents on the west side of Lake Winnipegosis and Lake Manitoba to the line, that similarly he won't build the line down that route.

Mr. Doer: Madam Chairperson, the issue of consultation is not the issue of veto, and if the member opposite had followed even the protocol we signed with the east side First Nations communities, we talked about a comprehensive consultation process prior to any decisions being made. In fact, I think it was Grand Chief Fontaine that said this is not a veto. So the member opposite should catch up a little bit on what actually was said on the east side by the chiefs who were there.

Secondly, Madam Chair, I sat with Mr. Harper. He's a former colleague in this Legislature. In fact, I believe he sat where the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) was during the Meech Lake events. There were lots of consultants and I certainly wasn't referring to Mr. Harper, I want to make that clear. But there were lots of consultants. I asked my colleague from Rupertsland how many consultants there were; we're aware of a lot of them involved because, obviously, there are lots. You know, Hydro has consultants; communities have consultants;

companies have consultants; proponents have consultants; companies that might finance something and then own it have consultants. It shouldn't surprise the member opposite.

Certainly, I want to make another point. This will go to the PUB and will go to the Clean Environment Commission. There will be people that will debate at the Clean Environment Commission. I have found in the past that people will debate whether to have any route at all. You can't presume that it's going to be licensed on the west side or the east side. You can't presume that. It requires Clean Environment Commission licensing. Secondly, the issue of reliability is the primary reason for building the line. There is increased market share that could also be increased there. I think Mr. Brennan also talked on the radio about increased export sales as well, increased sales, which we, of course, will get. If it's delayed for a number of years, it also has a cost. If it's not licensed, it also has additional cost. There are lots of other factors that are going to be examined.

There are reviews that have taken place by Hydro, by our government, both on the issues of pros and cons of each route. We were also very honest with the public because that was the basis of our meetings with people living on the east side. I said this in the election. It was reported in the election. The member's position was reported in the election. I'm not sure what the Liberal position was in the election. I think they wanted to be on one hand or the other, but I'll have to go back and get the NCI debate tapes. But, certainly, we made our position clear. It followed a meeting of every community on the east side. It followed the leadership of the Member for Rupertsland (Mr. Robinson) who represents that area, who went to every meeting on the east side and listened to elders, chiefs, council members, youth—there were meetings in schools. I know that the member opposite didn't raise that when he first raised east side versus west side, but certainly for us it's an important factor in our preference for the west side.

Mr. McFadyen: Can the Premier indicate whether he's undertaken the same level of consultation with youths, elders and people on the west side of the lake before he made this decision?

Mr. Doer: Yes, the Clean Environment Commission has the right to hear and the responsibility to hear from all the members of the public. This was a stage that took place prior to the Hydro board announcing today their decision, and it requires some work to go

on. I'm not sure what happened between 1992 and 1999, but I do know when Hydro recommended the east side, there were no meetings that took place. We will be bound by hearings that take place on the west side for that proposal. I'm sure there are people from the east side who will still argue for it in a hearing. A licence is issued by the Clean Environment Commission, and it will have, I'm sure, vigorous debate and different opinions on the west side. There is more access on the west side or more obtained right-of-way on the west side already before the hearings take place.

* (17:40)

Mr. McFadyen: I want to come back to that last point the Premier (Mr. Doer) made, and I would like to get some clarification. My understanding is that there is more Crown land on the east side than there is on the west side and that there are going to be significantly more private interests on the route that's been selected along the way than there would have been on the east side. But certainly this is a big issue with lots of implications—hundreds of millions of dollars of debt for future generations of Manitobans. So clearly there are more questions to be asked and answered.

Another comment on the radio today is that farmers and landowners on the west side are going to be paid as Hydro runs towers over their property through a process that was confirmed today. So, clearly, we're going to see some return to those who have land on the west side, which is what one would expect. Clearly, we have a situation where those who are in favour of economic development opportunities on the east side, once again, are going to be denied the opportunity to generate income and payments by virtue of the routing of a line through land that they may have an interest in with the accompanying transportation opportunities that would be enhanced by that decision.

The Premier in his previous response seems to saying that the CEC will handle the issue of consultation. There was an outside-the-CEC process, there was a stakeholders' consultation process on the east side, which seems not to have been replicated on the west side, and I don't know how the Premier justifies the difference in treatment. But we'll certainly have more opportunities to come back to this issue.

He is correct in saying that we have clearly distinct views on this issue. We don't think that it's

responsible for a government to leave hundreds of millions of dollars in debt to future generations unless there's an awfully good reason for it. We are completely unsatisfied and unconvinced that there's a good reason to leave a couple hundred, a minimum of a few hundred million dollars in additional unneeded debt, in our view, as a result of this decision. We'll certainly have more opportunities to have this debate and gather facts as we go along.

But we are, I would just simply say as a comment, at a loss to understand fully what is behind the decision, noting that in the past when the Premier has undertaken projects like the floodway expansion, he hasn't been particularly concerned about consultation, Clean Environment Commission proceedings and other licensing issues. I remember his speeches telling the Clean Environment Commission and the feds to get out of the way when the floodway expansion was coming through because fish weren't going to do any better in people's basements than they would in an expanded floodway. I actually thought that the comment made some sense to me. I don't understand, though, why he is able to take that attitude when it comes to these processes on that project but seems completely unwilling to adopt a pragmatic attitude when it comes to this project. But I guess this is a matter that we can come back to.

I wonder if the Premier can just indicate on the issue of, again on Hydro, what the latest information he has with respect to the costs to date on the construction of the Hydro tower downtown.

Mr. Doer: I'll take the question as notice on behalf of the minister responsible, so that we can be sure of the number.

I did know, just coming back to the floodway environmental assessment, what I was concerned about was that we had a decision made by the federal government of the day to have a joint environmental assessment and the Fisheries people in the federal government were attempting to delay the environmental assessment, and instead of having a joint assessment with the provincial and federal people together, they proposed that there be a separate hearing, and that would delay the floodway by over two years.

We also had a federal report from the IJC that said that every time the floodway wasn't completed, it would add \$75 million in liability to the Capital Region of Winnipeg. I have never suggested that the Clean Environment Commission should not be the

proper body to hear the arguments made on the floodway. In fact, I know that there were issues arising from the original floodway in northeast areas, in the Springfield and St. Clement area—not St. Clement, the St. Andrews, no, St. Clement, I was right the first time, St. Clement area—that they were concerned that the original floodway had impacted negatively on the aquifer in the northeast area of Winnipeg.

Now, this floodway protects East St. Paul. It protects West St. Paul in the sense of the river levels because the floodway comes out north of Lockport. There were also concerns on the environmental damage of the outlet of the floodway into the area affecting St. Andrews. On that point I'm right. Then, of course, Selkirk had issues of the lift and non-lift of the floodway pumping requirements in their community. We very much supported the idea that we send this to the Clean Environment Commission.

So let there be no—when I was commenting on the fish going through your basement versus going through, around the city and the floodway, I was commenting on—and the member opposite would know sometimes, if he listens to his Ag people, that sometimes the kinds of delays we get from federal Fishery people on little things like putting a culvert in a ditch to flow the water from a field quicker and not have undue flooding. So what I was concerned about was the real proposition from federal bureaucrats to delay the floodway construction by two years, two years. We would not have 1-in-300-year protection right now if we had delayed the process.

In fact, we got criticized sometimes. From time to time people would say, you've got to do a full environmental assessment. Then the same people, i.e., the Liberal Party leader, would say, hurry up and get it done, one position in Selkirk, one position in Winnipeg. But we actually believe that the impact to the floodway, particularly the aquifer, should go to the Clean Environment Commission.

Flowing from that, if you will, the Clean Environment Commission set aside up to \$10 million for the aquifer in the St. Clement area for potential repair. That was something that came directly out of the Clean Environment Commission that we didn't propose, but it was proposed by the public. So we did not go ahead with the licensing requirement that we had proposed to the Clean Environment Commission, but rather we went forward with the

licence that they had recommended to us as an entity along with the federal government.

I think the last time a government overrode a major recommendation to the Clean Environment Commission, Madam Chair, was actually on the set-asides in the, I believe it was the Manigotagan River, the set-asides recommended by the Clean Environment Commission on the Abitibi price renewal of licence in the Pine Falls area. There were other recommendations on some of the park area, and the government of the day—and the member opposite would have been working for the government of the day—there are Cabinet ministers from that era that overturned the Clean Environment Commission on those two specific recommendations.

* (17:50)

There has not been a major recommendation made to our government that has been overturned. So the Clean Environment Commission issue that he's talking about dealt with, not with the Clean Environment Commission licence, but rather a delaying tactic from the federal government Fisheries bureaucrats that would—well, I'm glad to see the member opposite disagrees with me, but the Clean Environment Commission decision, and she can tell me how she overruled this decision dealing with Pine Falls. I've always been curious to know, but there was the Clean Environment decision on delaying as proposed by the bureaucrats. So we think it was a good decision. It was a good decision. *[interjection]* We shouldn't have moved all those resources to Rossmere, but we think it was a good decision to have—*[interjection]* I'm just joking, neighbour and my MLA. We think it was a good decision to have a joint environmental assessment at the floodway decision and not be held up by the bureaucrats that sometimes terrorize decisions of drainage all across Manitoba. I know members opposite have said that because I've heard them at AMM conventions, or the successor body, talk—*[interjection]* AMM, I'm right. They merged. They complained at that body about the Fisheries people working against agriculture.

Mr. McFadyen: Madam Chair, 10 out of 10 for length of answer, one out of 10 for quality of response. It's not just me. We'll let the folks at home decide whether there was any connection whatsoever between that long, rambling answer—talking about delay tactics—and the question that was asked. But he doesn't want to ask the question, and so we will have to assume that it's because he's got one standard for

consultations when it comes to one project and a different one for another.

I just want to ask him, since he seems to want to talk about the floodway now, and I gave him the opening to discuss it, whether the unions representing the employees working on the project underneath the master labour agreement have remitted donations to any political party in the names of employees, and have they remitted such donations, to be more specific, to the NDP?

Mr. Doer: The law prohibits union and corporate donations to any political party in Manitoba, and that is clear. Individuals that own companies donate money, I'm sure, to all political parties. Individuals that are members of unions donate their own individual money to political parties.

On the floodway, the members opposite were opposed to the agreement that was recommended by an independent labour-management expert to go to a similar model that was developed by Brian Mulroney for the Charlottetown bridge, Confederation Bridge, and to deny—

An Honourable Member: This is actually better than the answers.

Mr. Doer: You can't handle the truth so that's why as that great philosopher-king, Jack Nicholson, said, "You can't handle the truth."

But I think it is appropriate we talk about unions and management. Unions—*[interjection]* Yes, the co-chair of the election committee is alive again and presenting her views. I just want to thank her for her great strategic decision making in the last election campaign.

You know, we like Tuxedo now. None of us should ever get complacent. I strongly recommend nobody get complacent, but I would point out that the reason why it was recommended to go to this model was the same reason why Brian Mulroney—and I'm sure the member opposite has read the 1,400-page book, including the appendix, that has just been released by the prime minister dealing with matters pertaining to Manitoba. He went ahead and had the first federal Treasury Board-approved labour-management agreement on the Charlottetown Confederation Bridge. The reason they did it was very simple. They wanted to have a no-strike, no-lockout agreement, and the agreement included that everyone would be scoped under the union contract but not have to be a member of a union. The other example of that was the building of Hydro.

Who was the one that built Hydro with the first labour-management agreement in Manitoba? It was the Roblin government. Hydro at the time negotiated a no-strike, no-lockout agreement for the Burntwood Project and Kettle Rapids, I believe. I'll have to go back and check these. They both were agreements that had no strike or lockout.

This year, this summer, the building trades and the crane operators went out on strike and hit a number of private-public investments including the Hydro building. There was a stoppage of work and the no-strike, no-lockout agreement still allowed for the crane operators at Hydro that were building bridges, particularly adjacent to the No. 1 highway on the railway; I believe that's the Redditt. Is that the Redditt Bridge? I'll have to double-check.

Anyway, they were expanding the floodway to be able to handle water of up to 700 years in the floodway expansion. Now, when that took place, there was no stoppage of work by the crane operators on the floodway, and we daresay that if we had not completed some of the bridge work on time, we could not complete the timing for the 1-in-700 years in the time schedule that was filed before the Clean Environment Commission. In fact, we had a second setback on the floodway and the excessive moisture that happened there. There was a considerable amount of water in the floodway and we opened the floodway modestly during the excessive moisture, but most of it came through naturally when the rains came down in late May and early June. That put us really in jeopardy because obviously you can't have, contrary to one city councillor saying we should open the floodway completely, you can't actually work inside the floodway when you are constructing and dealing with work in the floodway site.

So I just want to say that we were pleased to have that agreement in that place because the first goal of the floodway is to be completed on time. The first goal of the Floodway Authority is to have the

floodway completed on time so the floodway itself and the bridges will be at 1-in-700 years' capacity to deal with water that we could possibly get as recommended by the IJC. This spring, we were able to get 1-in-300 years completed, and we're pleased about that. We're also really concerned that we complete the 1-in-700 years, and we think the protection of the no-strike and no-lockout, which isn't well known by people because the members opposite don't emphasize that in their question, and we think that that is a valuable asset in a go-forward basis on the floodway.

Mr. McFadyen: Madam Chair, I just want to assure the Premier that we won't take any of our seats for granted, and on that note, I wonder if the Premier is going to leave western Manitoba out of his Cabinet when he shuffles it.

Mr. Doer: Western Manitoba is in our Cabinet. We have a member from Dauphin-Roblin. I think they consider themselves members of western Manitoba. The Member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk) is further west than any other—I guess Russell's pretty close to being on the border. The Pas is just a stone throw away across the Carrot River farmers from the west side at Saskatchewan. Flin Flon—my goodness, Flin Flon is on the border of Saskatchewan and Manitoba. It's right on the border of Creighton. Well, the member opposite was going to set aside a seat for a woman to run, the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), the only all-male party in this Legislature. Bye.

Madam Chairperson: As previously agreed, the hour being 6 p.m., committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Madam Deputy Speaker: The House being after 6 p.m., as previously agreed, this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, September 25, 2007

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