

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

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Speaker*

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	N.D.P.
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GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	P.C.
GRAYDON, Cliff	Emerson	P.C.
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HICKES, George, Hon.	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
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WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 30, 2009

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 30—The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2009

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): I move, seconded by the Minister of Family Services (Mr. Mackintosh), that Bill 30, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2009; Loi d'exécution du budget de 2009 et modifiant diverses dispositions législatives en matière de fiscalité, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, this budget implementation bill puts in place the measures we announced in the budget for both stimulating the economy through infrastructure spending as well as reducing taxes and several other measures that will benefit all Manitobans.

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

Bill 31—The Manitoba Floodway Authority Amendment Act

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): I move, seconded by the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs (Mr. Ashton), that Bill 31, The Manitoba Floodway Authority Amendment Act, be now read for a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Lemieux: It's my pleasure to rise today in the House to introduce Bill 31. This bill would expand the Manitoba Floodway Authority's mandate to include overseeing the construction of an all-season road on the east side of Lake Winnipeg. Thank you.

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

Bill 32—The Centre culturel franco-manitobain Act

Hon. Eric Robison (Minister of Culture, Heritage, Tourism and Sport): I move, seconded by the Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross),

that Bill 32, The Centre culturel franco-manitobain Act, be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Robison: Mr. Speaker, this bill replaces and modernizes the act that establishes the Centre culturel franco-manitobain. The Centre culturel franco-manitobain is a Crown agency responsible for presenting and promoting cultural and artistic activities in the French language and for managing the property located on Provencher Boulevard.

Modernizing this act will enable the corporation to take advantage of best business practices enjoyed by similar facilities in the Crown corporations sector. Other amendments update the language and renumber existing provisions of the act.

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

Bill 222—The Justice for Victims of Child Pornography Act

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I move, seconded by the Member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck), that Bill 222, The Justice for Victims of Child Pornography Act, be now read for a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, while child predators face criminal sanctions under Canada's Criminal Code for creating, distributing, publishing or possessing child pornography, these criminal activities escape responsibility through civil action.

This bill, The Justice for Victims of Child Pornography Act, will allow the Province to sue in civil court those who have been convicted of victimizing children where those children are unidentified, and the financial awards will be used to help victims and organizations dedicated to reducing child pornography in Manitoba.

It's received the support of organizations combatting child pornography in Manitoba, and I'm pleased to introduce it in the House on behalf of the Progressive Conservative caucus. Thank you.

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

PETITIONS

Long-Term Care Facility—Morden

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

The background for this petition is as follows:

Tabor Home Incorporated is a time-expired personal care home in Morden with safety, environmental and space deficiencies.

The seniors of Manitoba are valuable members of the community with increasing health-care needs requiring long-term care.

The community of Morden and the surrounding area are experiencing substantial population growth.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) to strongly consider giving priority for funding to develop and staff a new 100-bed long-term care facility so that clients are not exposed to unsafe conditions and so that Boundary Trails Health Centre beds remain available for acute-care patients instead of waiting placement clients.

This is signed by Theo Allen, Ken Dalke, David Lungair 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.

Winnipeg Regional Health Authority

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

Manitoba's Premier and his NDP government have not recognized the issues of public concern related to the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority.

The WRHA is building an administrative empire at the expense of bedside care.

Winnipeg Regional Health Authority needs to be held accountable for the decisions it is making.

Health-care workers are being pressured into not being able to speak out no matter what the WRHA is doing or has done.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Premier (Mr. Doer) and the NDP government to call a meeting of a standing committee of the Legislature and invite representatives of the WRHA to appear before it.

Mr. Speaker, this is signed D. Robinson, E. Hadaller, E. Hryshko and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

PTH 15

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba.

These are the reasons for this petition:

In 2004, the Province of Manitoba made a public commitment to the people of Springfield to twin PTH 15 and the floodway bridge on PTH 15, but then in 2006, the twinning was cancelled.

Injuries resulting from collisions on PTH 15 continue to rise and have doubled from 2007 to 2008.

In August 2008, the Minister of Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) stated that preliminary analysis of current and future traffic demands indicate that local twinning will be required.

The current plan to replace the floodway bridge on PTH 15 does not include twinning and, therefore, does not fulfil the current nor future traffic demands cited by the Minister of Transportation.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Transportation consider the immediate twinning of the PTH 15 floodway bridge for the safety of the citizens of Manitoba.

Signed by Mary Jean Campbell, Cathy McKay, John Devisser and many, many other Manitobans.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Influenza A (H1N1)

Disclosure of Cases

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, in response to the H1N1 flu outbreak, as we know yesterday, the World Health Organization raised the pandemic alert level

to a level 5 for the first time ever and has indicated concern that a global pandemic may be now imminent. The province's own Chief Public Health Officer, Dr. Kettner, said yesterday that he is confident that there are undiagnosed cases of H1N1 flu here in Manitoba. We know next door in Saskatchewan the government has committed to formally notifying the people of that province both of the number of confirmed cases as well as the number of cases that are suspected and under investigation.

I wonder if the government can indicate whether we'll have a similar level of disclosure here in Manitoba about both the number of confirmed cases but also the number of cases that are under investigation so that Manitobans can be comforted that they're receiving full disclosure from their government.

*(13:40)

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, Dr. Kettner is working with the federal Minister of Health, and they are maintaining the same protocol in Ottawa as we are in Manitoba. We think one of the analyses that took place post-SARS is that to have different responses from different public health agencies in Canada created silos of different co-ordination on the protocols to put in place.

So, so far, we have been working with the protocols of the federal government, with the national Minister of Health, with Dr. Butler-Jones and, of course, Dr. Kettner. At this point, we feel that having a national approach, including input from Manitoba before the decisions are made, and implementation of decisions on a national basis makes sense. There are so many people that go across different borders in our country, let alone internationally, that we feel national protocols make sense.

Availability of Antiviral Medications

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): The message of the government of Saskatchewan is to be as transparent as they can be. I wonder if the Premier would undertake to take a look at what's happening in Saskatchewan and perhaps encourage the adoption of that protocol here in Manitoba, as well as nationally.

The message to the public of not panicking but be concerned we believe is the appropriate one, although one way to ensure that people don't panic

and remain concerned is that they're fully informed as to what is going on within their province and what steps they can be taking.

One of the issues that has come up and that we've been asked about by many Manitobans is the availability of the antiviral medications that have been stockpiled, and we are advised by the medical experts that those antivirals are effective in treating the current H1N1 strain. We're also advised that there are some 200,000 available doses of that antiviral for the province of Manitoba.

Can the Premier outline whether he has received the same advice and, secondly, what the approach of the government is to co-ordinating the distribution of that antiviral in the very undesired scenario where we have a significant outbreak of H1N1 flu here in Manitoba?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I just want to re-confirm to the member opposite on the conference call, I believe today or late yesterday, when it was noted that Saskatchewan had gone to a different, or slightly different, approach on not communicating only confirmed cases in terms of reporting. Apparently, all provinces agreed with the federal protocol.

I don't know whether Saskatchewan's changed their mind, but all provinces are operating under the protocol that Dr. Kettner's outlined here in Manitoba.

Mr. McFadyen: I thank the Premier for the response and would just ask again on the issue of the distribution of the antivirals. We're advised that the medical experts see them as being effective and that there are some 200,000 or so doses available within Manitoba's stockpile, which represents a dose for one in every six Manitobans. We all are certainly hoping that this doesn't become a serious outbreak and that it doesn't pose serious health threats in Manitoba, but could the Premier be specific about what the plans would be for the distribution of those doses in Manitoba in the event that we had a serious outbreak?

The concern we have is that the general message coming from government is one of seeming complacency at this stage, which was similar to their message going into the flood situation, which resulted in the Province being unprepared. We want to avoid a repeat of what just happened with the flood and ask the Premier if they can be proactive and be open with Manitobans about what the plans are for dealing with the most significant

contingencies that we hope will not arise, but which could arise.

Mr. Doer: Well, Mr. Speaker, dealing with H1N1, we'll be following the advice of medical experts, and we have stockpiled the amount of antiviral materials that they feel is appropriate. We have them in place with protocols that will be recommended by the chief medical officer, the chief public health officer.

The member opposite talks about the flood. We built and extended the ring dikes in Emerson. There was no flooding in Emerson. We built expansions to the ring dikes in Morris. We built a diversion in Rosenort. We expanded the dikes and protection in Ste. Agathe. There's no flooding in the community of Ste. Agathe. We put \$6 million into Grande Pointe. There hasn't been any flooding in that community.

So, certainly, Mr. Speaker, there have been situations, obviously north of the Perimeter Highway, particularly in Breezy Point and St. Peters Road, that we're managing at this point, but the preparations that were made starting with the former Premier Roblin, have always been useful for Manitobans.

Child and Family Services Digital Photos of Children in Care

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): This morning, the Minister of Family Services admitted on CJOB that a digital photograph of each and every child in care has not been taken.

Mr. Speaker, this minister promised, in the wake of the tragic death of Phoenix Sinclair, that each and every child in care would have his or her picture taken and kept on file.

Can the minister explain to us today why that hasn't happened?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, I was pleased to participate in that community forum this morning and hear about concerns and, indeed, to talk about the improvements to child welfare.

As part of the Changes for Children initiative that was launched to overhaul the child welfare system in Manitoba, one of the approximately 300 recommendations was a recommendation to move from hard copy photos in files of children in care to digital photos to better communicate with police when a child goes missing or AWOL.

I can say to the House that it's the first initiative of its kind, I understand, and the department began that. We have concerns about the pace of that. Two months ago, the issue was formally raised with the authorities and I understand it will be completed in the next six months.

Mrs. Mitchelson: The Children's Advocate report released in September 2006 called *Honouring Their Spirits*—in that report it's recommended that digital photographs be available for all children in care so that in case of emergency, photographs of the child can be quickly distributed to the police and/or press. We also know that the photograph is essential for social workers to identify the kids in care when they make home visits. The minister's had two and a half years now, Mr. Speaker, to implement this recommendation and many, many others.

Mr. Speaker, will he tell us when the directive went out to the Child and Family Services agencies that every child should have a digital photograph on file, when that directive went out and how many of those cameras have been provided to the agencies so that those photographs can be taken?

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, the initiative is called the Youth Identification Project. It was launched as a result of some excellent thinking between the branch and police.

I can advise the House that Mr. Menno Zacharias, former Deputy Chief of Police, has been assigned, along with other tasks, Mr. Speaker, to oversee the conclusion of the implementation of this project.

I can say that other jurisdictions are looking at Manitoba's experience in this regard, to move from hard copy photos to digital photos, and the agencies in Manitoba are at differing stages of implementing that, Mr. Speaker. It'll be accomplished by both new digital photos—and the technology was available and was made available in 2007 to enable this to happen with CFS—or the scanning of existing hard copy photos.

We look forward to positive results with this innovative experience.

Visits to Children in Care

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): We see that two and a half years after a recommendation, and a very significant recommendation, that there's a lot of spin but not much action on behalf of this government and this minister.

Mr. Speaker, we've also learned today that in spite of the minister's promise that every child in care would be seen, there are children in care that haven't been seen for over two years.

Can the minister tell us, Mr. Speaker, why—after 260 recommendations from many, many reviews that have been done under his watch—these recommendations haven't been implemented, and children are still sitting in the system not being seen?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, any time there's an allegation like that, we take it seriously and we follow up.

As a result of the program this morning, we were able, through the Child Protection branch, to make contact with the caller who made that allegation. I've been advised, Mr. Speaker, that there have been twice-a-week supervised visits with the father. It was the mother that called in. So the child would have been seen, I understand, regularly by a support worker.

So those facts were clarified for the record, Mr. Speaker.

*(13:50)

Crime Electronic Monitoring Program

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): We were pleased last week with the comments of police and the Auto Theft Suppression Unit saying that the electronic monitoring program is an important tool in reducing auto theft. We're also pleased that Manitoba prosecutors have also said that electronic monitoring is a good part of trying to reduce auto theft.

After years of speaking negatively about electronic monitoring, after years of rejecting the call of the Progressive Conservative caucus to track offenders through electronic monitoring, we're also glad that the NDP government had a conversion on the road to Damascus last week and decided to extend a program that they spoke against for so long.

Can the Minister of Justice now tell this House whether or not he'll be looking at extending the electronic monitoring program to other offenders?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, as I explained to the member quite extensively during Estimates that we had last week where we talked about this for some while, including this issue, I indicated that we

were extending the review of electronic monitoring for another year with the same group of individuals, et cetera, in order to work out some of the ramifications and kinks of the particular program, and that it was successful.

I also indicated that it's not like when members opposite stand up and offer something and say that would be the solution to everything. It's not. It's not a panacea. It's only one tool in all of the repertoire that we have in order to deal with crime. We're pleased with the way it's working. We have more work to do on it, because when technology goes down, as it did in the Chamber here last week, it goes down and nothing works. So you want to be very careful about dealing with technology.

Mr. Goertzen: It's a tool that's working and it's working in other jurisdictions. In fact, across North America electronic monitoring is being used to track gang members to ensure that they are not violating their probation conditions and are staying away from places like schools. If gang members go into places that they're not supposed to go or try to cut off their electronic monitoring devices, they're then picked up and locked up.

Will the Minister of Justice commit to using this technology on known gang members this summer to protect residents of Winnipeg and Manitoba from escalating gang violence?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, I know the member knows, and I told him, we were the only province in the past 20 years to put together, actually, a review of gangs and gang activities and bring 14 proposals out for dealing with gang activities. In fact, the federal government has implemented and is working on some of them, and the western Justice ministers, on gangs and gang violence prevention, are dealing with those recommendations.

With respect to the electronic monitoring on specific gang members, Mr. Speaker, I can indicate that some of the youths that were on electronic monitoring I am sure had gang connections, and the member will know that there were 17 cutoffs and you can't follow an individual when they've cut off their device.

But if you were monitoring them 24 hours on an every-hour basis or you're looking at them and following them or have a mentor with them, Mr. Speaker, you're covering them for 24 hours.

Mr. Goertzen: But if they've cut off their devices, at least you can breach their probation. The police can

go and try to pick them up before they cause more victims.

As a quick media response to the gun violence in past years, the NDP have brought in gun amnesties and encouraged law-abiding citizens, farmers and hunters to turn in their unwanted weapons. It may have only come as a surprise to this NDP government that the gangs hung on to their guns while law-abiding citizens brought in their unwanted weapons.

If the minister isn't willing to commit to tracking known gang members electronically this summer, is he telling Manitobans that the only plan he has this summer to reduce gang violence is to once again go after law-abiding citizens?

Mr. Chomiak: We've been very pleased with the activities of police-recommended gun amnesty. We've also been very pleased with the fact that we virtually put most of the Hells Angels leadership, not in the street to be monitored, but in jail, in jail, Mr. Speaker, for long periods of time. They don't need an ankle bracelet when they're in jail. They don't need an ankle bracelet when you're able to prosecute them. We've been able to do that.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, we're very pleased that the federal government has gone along with our significant revisions to the Criminal Code, something that the Member for St. Johns (Mr. Mackintosh) asked for for years, like two-for-one remands, moving on that, moving on crimes, making it reverse onus if you have a weapon during the commission of an offence.

If you have a weapon now, it's reverse onus, and there's minimum sentencing. That's things that the Member for St. Johns asked for for years, and we're very—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Crime Bail Rejection for Gun Use

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Steinbach, on a new question.

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): On a new question.

We're very pleased that the federal government is doing things when this government is doing nothing. But across other jurisdictions, provincial ministers of Justice are taking action. In fact, in other provinces, there have been directives that have been

ordered to prosecutions to oppose bail when a gun is used in a violent crime.

Last week, the Minister of Justice in committee took some great pride in saying that not only has he not given direction to his prosecutors to reject bail when a gun's been used in a crime, but he says he's never issued a directive to his prosecutors. Well, that hands-off approach clearly isn't working in Manitoba.

If he's not willing to commit to tracking gang members with electronic monitoring, will he at least give a direction to his prosecutors not to ask for bail when a gun is used in a violent act?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): When we talked about that during Estimates last week and we discussed directive to prosecutors, I indicated to the member that most of the prosecution policies are on-line, Mr. Speaker, and are available.

The Crown does have a policy with respect to weapons and violence, and I, for one, will not interfere, as the member asked me to do in the Taman case, in which case the case would have been thrown from court and we would not have had the solutions we had on that.

The member told me to interfere then. I said, no, it's wrong. It would be wrong to interfere in prosecutions. Does the member want me to cross the bound and interfere on any prosecutions? I think it's better to be left in the professional hands of the prosecutors who know the case and not move it into the political forum which the member suggests constantly in this House.

Photo Radar Tickets Construction Zones

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Well, it's interesting, Mr. Speaker, that across Canada, provincial ministers of justice can do their job, but this Minister of Justice says he can't do anything. He simply doesn't want to take the steps needed to stop criminals from their criminal acts, but he has all the time in the world to go after citizens who are acting responsibly.

In fact, when a court struck down a photo radar case where tickets were given out to individuals who were driving safely and responsibly when there were no construction workers in a zone, he went and appealed that case.

Why is the Minister of Justice so aggressive in going after individuals who are driving responsibly in zones when there are no construction workers there at the same time when he doesn't want to do anything about gang issues in this province?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): You know, Mr. Speaker, the member was at the dinner on Saturday night with the Police Association when Minister Toews came up and said this government has done more and this minister has done more to help the federal government on crime than anyone else in the country. He said we're there. That's his own Member of Parliament. Usually Conservative members of Parliament don't say those kinds of things about NDP Justice ministers.

With respect to the issue of the prosecutions matter, Mr. Speaker, we did discuss that in Estimates, and the member will know that Minister Wally Oppal has been aggressive and has taken cases on that have been very controversial and lost most of them. It does impinge on the integrity of a Justice minister to enter into the prosecution circle and make political decisions, because when do we stop? Where do we begin and when do we stop?

Mr. Goertzen: I'm less concerned about when he stops. I'm more concerned about when he starts, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice, himself, said last week in Estimates that there shouldn't be a blanket prohibition on construction sites when it comes to speed limits, that it would be better if fines were only issued when workers were there at the site. I agree with him. Yet he is appealing the decision that struck down the photo radar tickets in construction areas where there are no workers. The minister is speaking against his own appeal.

Why is he wasting the time and the resources of Prosecutions branch when he should be going after real criminals?

Mr. Chomiak: The member knows, and we discussed it in Estimates, that it's a judicial justice of the peace that made that ruling, Mr. Speaker, and that the prosecution is appealing it. The member also knows that I said the Province does not enforce photo radar. The Province does not use photo radar at construction sites. In fact, the Province has different rules than the City has.

I want the member to know that in the place where his parents and my parents came from in the

old country, prosecutors did what the government told them. That's why our ancestors left that place because prosecutions and police were one in one.

We should stay out of the prosecutions business. That's the judicial separation of powers. The member makes strong remarks, but I take it very seriously that we do not interfere in political matters as politicians. In fact, if I were to interfere politically, I would have to resign my seat by virtue of parliamentary law, Mr. Speaker. So the member ought to know that.

*(14:00)

Employment Insurance Statistics

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Mr. Speaker, according to Statistics Canada, Manitoba was up 22.3 percent in people applying for employment insurance in February of this year. Given the time lag and the worsening economic situation since February, it is not a stretch to assume that EI applications will continue to rise.

However, Manitoba's chief statistician continues to dispute Stat Canada's numbers. Mr. Speaker, I ask: Whose numbers is Manitoba using to determine unemployment in Manitoba?

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade): Again, to put things in perspective, there is no question there are more people applying for EI in Manitoba. As the Member for Carman should know, of course, Manitoba is faring relatively well especially compared to many western provinces—[interjection] Well, I hear noise from the other side. In fact, Alberta's percentage of people applying for EI has almost doubled year over year.

Now, my friend from Carman makes a good point. The number of people applying for EI and the number of people receiving EI is actually quite different because of cuts that have been made by successive federal governments to the EI program.

So, indeed, not every Manitoban who should get EI is, indeed, going to be able to get EI, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, then one of the measures that this government is using is to have Will Falk, the chief statistician for Manitoba, dispute Stats Canada's numbers, and I'll quote from the *Winnipeg Free Press* yesterday. It goes on to say: because not everyone who applies for EI gets it, and benefits eventually run out for workers as well.

So what I'm asking then: Is this Manitoba's plan, that if people are not eligible for EI or their EI runs out, does this mean that Manitoba's unemployment will actually go down, then, because they're not taking Stats Canada numbers seriously? How can they continue to downplay layoffs in this province?

Mr. Swan: Well, first, I want to thank my friend from Carman for making my point that, indeed, not enough workers who should be entitled to EI benefits are getting them under the choices of the federal government.

But let me again put some perspective in this matter. The number of Manitobans on EI from February 2008 to February 2009 has, indeed, increased. It's increased by 24.8 percent or approximately 2,420 people. That's the lowest increase among the western provinces and well below the national average. Over the same time, Saskatchewan's EI claims increased 28 percent by about 2,200 people, and, again, Alberta's EI claims increased by 94 percent with 14,810 more people on employment insurance. B.C.'s claims actually increased by 67 percent which is 25,480 more people collecting EI.

Certainly there's an increase in people claiming and receiving but we are doing relatively better than other provinces.

Mr. Pedersen: Mr. Speaker, all those numbers that my honourable friend was spilling off, he forgot to mention that northern Manitoba remains No. 1 in unemployment at 27.4, and we're up again this month.

So if Manitobans are not eligible for EI or their benefits run out, what are Manitobans to do, collect welfare or leave the province? You don't give them any choice.

Mr. Swan: Just to correct the record, the unemployment rate in northern Manitoba as reported by Statistics Canada is exactly the same as the unemployment rate in northern Saskatchewan. It's approximately 7 percent, too high, we acknowledge.

Again, if the Member for Carman wants to actually assist people in Manitoba, he could get on the phone and speak to his federal counterparts, see what we can do to continue working with what Manitoba is doing to help our Aboriginal people, to help people living in northern communities, to make sure they have more opportunities.

Indeed, I've very pleased with this government's efforts with the Hydro Northern Training Initiative, with the money that we've invested in skills training for northern communities and money for University College of the North which, in fact, these members opposed and said they would never do.

This government is putting more resources into the north, and I encourage the Member for Carman and his colleagues to come on board and help this province.

Balanced Budget Fiscal Stabilization Fund Use

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, it seems this government is fast and loose with their unemployment statistics, but I'll tell you what, it seems this government plays fast and loose with its definition of a balanced budget.

In Estimates, the Finance Minister said Alberta is in a deficit but covered the deficit by using their fiscal stabilization fund. Manitoba, on the other hand, covers an \$88-million loss by using its Fiscal Stabilization Fund, but this is defined as a surplus. What is it, a surplus or a deficit? How can Alberta be in deficit but Manitoba be in surplus under the same circumstances?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I always enjoy a question from the member opposite. He does everything but accept the fact that we're following the GAAP rules that he, himself, recommended we follow and, under the rules that he recommended we follow, we balanced the budget. Those are the rules he recommended we follow. If we had stayed with his old rules, which he wants to return to now, we would have balanced the budget.

I know the member is in shock that Alberta has a \$4.7-billion deficit and that we're balancing the budget. That's the way it is, Mr. Speaker. I know the member is going to have a hard time accepting it, but I'm sure he'll correct himself in his next question.

Mr. Borotsik: Mr. Speaker, here's the quote used when we were discussing debt. The Finance Minister said, and I quote: Alberta is not applicable because, as you know, they have eliminated their debt. They're running a deficit this year, but they're drawing down on their rather large fiscal stabilization fund. End quote.

The Manitoba core government budget is very obvious in this budget: the net results, in brackets, minus \$88 million of deficit; transfer from the Fiscal

Stabilization Fund, \$110 million. Sounds like apples to apples to me. Alberta is in a deficit; Manitoba is in a deficit.

Will the Finance Minister simply admit he's running a core operating deficit?

Mr. Selinger: In the '99-2000 election year, the members opposite drew \$185 million out of the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, money that they had put in there after they sold off the telephone system, and they said they were running on a balanced budget.

They could run on a balanced budget with a \$185-million draw, but, now, if there's an \$88-million draw, that's running a deficit. Perhaps the member himself would decide which definition he would like to follow: his '99 definition or today's definition.

Mr. Borotsik: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's obvious, I would like to follow today's definition. When you're spending more money than what you're taking in, that's a loss; that's a deficit. Today, the Minister of Finance said that there are rules to balance the budget that haven't even been invented yet. He invents the rules.

He invents the rules to balance a budget. It is not a balanced budget, Mr. Speaker, and all Manitobans want is honesty and transparency. Stand up; say you're in deficit and we'll accept it.

Mr. Selinger: I'm delighted the member would like to accept today's definition of a balanced budget. I endorse that. That's a \$48-million surplus. I know he has trouble with that. That's the GAAP definition of a balanced budget: no longer two sets of books, one set of books, everything included: universities, public schools, Crown corporations, one bottom line, one surplus.

I know the member has a problem with that, but that's the reality. We'll let the Auditor General audit that. We'll take the Auditor General's word over the bafflegab coming from the Member for Brandon West.

Nor'West Co-op Community Health Centre New Facility Request

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Minister of Health took out her crystal ball and said that she's going to have a health-care access centre in St. James. Once again, I would argue that the North End continuously gets ignored by this government.

Nor'West Health for many years has pioneered many of those health-care and social-services outreach programs and has been waiting for years now to establish a health access centre for people living in the North End and some of the contributing communities, such as Weston, Brooklands, Tyndall Park, The Maples and Shaughnessy, towards that development, Mr. Speaker.

Why does this government continuously choose to ignore the needs of the North End of Winnipeg?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Again, I have to take issue with items that the member is putting on the record that are, you know, as usual, just incorrect. We know that we've been hearing from the member for several weeks that services are being taken away from Seven Oaks Hospital when, in fact, we're adding services to Seven Oaks Hospital. Indeed, there's been a consolidation of general surgery on the recommendation of medical doctors, but we're adding a number of services to that community hospital and, indeed, will continue to build access centres. We will continue to bring more family doctors and nurse practitioners to the front lines in health care. I think this is the same member, by the way, that made spurious comments about the WRHA building going downtown, one that's going to have a clinic for the—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

* (14:10)

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, that's the problem. When it comes to the health-care bureaucracy, money's no problem. They'll build whatever empire they want.

This Premier (Mr. Doer) has cut back on community policing in north Winnipeg. They have cut back on emergency services in north Winnipeg at the Seven Oaks Hospital. *[interjection]* Yes, yes, yes, you have done that.

Mr. Speaker, the reality is this government is neglecting its responsibilities to the people that live in north Winnipeg. I'm asking for this minister to be very clear: Will she commit to building a structure for Nor'West Health sometime in the next one or two years? Will she make that commitment today?

Ms. Oswald: A couple of things just to correct the incorrect information that he predictably put on the record again concerning the Seven Oaks Hospital emergency room, for example: that was an increase in emergency room space by almost 50 percent; it

was improved efficiency and patient flow; it was the development of a six-bed reassessment unit; a new minor treatment area; a new decontamination area; a new isolation room; a new three-vehicle ambulance bay.

We've committed to bring access centres, Mr. Speaker, to all areas of Winnipeg and to bring primary care into rural and northern Manitoba. He voted against it. He puts false information on the record, and the member certainly ought not do that. We care about all Manitobans. We care about people in north Winnipeg, west Winnipeg, east Winnipeg, rural Manitoba, northern Manitoba.

Mr. Lamoureux: The minister says, a new this, a new that, a new this, and, in reality, Mr. Speaker, it's Nor'West—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

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

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, it's Nor'West Community Health that needs the new facility.

The reality—and I ask the minister to clue in on this. This is a reality check. The emergency services at Seven Oaks Hospital have been cut. If you have an appendix issue, if you have any sort of massive internal bleeding, if you have ulcer issues, don't go to the Seven Oaks Hospital.

Mr. Speaker, you could do that before; you can't do it today. That means there's been a cut in services. No matter how you and your minions try to explain the situation, a cut's a cut and that's what you've done. What I am asking this government is to make a commitment to build a new facility for Nor'West.

Ms. Oswald: Just to be clear on the subject of emergency care, some of the statements the member just made were incorrect and very concerning, as concerning, almost, as the material that he was passing out to the public suggesting that cardiac surgery should be done at our community hospitals, in direct contradiction to the recommendations from Dr. Koshal; indeed, in direct contradiction to what his own leader said when he had his medical doctor hat on and he said that the Koshal recommendations were a move in the right direction.

I know that the Member for Inkster needs to play political games at all times, but when it comes to making dangerous statements, Mr. Speaker, I need to

put factual information on the record. Shame on him for doing that.

Pauwels Group Expansion

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): We keep on hearing the gloomy and negative picture of the economy from that side. As we discussed this morning, they have never acknowledged the fact—they don't like to read good news on the economy. I'd like to request the Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade to share with us the news which I heard this morning about a manufacturer investing in Manitoba and growing here so that they can be ahead in North America.

Would the minister enlighten the entire House?

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade): This morning, with the Premier (Mr. Doer) in attendance, Pauwels Group announced a major step forward in their operations here in Manitoba.

Pauwels Canada is a North America leader in the design and manufacture of power transformers, and it officially opened its \$6-million test bay expansion at its Fort Garry plant today.

Mr. Speaker, Pauwels plans to invest a further \$7 million in the plant through 2009, another solid company investing their money, their capital, here in Manitoba.

Pauwels is the only facility in western Canada that has the capability to test these larger, more powerful transformers. They have few competitors in North America that can equal their work.

I'm proud to have a good company like Pauwels in Manitoba, and we should all be proud that a company like Pauwels is making investments right here in our province.

Water Services Underground Line Inspection Regulations

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Len Poersch owns and operates a service station in Brunkild, and he's been told by the Minister of Conservation that he needed to test his underground lines and possibly have some work done, some upgrades.

Well, he co-operated. He got a contractor, and he got a quote to do that work. Although he thought everything was going along just fine, he finds out from the contractor that the minister has changed the

rules, and Mr. Poersch is going to be shut down by the end of this week.

Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the minister: Is this how he treats people that are struggling in their business?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Conservation): Mr. Speaker, in any of these kinds of cases they bring forward, I really would like the opportunity to look into this specifically to make sure that the facts are correct. I've done this in the past, with other members, only to find out that the facts aren't quite right. So if she would be kind enough to give me those details, I'll follow up on it.

Mrs. Taillieu: Mr. Speaker, I wrote to the minister three weeks ago about this. The fact is that Mr. Poersch hired a contractor to do the work, and he thought everything was on track until yesterday when he discovered he only had until the end of the week.

The minister's department decided to contact Mr. Poersch's contractor and tell the contractor this work wasn't going to be enough. They didn't even contact Mr. Poersch, himself, Mr. Speaker.

I want to ask the minister if this is how he treats people. Will he have another look at this, and instead of bypassing Mr. Poersch, the private owner of this business, will he work with Mr. Poersch? Will he look at this case and make sure Mr. Poersch's business is not closed down by the end of this week?

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Speaker, I've undertaken that we will follow up with this and check out the facts. Our motivation, as always, is the protection of water, and if there is a problem in protecting the water then we need to have the ability to take strong action.

We do this always understanding the impacts of local business in many cases that are family owned and operated. We will be sensitive to that, Mr. Speaker, but we do have an obligation to protect Manitoba's water.

Flood Compensation Municipality Eligibility

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Early in March, the federal and provincial government ministers of Agriculture announced flood compensation for parts of the Interlake and Westlake regions. At the time, there was evidence that the north half of the rural municipalities of Rockwood, Woodlands, St. Andrews were missed in this compensation package

of which a petition was started. I'd like to table that today, Mr. Speaker.

Both ministers were made aware of this, and it was agreed that something had to be done. I personally talked to the federal Minister of Agriculture and our Minister of Agriculture, asking that these R.M.s be included.

Mr. Speaker, could the minister update the House on the status of this request?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Indeed, we have worked with the people in the Interlake with supports for their breeding stock. We've put in place assistance to help them move hay into the area, Mr. Speaker. We have put in place assistance to help them restore their hayfields. Through DFA, their croplands will be restored.

There have been some municipalities that are in bordering communities that have been looking for assistance, and I can say to the member, as I have said in the past, that federal and provincial staff are reviewing the situation and, when they complete that, we will be able to talk to the people of that area. But staff are reviewing it.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

* (14:20)

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Bright Futures Fund

Mr. Mohinder Saran (The Maples): Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise in the House today to speak about the Bright Futures fund. Established in 2008, the program enables community organizations and schools to improve high school graduation rates and increases access to and retention in post-secondary education for disadvantaged, underrepresented and low-income students. Budget 2009 had doubled funding to Bright Futures fund from \$1 million to \$2 million.

This fund helps community-based groups to work with partnering schools to provide students with a variety of supports, including tutoring, increased family involvement in schools, mentoring, goal-setting, career exploration and bursaries.

Bright Futures operates at Maples Collegiate four days a week. Supports range from assistance with homework through tutoring to involving families in the education process, mentoring, goal-setting, career exploration and tuition credit

accounts. As a result of this program, students are handing in assignments, completing their work on time and getting better grades. These outcomes are a direct result of their own hard work and commitment. They gain the self-esteem that only comes by setting and achieving their own goals.

The Bright Futures fund also supports programs like Career Trek, a successful community-based program that has acted with the children of families and the education community to motivate students to stay in school and develop career goals.

Bright Futures benefits inner city, rural, Aboriginal and immigrant students in particular, as it provides them with supports necessary to stay in school and complete their education. More importantly, it encourages them to pursue higher education by attending college or university.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be part of a government that invests in its young people. I would like to thank all the dedicated volunteers that work to make the Bright Futures program such a success in my constituency. The students who benefit from Bright Futures funded programs will have the confidence and resources they need to continue their education. Thank you.

National Victims of Crime Awareness Week

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of our caucus, I would like to recognize National Victims of Crime Awareness Week. I wish to convey our most sincere sympathies to the victims of crime, particularly the families and companions of loved ones lost to violent crime.

Mr. Speaker, the primary responsibility of government is to protect its citizens from threats against themselves and their property. We cannot turn a blind eye to the prevalence of violent crime in our communities. To do so compromises the very foundations of our system of law and order.

For too many Manitobans, crime is not a headline they encounter on a newspaper or a telecast, but a daily reality that they live through in their communities, on their streets and, tragically, within their own homes.

Today we acknowledge and raise awareness about that reality while looking forward. It is fitting, then, that this year's theme is entitled "Supporting, Connecting and Evolving." We must work together to support those in our community who are suffering from crime by strengthening connections with the

wider community, but also with the government resources that are needed to help them. We must always be looking forward and ensuring that our programs, legislation and policies have properly evolved and are providing a level of comfort to victims of crime, not adding undue hardship to those who have already suffered.

Today, on behalf of our caucus, I want to reaffirm our party's commitment to victims of crime and recognize the significance of the National Victims of Crime Awareness Week to Manitobans.

Sam's Place

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Elmwood): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the opening of a unique non-profit used book store, cafe and performing arts venue in the Elmwood constituency.

Sam's Place, as it is called, is a welcoming and warm venue that encourages people from the community to get to know each other better. It's different from most small business ventures in that it's a project run mainly by volunteers with the intention of raising funds for the Mennonite Central Committee.

One of my first pleasures as the new MLA for Elmwood was to attend the opening back in late March, and show my support for a project that so uniquely embodies the spirit of community engagement. I also had the opportunity to see Sam, who, for the information of honourable members, is a life-sized wood carving of a Komodo dragon.

Sam's Place was renovated with the help of countless volunteers, coming from all walks of life and uniting for the common purpose of revitalizing a vacant space that once housed a printing business. Their efforts, in conjunction with the generosity of Winnipeg's business community, have created a meeting place where people can join together and support one another in various ways. The 60-seat restaurant serves locally grown and fair trade products, and a stage and sound system were built to encourage local artists to perform publicly, enriching the community with their music, self-published books and art. Moreover, thousands of used books have been donated and now currently line the shelves of the main floor at Sam's Place.

I ask the House to join me in congratulating everyone who contributed to Sam's Place in whatever shape or form and got this project off the ground, especially the men from Forward House who volunteered to help with the renovations.

Sam's Place is making an important contribution to building community, and I extend best wishes to manager, Tim Collins, and all who work with him in the future in this welcome endeavour.

Morden Community Volunteer Award Winners

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Today, I would like to recognize individuals in my constituency who have made a difference in the community. Recently, the 2009 Community Volunteer Awards were presented in Morden to some extremely deserving recipients. Volunteers are a vital part of society as they make a positive impact on our community.

This year, the Citizen of the Year Award was presented to Durwin Buchy for his involvement in a variety of different projects. Mr. Buchy is involved with the youth in the community through activities such as speech, arts and school dramas, as well as the Corn and Apple Festival and the Pembina Hills Arts Centre. He believes volunteers are necessary to the survival of the community, especially youth who are the community's greatest resource.

Makyla Moen is a prime example of how youth can make a difference in the community as she is this year's Youth Volunteer of the Year. Makyla is the student council president and is a youth representative on the Morden and District United Way. She also spends her time volunteering with organizations such as Boundary Trails Health Centre, Canada Blood Services and the Healthy Minds Breakfast Club. Her dedication to the community is an inspiration to us all.

The recipient of the 2009 volunteer Group of the Year Award in the Morden community is the Morden Community Thrift Store. Over 50 individuals dedicate their time and energy towards the operation of the facility. The thrift store donates almost 100 percent of its profit back to the community which translates into \$246,000 over the past two years.

Some of the other volunteer award recipients include Tom Wiebe as the sport volunteer; the Pembina Threshermen's Museum for Arts and Culture. The volunteer Event of the Year went to the Morden Corn and Apple Festival. The award for Health and Education went to Boundary Trails Health Centre Auxiliary, Morden Chapter, and Al Titchkosky received the Senior Award.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate all the volunteer award recipients on receiving their awards. I would also like to thank all the people who

volunteer in my constituency as their service is fundamental to the operation and development of our community. Thank you.

May Day Celebrations

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): May Day will be celebrated tomorrow in over 100 countries to express the solidarity of the international labour movement. It provides a focal point for women and men everywhere to join together in building a better world.

The celebration of May Day originated in 1889 when national strikes were called in Canada and the United States to support the struggle for the eight-hour work day. Following the unjust arrest, trial and execution of the Chicago Haymarket martyrs, in connection with that struggle the International Working Men's Association declared May 1 an international working class holiday to remember their sacrifice.

Perhaps not coincidentally, May Day was first observed in Winnipeg on May 1, 1920, to protest the imprisonment of the 1919 General Strike leaders. Ten thousand Winnipeg workers walked in a parade through the city that day. Among the thousands of demonstrators, there was a banner in the parade that read, our brothers in jail should be in the Legislature. Fittingly enough, Fred Dixon, a leader in the General Strike, was elected shortly afterwards to the Manitoba Legislature with almost a 7,000-vote lead over his nearest competitor.

May Day parades were held in Winnipeg from the 1920s to the 1940s, attracting thousands of workers every year to march, speak and peacefully advocate social change and the creation of a better world. Over the years, May Day has been transformed into Mayworks, a month of festivities to honour the many contributions that working people and their unions have made for progressive social change in our province.

This year is the fifteenth year of the Mayworks Festival as Winnipeg is commemorating the 90th Anniversary of the Winnipeg General Strike. This year's theme for the festival is "Rise as One." There will be events all throughout the city in recognition of the General Strike. I encourage all members to participate.

Finally, regarding the events of 1919, a giant awoke in those fateful weeks, a giant that could not and will not rest, for where there is no justice, there can be no peace. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

ORDERS OF THE DAY**(Continued)****GOVERNMENT BUSINESS****House Business**

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, before resolving the House into Committee of Supply, I'd like to ask that the House reconvene at 4:55 p.m. in order to determine whether or not we will be sitting in Committee of Supply on Friday.

Mr. Speaker: Okay. Before we resolve into Committee of Supply, it's been announced that the House will reconvene at 4:55 p.m. to deal with House business.

Is that agreed? *[Agreed]*

So now we will resolve into Committee of Supply.

Would the Chairs please go to the respective rooms where they'll be chairing. In the Chamber will be Education, Citizenship and Youth; Room 255 will be Water Stewardship; and Room 254 will be Health and Healthy Living.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY**(Concurrent Sections)****HEALTH AND HEALTHY LIVING**

* (14:40)

Madam Chairperson (Marilyn Brick): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Health and Healthy Living. As had been previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): When we left off yesterday, the member was asking a question concerning administration and senior management and so forth. It was a long question which we need not repeat.

I guess I would begin by saying in reviewing some of the materials from which the member was quoting, I noted that much of the material concerned RHA administration. I think it's worthwhile to note that, when the system was built in 1996, arguably, there were, indeed, too many RHAs and not lots of checks on administrative costs. We know that when

the NDP formed government that there was a choice to eliminate the number of RHAs from 13 to 11, eliminating one of two RHAs in Winnipeg and cutting the number of Winnipeg senior executives in half. I think that that's a salient point to bring to the discussion on that subject.

I know that there has been close to \$20 million in administrative savings in the WRHA alone, achieved by reducing duplication; by merging previously separate administrations of HSC and Deer Lodge; merging the VON into the WRHA; efforts of bulk purchasing; 26 admin positions from the WRHA bureaucracy; centralizing purchasing of ambulances. Indeed, there are cost mitigation efforts in the realm of administrative costs across the board.

Madam Chairperson, I know that the member yesterday made reference, in part of her answer, in reference to our current deputy minister, Arlene Wilgosh. I really want to thank her for that on the theme of what she was saying yesterday about our jobs in government, oppose versus propose, and the very few opportunities we have, perhaps on the record—usually because somebody's clock is ticking for 45 seconds or something silly like that. We don't get the time to actually, occasionally do what human beings like to do, and that is acknowledge great work. I know that I have profoundly deep respect for Ms. Wilgosh, and I really appreciate what—

An Honourable Member: Ask for a raise.

Ms. Oswald: You're talking to me about spending.

For the member opposite, in the time that she's afforded to take that opportunity to tell her that story, she's right. We don't tell them enough, and I'm glad that she did, and I appreciate that.

On that theme, when I look today at the senior administration in the Department of Health and Healthy Living to which the member expressed concern yesterday, having Arlene at the helm of the department as deputy is absolutely critical, I believe, to Manitoba's success. The assistant deputy ministers that were being referenced yesterday and the one associate deputy minister are the very bureaucracy who have been very actively engaged in planning on how to deal with a potential pandemic.

We know that, on the one hand, it isn't uncommon for people in opposition of whatever political stripe to speak about getting rid of administration, getting rid of senior bureaucrats. It happens across the nation and across the world. I don't think we take time to talk about what those

people are doing; planning for pandemic, planning very specifically for what's happening across the world and in Canada with H1N1 right now. They are the ones that are working full tilt, in some respects, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

They're also the ones that are involved in recruitment and retention efforts to ensure that we have the best front-line staff. They're the same ones who are working on developing state-of-the-art patient safety policies. They're the ones that are working on heading up the wait times task force. I acknowledge that the member is making reference to positions within the current Department of Health. They are different from the ones in the previous Conservative government, from associate to assistant, and I believe it is a streamlined process to deal with augmented responsibilities, particularly with the creation of a separate Ministry of Health and Healthy Living. I think I could go on, but I sense that maybe the member would rather I didn't.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): One thing that came to mind as the minister was just commenting right now too, and that is the role that a deputy minister and an ADM plays, whether it's in Health or any other department in government. The one thing I've really come to admire about that whole group of people—and probably all of the rest of them in government—is how neutral they have to be and how they can't be partisan. I have to say I really admire the fact that they're able to do that because it tends to be such a partisan environment in many cases. Everybody has their own values and beliefs. I really have to admire this particular group because I think it's probably a fairly big challenge to have to remain neutral in an environment like that, and I think anybody I've ever come in contact with, no matter what department, they just do such a good job of doing that. I guess that's why they're in their jobs and I'm in mine because I probably couldn't do something like that, so I really admire their ability to do that and they do a great job.

My questions were related to—and I have an org chart here from April 1, 1999. I guess the minister probably knows where I'm coming from, because I was talking about it at the end of yesterday—was a promise made in 1999, a fairly significant promise by the NDP at that time, that we will cut senior bureaucrats in the Department of Health. We didn't have very many senior bureaucrats at that time in the Department of Health. We had an Associate Deputy Minister, Sue Hicks; an Assistant Deputy Minister, Jim McFarlane; an Assistant Deputy Minister, Susan

Murphy; and our Deputy Minister of Health, who was Tom Carson. That's all we had at the day in terms of people at the top; I guess certainly below there are various levels of senior bureaucrats, I suppose.

But what we see now under the org chart of April 1, 2009, and just to be clear, I'm not being critical of people in doing their jobs, I'm basically being critical of a government that said they would do one thing and now they have actually gone and gone far beyond what that org chart looked like in 1999. We have five assistant deputy ministers, one associate deputy minister and four executive directors. So they've ramped up administration within the Department of Health, all at the same time that we have regional health authorities in the mix and a significant number of administrators within the RHAs.

I guess my question is: Why were they critical of that in 1999, made it a promise that they were going to have less bureaucracy and were very critical of us, and now they've basically turned around and done quite the opposite? I am just looking for an explanation as to why things changed so dramatically from their views in 1999.

* (14:50)

Ms. Oswald: Well, again, Madam Chair, to talk about the fact that there has been a very significant and important restructuring in Health. It begins right in the title; it's now Manitoba Health and Healthy Living. We know that in a dialogue across the nation, indeed, through North America and, arguably, in the world that the discourse on health has very much shifted into the importance of health prevention and promotion. The discussion about health care being singularly about acute care, and only about acute care, was not satisfactory to experts today, and experts that began that conversation, and that working to provide as much intervention upstream so as not to have as many people affected and requiring acute interventions has really become part of a dialogue on a national stage.

Having our Premier (Mr. Doer) be the one to be the first in Canada to set aside a ministry dedicated to health promotion and to prevention and to maintaining healthy lifestyles was visionary. But it, indeed, requires support and that support exists, of course, principally, in the role of the associate deputy minister, Ms. O'Neill, but is expertly guided by our deputy minister, Ms. Wilgosh. In order for Ms. Wilgosh to serve as expertly as she does in her role,

being deputy for both the Minister of Health and the Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross), a delegation of duties also needed to occur. This, I believe, is serving us very well.

In this current situation we find ourselves in the world, with the potential development of a pandemic, but certainly the H1N1 outbreak. We know that having people in dedicated roles, such as these, is not only allowing us to talk about the acute side of the issue, dealing with the developing surge capacity, dealing with materials that are required, antivirals, protective equipment, but also working very hard to put forward the important healthy living message that our Chief Provincial Public Health Officer says is probably the single most important message in this outbreak. And that is the most important thing you can do, aside from protecting yourself from people coughing, coughing properly, washing your hands, is maintaining good health. If you are, in fact, a healthy person, eating right, exercising, getting enough sleep, not smoking, you are better equipped to deal with H1N1 should it come your way.

So the issue of the development of the Minister of Healthy Living, and the reorganization that resulted as a result of that change, in addition to developing a bridge between Health and Healthy Living and Family Services and Housing through our Cross-Departmental Co-ordination Initiative, to go forward in supporting the number of additional initiatives that have come to the people of Manitoba as a result of our investments in Health, those things need to be supported. When you bring additional doctors to the work force, when you bring additional nurses to the work force, it doesn't happen by accident; it happens by having key people in leadership roles driving things like recruitment.

So those kinds of decisions, the development of the new ministry, the development of additional resources to the system, do require support from individuals and, certainly, in particular, when we look at what's happening, is a very good example, with the pandemic preparedness. I am very pleased to have these people working as well and as hard as they are because it is of great benefit for the people of Manitoba.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister makes my point to some degree, I guess, because she talks about the need to have the support in Manitoba Health, and that if you have the people that you need to do the job and you need adequate numbers of them to do the job, then she's justifying having five assistant

deputy ministers, one associate, four executive directors, and saying how valuable they are to being able to carry work out because it's important work and it takes the bodies.

I know the minister probably can't answer this because she wasn't here in 1999, but why would the NDP have been critical then in 1999 when we had well below half of this number of people? The minister is saying, well, you can't do the job with that few people. You do need more of these. Does she have any sense of why the government back then, or the NDP back then, would have been so critical because she certainly defended the necessity of them? Yet, I know back in 1999, the NDP were—they made a big deal about the number of people in the bureaucracies. They were slamming us day in and day out. Now she's saying, well, you can't do the job without that. Why does she think the Premier (Mr. Doer) and others were so negative back in 1999?

Ms. Oswald: Well, again, I'm not going to speak for individuals that made statements or didn't make statements. I, at best, can speculate about a deep lack of satisfaction with work that was being done with decisions that were being made about losing nurses, decisions that were being made about how care was being applied or even rationed. I can't speak for that.

I do know external reviewers of the regional health authority system, independent from political parties, who, again, as I noted earlier, we can watch across the nation. We can stick to Canadian politics only, although there's an interesting discourse one can have about American politics on health care which I know we don't have time for. But, in the Canadian context, political discourse on health-care administration coming from opposition parties of all stripes focusses on this issue. That is a fact. It is true the current opposition makes many statements about health-care administration, some of them more aggressive than others. It's true there have been expressions used by opposition members about senior bureaucrats in the WRHA. Sometimes comments made, and I'm not speaking solely of the member opposite at the moment, I'm talking about generally from the opposition, sometimes there have been unflattering comments made not just about the RHAs, but about people in the Department of Health being bloated and so forth.

It is a practice of opposition parties to make reference to that, and that is just a fact I've observed in my time in politics. But the independent, non-political, external reviewers made some comments

on administrative costs in the external review of the regional health authorities. Certainly, they acknowledged and found all RHAs in Manitoba have taken actions to reduce administrative costs. They examined it thoroughly, measured it, and came to that conclusion. They also said there's a constant focus on cost savings and evidence of reduced costs. Again, that was an independent opinion. They also concluded that administrative costs within the RHAs are on balance, at a reasonable level compared to RHAs in other provinces, which, I thought, was significant analysis from an independent group.

So, while at the same time, this government did make efforts to reduce the number of RHAs and reduce the administration at that level, while it was making efforts to reduce the number of FTEs in the Department of Health. I believe, according to the Estimates schedule in '98-99, there were just over 1,400 FTEs in the department. In 2009, we see 1,200, slightly over. That's a decrease of over 200 positions. While we are increasing our programs, increasing access by bringing more doctors, increasing front-line care by bringing more nurses, increasing the opportunities, building access centres, personal care homes, trying to augment our work in Aboriginal health, arguably the single most important thing any government can do when we look at the disparities in health status between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

* (15:00)

While we're increasing all of those things, I believe we have kept a very watchful eye on staffing and endeavour to take a balanced approach. That, in addition to the creation of an additional ministry, has led to a transformation of the roles and responsibilities in the organizational chart.

Mrs. Driedger: I think a lot of work in 1998-1999 was certainly going on in the area of healthy living. It wasn't like there wasn't anything going on. In fact, there was some significant effort being put into that area, and I do agree with the minister that upstream initiatives are definitely where we need to be because if we were only putting money into acute care it would suck up every cent that probably any government would have, including 100 percent of a budget.

So I'm totally supportive. I think the nursing profession has recognized that for a long time and, you know, there's been a lot of talk over the years about upstream initiatives, but it has sometimes been hard to operationalize that. So I do agree that we do

need to have a significant focus there and probably even more so than we even have now, but I do acknowledge that we're moving in that direction better than we have been in the last 20 or 30 years.

You know, Madam Chair, my understanding is that approximately two-thirds of health-care costs are because of chronic diseases, so there's a lot of work to be done in that area and a lot of, I think, savings that could be achieved if we could reach the point of having good prevention programs that actually work and good levels of personal responsibility as well because I think you need that aspect of it too.

I don't think two ministries account for the growth, with all due respect to the minister, but, you know, I do acknowledge that it certainly has put a good emphasis on healthy living to create a ministry at that level. Certainly, there was a lot of this work that was happening in the '90s as well.

When the RHAs were being set up, the intent at the time was for Manitoba Health to, I think, fairly significantly be downsized, and I note that that hasn't happened, but probably not just in Manitoba. My guess is it probably didn't change in a number of other provinces as well.

I'd like to ask the minister why she thinks that that hasn't been able to be achieved because that was sort of the intent, that you would have your RHAs, you would be able to downsize Manitoba Health and allow your RHAs to make a lot of the decisions, but, in fact, we certainly haven't seen the downsizing in Manitoba Health that I think was expected at that time. We're seeing instead a more than doubling of, you know, the top-level administration within Manitoba Health.

So I wonder if she could indicate why they haven't been able to achieve that goal that was really sort of an integral goal to the whole purpose of regionalization.

Ms. Oswald: Before I go on to that question, if it's okay with the member opposite, I meant to provide an answer from yesterday that I forgot, and if I keep going, I'm going to keep forgetting. So I'm going to do it now, if that's okay. It was concerning vacancy rates in the Department of Health.

I am informed that, as of March 2009, the vacancy rate is 5.32 percent in the department. It does fluctuate, and a small rate is always expected concerning staff turnover. We know that a lot of departments use vacancy management strategies as a way to help manage budgets. We know this needs to

be done very carefully in Health because of the nature of the work, but it is an approach that the department has used for many years. Our current vacancy rate, as I said earlier, stands at that percentage, but we pay close attention to critical positions. If they should become vacant in terms of, for example, a role that might be filled in pandemic preparedness, they would be filled without delay as far as a vacancy management strategy or not. Health is a different animal, I believe, and I know that the member believes that to be so.

We know that, according to CIHI in 2008, their health expenditures report, the admin costs in Manitoba were forecast to be 2.9 percent in '08, which is down one-third from 3.9 in 1999. So, while we're increasing and streamlining our structures and organizing our structures to take care of the initiatives that we have added, we have been able to achieve savings in administrative costs. I believe that, while the member opposite and I may go to war on any number of subjects, I feel pretty confident that we both believe the same thing about putting as many resources as you have available to you on the front lines, and that's certainly something that we have endeavoured to do.

We have seen creation of the things like the Protection for Persons in Care office, more staff at Selkirk, more staff for working on the personal care home standards that have been amended, acquired brain injury; we've seen staffing increases in those areas. But I don't have much doubt that when it comes to vulnerable people in any one of those categories, and having those vulnerable people being cared for in the best possible way, I don't know of many people that would have objected to putting people into roles that could support that kind of care.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell me if she's ever seen the WRHA corporate phone book that they have?

Ms. Oswald: I'm not sure.

Mrs. Driedger: One of the ways we had been monitoring, I guess, the number of people working within the WRHA in administration had been having access to that particular phone book, and I would have to say that it wasn't something willingly given. It was actually a leaked document all the time, year after year. And then I do believe the WRHA found a way to make it a little bit more difficult to get your hands on it. But I would ask the minister if she might endeavour to try to get a copy of that, that she would be willing to share with us.

Ms. Oswald: I'll have a look.

Mrs. Driedger: The public health in that particular category with Dr. Kettner's position—I have a question about that: Is he wearing two hats right now, as the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer and the Chief Medical Officer of Health?

* (15:10)

Ms. Oswald: Madam Chair, he's wearing a single hat as the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer, although I wouldn't blame the—since the act was proclaimed April 1, I wouldn't blame the member opposite if she thought otherwise because I have not fully trained my vocabulary not to say Chief Medical Officer of Health. I'm going to try to do better in that regard.

Mrs. Driedger: So, indeed, he is playing both roles now. He is the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer as well as the Chief Medical Officer of Health. It is now made into one position? Is that correct?

Ms. Oswald: He holds one position now and the name of the position is the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer.

Mrs. Driedger: Then I guess my question from that and in talking to some people that know far more about this than I do, as well, that when they were two separate positions there were checks and balances in the system, and then people would feel assured that problems would not go unaddressed.

If both of those positions are melded into one, we no longer, then, would have a Chief Provincial Public Health Officer responsible to the minister and a Chief Medical Officer of Health more directly linked to the RHAs and the medical officers of health throughout the province.

So can the minister then tell me where the checks and balances are within this kind of a system so that problems don't go unaddressed and so they are properly dealt with?

Ms. Oswald: Well, I can certainly let the member know that the provincial medical officers of health do report up through Dr. Kettner, and they also are directly connected and reporting to the RHAs in which they work, and Dr. Kettner, of course, is connected to the deputy minister. So in many ways the connectivity of information has really increased and solidified, and roles and responsibilities through this discussion about the proclamation of The Public Health Act have really been clarified.

I wonder if the member might be able to give us an example of what she might be talking about, and I might be able to articulate more fully why it is that we believe that we have confidence in the current structure regarding any conflicts or problems. That might help.

Mrs. Driedger: Some of the people that I have talked to in the area of infectious diseases indicated to me that the chief provincial officer of health would be more responsible to the Minister of Health and would have a fairly significant responsibility in communications that way and responsibilities that way, whereas the other position for the Chief Medical Officer of Health, that person would be more responsible to all of the RHAs and the medical officers of health, so that the medical officers of health and the RHAs would have a strong voice that would then carry that voice, I guess, to other areas, and one of those areas would be the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer.

It would give a stronger voice, I'm told, to the medical officers of health. In fact, people in infectious diseases have indicated to me that they feel that this is a conflict of interest. Again, I'm not an expert in the area of public health, certainly, but I certainly have respect for the people that have passed that information on to me. So I was just looking for some clarification on that.

Ms. Oswald: I wanted to inform the member that the new act actually gives more authority to the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer in terms of providing information to the public. Madam Chair, if medical officers of health come forward with concerns to the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer, certainly there is within the context of the act more independence and authority. This act was developed after Walkerton, the deputy informs me as no small point.

Also, Dr. Kettner himself has, in one way or another, been asked a question about independence and his role in being independent on a few occasions in a few different ways, and he has said pretty consistently the same thing that he said on the radio in August of '07. When he was asked if his decisions or public messages were influenced by politics, he responded, if I ever thought that I either couldn't or shouldn't speak the truth about any public health issue, then I'd go back to working full time in the university or anywhere else. I know you've spent a little time with Dr. Kettner, as have I. I believe this to be absolutely true.

Mrs. Driedger: I appreciate the response from the minister and I can appreciate the explanation. I know one of the issues that came up in SARS—well, I guess the analysis post-SARS—was the thought of making the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer an independent body reporting to the Legislature. The reason that came up in the analysis post-SARS—and that's Ontario, and I appreciate Dr. Kettner's comments, too—but certainly in Ontario after SARS, there had been some analysis and hints at political interference and then there was some discussion of making this an independent body reporting right to the Legislature.

Has the minister ever had any discussions about seeing that happen in Manitoba, and is she aware of what they finally may have done in Ontario in regard to that?

Ms. Oswald: Certainly, I appreciate that the member says Ontario is Ontario and Manitoba is Manitoba, and the crafting of this particular act took into account any number of issues or controversies or the best way to go forward. We believe the structure that exists and the individual that is in place right now is certainly one who follows the medical oath of do no harm and taking politically interfering commentary that would be at odds with medical judgment would certainly—I think everyone at this table would agree—be harm. So I believe that the structure that is in place is a good one.

*(15:20)

Interestingly, too, the details of how their—Ontario's, that is—chief public health officer reports, I think, is a matter of some discussion. There may be a reporting to the Legislature component to it. I'm sure the member is not incorrect about that, but there is also a reporting structure that actually does go up through the deputy as well. It is my understanding, I do stand to be corrected on that, but I know that I have heard the member make comments in the past—and maybe other members of her party—about the independence of the situation in Ontario. The experience with which we're aware may not necessarily match that interpretation. I'm certainly willing to have a look and get the facts straight on that.

Now, as a point of interest, it was a Conservative government in Ontario at the time during SARS wasn't it—the ones that were potentially politically interfering, or is the member's point it just doesn't matter who it is?

Mrs. Driedger: I couldn't tell the minister who was in government at that time. I certainly wasn't looking at the politics of anything. I was more concerned about the public health of patients and looking at the SARS report. I was looking at how a pandemic would be handled in Manitoba and whether we would be ready for it. I have to be honest. I really wasn't looking at the politics, nor do I wish to make a pandemic here a political issue. My concerns certainly are learning lessons from what happened in other provinces and ensuring, no matter what government is in power here, to just ensure that we're as ready as we could possibly be for something like that here.

Having gone to Ontario and toured Sunnybrook and talked to doctors and nurses there—I'm told that was the busiest hospital for SARS—and to learn from them. They were saying that Ontario was not ready at all for a pandemic, and that poor communication, I guess, between government and public health played a role in that. There were a number a factors for sure. I think there's just some good lessons to learn in that. That's my major focus in asking about that.

Another question around this for the minister would be if she knows if Dr. Greg Hammond is still in Manitoba, or has he left for another province?

Ms. Oswald: Dr. Hammond is still in Manitoba. The deputy actually informs me he took calls last weekend on infectious disease issues, so he's here.

I also wanted to reference the report that the member spoke of, the SARS report, and one of the interesting things coming out of that report, of course, is on the subject of regionalization. I know that it's a subject of discussion here in Manitoba and in every province and jurisdiction in Canada and in every province and jurisdiction in Canada to disband, to augment the regional health authority system in whatever form they exist. We know that we've seen the RHAs be virtually eliminated in Alberta. It's an interesting journey that they are on. We've seen a couple of years ago the regional health authorities increase in Nova Scotia, but one of the things coming out of that SARS report was pretty clear on how bad things happened because of a lack of a regional co-ordinated approach. The absence of regionalization in Ontario at the time was one of the core criticisms.

Again, I think that the member spoke eloquently. I mean that sincerely about our roles as politicians proposing and opposing. I fully understand the need to have a political discussion about regional health authorities and get into a populace discussion about—

we hate them, let's blow them all up, they're terrible. I don't share that view. I certainly think we have opportunities to do improving. The day that we decide we don't is the day we're all sunk.

But that report really resonates, and I always am concerned about the propensity for some people to say to dismiss RHAs out of hand when we have that core knowledge from the SARS report that a structure of a regional kind is critical for public safety, for public protection, and look where we are today, potentially, with H1N1. I believe that the planning that's being done in our regions is extraordinary, excellent and efficient because, indeed, those regions are in place. I think that needs to be said.

Mrs. Driedger: When we look at the cost of executive support for the minister, can the minister indicate what specific costs fit into executive support? Is that where the, I guess, the salary for the deputy minister, the ADMs and the executive directors, is that what that is, or am I wrong in that view?

Ms. Oswald: Yes, the assistant deputy ministers, their costing comes out of their division. The executive support would include deputy, her staff, the minister's office staff. It would be that division.

Mrs. Driedger: I'm going to switch gears and move away from the org chart, and I would like to ask some further questions related to a pandemic.

One question, the first one, I guess, I would start with: Is the minister at all prepared to do ministerial statements every day for this situation?

It certainly was useful in the flood situation to keep the House informed about what was going on with the flood, even though people directly related to the flood would have their own news conferences during the day. It was also a way I think to keep people up-to-date and maybe just keeps the buzz a little bit more in control in terms of wondering where things are at.

Madam Chair, would the minister be prepared to, or think it appropriate even, I guess, to do ministerial statements every day while we're in this particular situation?

Ms. Oswald: It certainly would be something I would be very willing to consider. Indeed, in this particular situation that, as the member opposite quite rightly points out, information is coming fast and furious. I read in one article today, there are

more news stories than there are cases, and I thought that was an interesting comment about the H1N1 outbreak.

I am not a medical doctor. I'm pretty sure everybody here knows that, and I would really look to the lead of our federal minister who's been very, very clear in delineating her role in keeping the public apprised as one piece and keeping the medical information to the national chief medical officer of health. So, certainly, in going forward, knowing that Dr. Kettner has been providing briefings every day on the developments in Manitoba, Canada and internationally, that has been our focus.

I will take the member's suggestion under advisement in endeavouring to keep the House informed and discuss with experts the best possible way to go forward, trying to maintain that balance of having the medical voice be at the forefront on this. But I hear the member, and I will review the concept of a ministerial statement.

*(15:30)

Mrs. Driedger: Thank you, and maybe it very well isn't even appropriate, because, if indeed we are wanting to make Dr. Kettner the voice behind this, then it may not even be appropriate, really, to bring that information forward to the House.

But, certainly, when we saw the minister stand every day and speak about the flood, he wasn't an expert in flood and engineering and all of that either.

So I'm torn betwixt and between in terms of that, but for a lot of us, we get questions by our constituents and we don't have any information. I suppose unless we're making sure we're going to a certain Web site every day and I guess following the news releases that come out. I suppose that in and of itself may be enough, again, because we don't want to, particularly in a pandemic or anything in public health, want to turn it political at all.

So I'm torn between knowing what's the right thing to do here, but I thought I'd get the minister's take on it. Can the minister indicate—and we've asked the question on a number of occasions, but certainly other provinces have certainly put out more detailed information about their pandemic plans. I wonder if the minister could indicate why Manitoba has been so reluctant to put out more than what they have put out on their Web site.

Ms. Oswald: Yes, just again to finish up on the subject of information for members of the House concerning the H1N1 update. I am in support of the member's comments about ensuring that we are working together for all Manitobans, indeed all Canadians and that there are times for politics and there are times for no politics, I suppose, if that's ever possible. At the very minimum, as we go forward, and I'm quite sincere in saying we'll discuss this issue, at the very minimum, finding a way to communicate to all members daily whatever updates we can so that we all have factual information so that if our constituents are speaking to us, we can be speaking from the same factual base.

If there are two overarching messages that Dr. Kettner is giving that I think are really important, it's that Manitobans should follow standard precautions against the spread of flu viruses. Go to the doctor when you would normally and ordinarily do so. That's his message to Manitobans and that remains consistent. For the health system, his message is prepare for the worst, just in case, and providing information to members and to citizens about the significant measures that are being taken in the system to be prepared, I think is useful information.

So, again, I'll take the member's suggestion and, indeed, review it.

As far as communications go across the nation on pandemic planning, Manitoba actually remains in line with messages across the country and, indeed, the level across the country. All provinces now have dedicated Web sites on the outbreak with the exception of one, P.E.I. We know that we have on our Web site a synopsis of our plan. We know that it's accessible to many Manitobans, although I will acknowledge to the member that individuals from Literacy Partners of Manitoba have spoken to our communications people saying we need to continue to work to make that language more accessible. Sometimes when doctors get into those briefing rooms, it gets a little interesting in terms of vocabulary. So I take that advice very seriously too.

We know that we do have a substantial pandemic plan. We do know that as Dr. Kettner said in our briefing the other day, that the most significant—and I believe Dr. Butler-Jones on the national stage said this also—that the most significant element of the plan is the planning. The plan itself needs to be a document that is responsive to the specific epidemiology, as Dr. Kettner said. As an example, I thought he gave a good one, that there are

pandemic plans out there as part of giant massive printed entities that make directives about the use of antivirals to the frail elderly, for example. What we're seeing early on about H1N1 and its outbreak is that initially would likely, according to the doctors, not be the target group because of who we see being affected by this group, you know, young adults. I say young because it's 25. That seems young to me.

An Honourable Member: Me, too.

Ms. Oswald: Yes. So, again, the planning and the plan exist in Manitoba. All 11 of our regional health authorities have their plans. When the WHO went to level 5, that, of course, indicated that it was time to finalize the organization, communication and implementation of the planned mitigation measures, we were already there. So we do have a plan. It's a plan that we connect. It's a plan that we share with our regional health authorities, our front-line workers and our doctors. It's a plan that has been borne out of discussions on the national stage and with provincial-territorial ministers. Indeed, in Manitoba, the plan is to tailor the response to the virus.

Just this morning on the federal-provincial-territorial call, Dr. Butler-Jones said they were revisiting their plan because they needed to make sure that it would work in this particular situation. So, yes, we do have a plan. There's a plan on our Web site, but the most important execution—or part of it is the execution of the plan, which is one that relates to the actual outbreak that you're dealing with.

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): I'm sure that the question that I will be posing of the minister will be a huge surprise to her, but I've been know to surprise people before. I will be referring to two letters I received. One is from the mayor of Winkler, the mayor for Morden and the reeve of the R.M. of Stanley, and another letter that I got—that first letter, rather, is on March 12, and it was addressed to the Minister of Health as well. The next letter I'm referring to is the one April 27, and was also sent to the Minister of Health, and it's regarding Tabor Home and the long-term care patients within the Boundary Trails Health Centre.

So I know that also on April 15, I was talking to the minister and she suggested that this was high on her priority list, which I appreciate very much, but that there were some infrastructure dollars that needed to be released from the federal government. I believe it was infrastructure, and that's where I need the correction to make sure that I get the right

department and the right area of dollars that could be, potentially, available for this project.

Ms. Oswald: Yes, I can confirm for the member that, no, I am not receiving this question as a surprise. I can also confirm for the member that it is a very important project. There are no other words that one can say about it. The community group has been working very hard to develop this project. They have taken initiatives to look at different ways of financing the project. I believe we know that a potential P3 concept was worked with people in the community and it was discarded as not being valuable.

* (15:40)

On the point that the member raised about our discussion, I did want to clarify. I did not say that the project hinged on the federal dollars. That was not, at all, what I said. I did say that our capital budget is not as large as the number of requests that we have for capital projects. I think if I quadrupled it, it wouldn't be as large as the number of requests from every member on your side of the House, those ones in the middle and from our side of our House and from Manitobans at large. It's very significant.

What I did say to the member, and I do really want to clarify this, is that in recent discussions and information coming from the federal government concerning stimulus spending, you know, lots and lots of money is going to communities in various forms on economic stimulus. Madam Chair, our federal government announced that they were going to do this, as did other governments, given our economic situation nationally, internationally and globally. They did this quickly, and I commend them for that, for acting to work to get money into the system.

But the flexibility for working together with communities on health-care capital was not apparent. It was not clearly designated in that federal stimulus money when inquiries were made about could these be possibilities. You know, I would understand fully that a federal government would not say yes, we're going to sweep in and build every health-care facility that you want to build. Fully I would understand that and be clear on that.

But what I mentioned to you, Madam Chair, was that our ability, in tighter economic times, to be able to move forward, would be greatly enhanced if we were able to, as a collective voice, talk to the federal government about loosening some of their

parameters on what could be a stimulus project, and the no-health-care facilities being considered for that was, we thought, unfortunately rigid. When we spoke, you made mention of the fact that you were going to be meeting with your MP, and I encouraged you. I believe I said at the time, and would like to put it on the record, I don't view this as a partisan politics issue; I really don't. It's about who is in power during an economic downturn, during a decision to put stimulus money into communities, and could we possibly have them relax their attitude on health care so that we might be able to make more of these projects happen. So that really was my point at the time, and I believe that is what I said. Of course, I'd be deeply interested if you had that meeting and how did you do.

Mr. Dyck: Just an answer in response to the minister. I did have that meeting. Again, because I was referring to infrastructure dollars but also to the stimulus package, they went back—or the MP for our area, who's Candice Hoepfner, did go back to Vic Toews. I have not received a response at this point.

But I want to just at this juncture clarify to make sure that I was looking in the right direction and asking them to also look in the right direction and to make sure that we were sort of looking at the same areas. Like I say, I'm expecting an answer back fairly soon. I'm not sure exactly when I'll be getting that, but yes, I think if we can work together on these projects, and I would agree that this is non-political and this is going to be some of my subsequent points.

But we've got 28 patients waiting placement in Boundary Trails and out of an 80-bed hospital. That is really, really poor utilization of space, also very costly. I would submit it costs three times as much per day to keep one of these people in Boundary Trails as it would in a personal care home. Added to that problem, they're just really not set up. Even the staff, and I've talked to some of the staff there, they're just not set up to handle these people day after day. Yet though, these are people who live and have lived in the community all their lives and they do need someplace. That's why I'm appealing to the minister to—and I guess my added question to this would be, what do we do with these people? They just cannot stay on their own. They don't have the ability to stay on their own. They are needing care 24 hours a day, and yet it seems the only place we have for them right now is in Boundary Trails. As I indicated, that is really poor utilization of our space.

So I'll leave it at that. I do have a few more questions as well, but I'll just allow the minister to make a few comments.

Ms. Oswald: Going back to the point about the discussion with the federal government, I really want to put a caution on the name I gave to the fund, the stimulus money. It was a very technical term I used. One of the things I have heard in discussions through various ministers is some of the complexities of how that pot of money has been designated into different windows of money. It has, by some people, been viewed as a real challenge in designating which fund, so I would certainly not wish to compound that problem by giving it a name that actually might not really exist and might have a more proper name.

So, if I can be of any assistance in trying to clarify what the federal government is naming a particular source of funds, I will try to do that. It's not my area of expertise, but I am talking broadly in the money that was announced in the federal budget concerning the principle of stimulus and stimulating the economy. It's drawing on that particular source, but I have heard, through some officials, that a little bit of the delay has been actually getting the names right for the different funds that they've broken it into. On this I'm not an expert, so maybe some further work needs to be done so that you can be asking that question correctly that you want to ask.

Moving forward to Tabor Home, I also want to say that I am not suggesting that the only way Tabor Home is going to be built is if we get federal money. I'm not saying that. I'm saying that certainly we are taking a steady-as-she-goes approach in these economic times. We aren't freezing our capital budget, but we have made commitments and we are going forward on them in a very steady way. But, since we had this conversation this time last year, the world has changed very significantly, so having that assistance from the federal government would undoubtedly help, but it doesn't mean that it will never come if we don't.

We know, on the issue that the member raises on safety and on security, we have made investments in upgrades to Tabor Home since 1999; \$350,000 has been invested in that. We know there are monies available for Tabor, and a funding letter has gone out concerning safety and security issues raised. I do know, anecdotally, that there may have been some concerns about Tabor Home receiving the funds, being concerned, of course, well, if we accept this smaller amount of money to do safety and security

upgrades, this will take our opportunity for the building of a new home out of the window.

I want to assure the member that that is not the case, that there is money. The funding letter has gone. We want Tabor and the regional health authority to accept and go forward with those amendments to ensure that the work gets done there and that it isn't going to take their place out of the queue or any such arrangement. There have been smaller investments of dollars just in advance of a larger announcement that have happened for any number of facilities, and I wouldn't want Tabor to be unduly concerned that the acceptance of a smaller amount would take their opportunity out of the window.

We know individuals waiting in the region's hospital for placement in a personal care home is not an ideal situation. We know that the work that has been going on to add housing and home environment across the continuum of care, not just personal care home beds but supportive housing and so forth, has been a very important investment that we're making across Manitoba, because it isn't always a personal care home bed that is needed in these cases.

*(15:50)

I do want to inform the member that I did have a meeting scheduled with the group from Morden-Winkler. I did have to postpone it because of pandemic preparedness planning. The group was very gracious and understanding, and I am going to endeavour to see them just as soon as I possibly can.

Mr. Dyck: Just in talking about programs, in April of '07 there was a program that was announced and that was a federal-provincial program, I believe. It was called the home workers' program for \$188 million. That was for a three-year period. Is the minister aware of that? I am told that within the province here that some communities have been able to access some of those funds and, in fact, are putting up assisted living or supportive housing, whatever definition you want to put to it, but it's called the home workers' program—or maybe the name I have is wrong—but I'm just wondering if there is a—if we can explore that as well.

Just further to that, as the minister is aware, the growth that's taking place within the region and the people that we need to accommodate—Winkler is in need of supportive housing, and I know that they're going to be speaking to that as well. I don't want to water down the point here in any way, but I mean

we're just in a position with the growth that we have and will continue to have where both communities, Morden and Winkler, need supportive housing and, of course, Morden is the one at this time that needs the personal care home.

Just added to that, just so that you know what the, and I use this term carefully, but the turnover is in the personal care home, the residents don't even stay there two years. It's under two years, and then they move on. So the urgency is there, and I guess I'm just trying to make that point with the minister.

Ms. Oswald: Well, the member does raise a significant point when we speak of long-term care planning. The nature of the individual that resided in a personal care home in 1973, the last time the standards had been looked at, is not the same kind of person that is existing there now.

Acuity has gone up substantially, so it is a very significant point in planning. I believe the member may be referring to the HOMEWorks! program, which is out of the Department of Family Services and Housing, who, I believe, comes up next in Estimates in this room. I'm not a hundred percent sure that that's the program, but I think so. HOMEWorks!, not workers. I certainly would encourage the member to speak to the minister about that specific program as it would fit within the context of the growing community in Morden-Winkler and also I would say that our cross-departmental initiative, where we're working really intimately now with Family Services and Housing on particular issues that affect the health of people—it's not just whether or not you get the flu; it's do you have a home, are you living in poverty. So many other things determine our health, so we want to bring those discussions together.

So, while the member will have an opportunity to discuss with the Minister of Family Services and Housing (Mr. Mackintosh), I will make sure that I go back with my deputy and review any possibilities that might exist within HOMEWorks! that might be of benefit to the challenges that we're facing in your community concerning people awaiting beds and so forth. I don't know the answer off the top of my head, but we'll commit to the member to do my homework.

Mr. Dyck: I have another question, and that's just with regard again referring to this letter, or both of the letters, I guess, from the private individual, but also from the mayors. Regarding the people waiting placement in Boundary Trails, and I know that the minister has, through her department, sent out a

directive that they want all of the beds at Boundary Trails to be there for surgery or whatever reasons, but not for people awaiting placement.

I'm just wondering what—you know, these people have lived in the community all their lives. There are no spaces in Morden; there are no spaces in Winkler. So the nearest personal care home probably would be 70 to 80 kilometres away, and, as you can well appreciate, that makes it really difficult for family. I know that I used the example one time, and I've just found out several more examples, of where the spouse of these individuals waiting placement will come in and, in fact, three times a day feed them. It's just to help the staff at Boundary Trails, which is very, very much appreciated. But I'm just wondering what the minister feels is the best thing to do for these people in the absence of a place to have them stay within the community.

Ms. Oswald: Madam Chair, I just wanted to go back for a moment before answering, to say that the amount of the monies that have been released to Tabor Home for upgrading is \$1.3 million, and so it's not a small amount. We're really hoping that that work can get started just as soon as possible. I didn't have that number at my fingertips before.

We know that the interim placement policy that is being discussed in the region is a plan that the region brought to government to discuss as a possible option as these numbers were increasing in the hospital. It is an interim solution that we're working with them on, you know, endeavouring to take into account the issues that you are quite rightly raising, and I know that I'm going to hear from members of your community. We're working really hard to balance the needs of those seniors who need medical care with the other demands in the health system.

We know that we've seen this approach used in other regions: Assiniboine, Interlake, North Eastman. And I'm not going to sit here and suggest that moving people out of their communities at a vulnerable time in their lives is an optimum solution; I know it is not. But the reality right now in terms of the number of people that are using acute care beds is putting lots of pressure on the services that the hospital needs to provide, and they need to have an interim solution. If I was able to—and I wish I were—say that we would approve the Tabor capital project right now, and I know that those individuals would take about 42 seconds to have the plan and design ready to go, the construction would still take time,

and we would still have to be working on an interim solution. I know it is not ideal. I know it is challenging for families, and working through those challenges with the regional health authority, with families, on an individual family basis is going to be the key. I do not believe that a one-size-fits-all policy is going to be appropriate here, and we're just going to have to find the best solutions in the interim that we can.

Mr. Dyck: Well, I thank the minister for her comments. I guess I would just indicate that, you know, even if, as she mentioned, it would take us 45 seconds to be ready to go, that is correct. It wouldn't take very much longer. However, I think we do have to be realistic, though, to know that it's still, even if we put the shovel in the ground, it's another three to five years before it's actually finished. Three years, three years on anything of that nature is fast-tracking. I mean we just know, historically, whether it's schools or personal care homes or anything like that, we just know the reality.

The problem that we have is, you know, we've got another three years that we need to cope with this, and I would submit that at the end of those three years, if this actually were to take place, with the growth that we've had there, we would still be back looking for more facilities.

So the minister made a comment that they'd spend \$1.3 million, I believe, it was in upgrades at Tabor. Is that correct or did I misunderstand that? Because I would suggest that if it was a facility that was owned privately, that more than likely the way the facility is right now, there would be some serious questions asked about it, and I'm not sure whether it would, in fact, be shut down.

* (16:00)

So I'm not sure—if we're spending those kinds of dollars, I would say that it would be a good idea to really, really think this through carefully and try to spend, then, the dollars in as good a way and manner as possible.

Ms. Oswald: I just wanted to clarify, I didn't say that the \$1.3 million is what has been done in upgrades. I said that that was the amount that has gone in the funding letter for the most recent important upgrade. That's the sprinkler system. They still have to go to tender. Don't blab that number. I already have on the record, but that's the money that is existing right now to make that upgrade, and \$350,000 has gone previous to that in upgrades.

I recognize that any number of your colleagues have requests. I'm trying to think of somebody that does not. There might be four brand-new builds, whether it's hospitals or personal care homes or primary care centres, or whatever it is that they're asking for, and it is the responsibility of government to go forward in as organized and careful way as possible. New builds everywhere immediately are a challenge and we want to make sure that we make investments as we go forward that are appropriate.

So I hear you. I literally hear you every day asking about this, and I know that it's a very important project to you, to your community, to the loved ones in your community. We're going to do the best that we can to go forward in the economic situation in which we find ourselves.

Mr. Dyck: Well, I appreciate the minister's comments, and I can also appreciate the fact that there are challenges out there. Just on that, just so that the minister is aware of, this weekend I will be picking up another 1,200 signatures on petitions. So we'll keep this going for a while yet. I hope not too long. I would just love to withdraw them from the floor.

Okay, we're talking about \$1.3 million in upgrades on the sprinkler, and I guess my question just would be: Do you want to spend another \$1.3 million? I think there comes a point in time in life, and I realize it's a safety issue and, granted, I've been talking about safety all along, but, you know, finally is that the direction you want to go?

The other question I would have is—and right now, I mean, obviously, the operations of the personal care home, the same with home care, like, that's funded by the Province, and rightly so, but if a person could find—and we're talking about capital here all the time—someone who was going to build this and then lease it back to the Province, is that a direction?

I think I would consider that as looking outside the box, trying to get other funding, because we know that if the Province puts up a dollar, there's always interest attached to it. So, if there was a private funding arrangement that could be arranged that would be acceptable to the minister, is this something that we could explore and come back with and come to the minister and work together to try and get this project moved ahead?

Ms. Oswald: On the issue of the \$1.3 million, it is a lot of money. It's a lot of money to me, maybe not to

some people, but it does come back to the issue of even if we were to put a shovel in the ground tomorrow for the new Taber Home, we could not discount the importance of having that system upgraded for safety today, and I know that you acknowledge that. So we want to make that investment now as an interim measure. We believe it's important and I know that you've been calling for it as well.

Madam Chair, on the issue of building and leasing back to the Province, as I referenced earlier, there was a proposal that did develop a public-private partnership kind of proposal. I know that sometimes we are considered to be ideologically opposed to that kind of thinking. We certainly did have a look at it. I know that there were individuals that were looking for return on their money and there's nothing wrong with that. It didn't turn out to be a proposal that was going to be workable. But we remain open to having conversations about options or models that have a business case. That, certainly, is the responsibility of the deputy. It's my responsibility to ensure that that happens. So we are not closed to whatever kind of creative options and modelling that might help us move forward on this. We'll continue to be open, and I know if a strong business case can be presented to government that it will be considered.

Mr. Dyck: I thank the minister for those comments and, certainly, we'll keep on working at this because the supportive housing and the assisted living, that category, together with the personal care home is something that we need. I guess the other point would be if we keep the number of patients in Boundary Trails that we have now who need a personal care home, then we would be requesting more beds at Boundary Trails because, obviously, that place is filled up as well. I think, as I've said several times and I think the minister is aware of it, but they are expecting—on the flip side of it we're talking about personal care awaiting placement, on the flip side, they're expecting 1,000 babies born there this year. So it's going to be a busy, busy place.

So, with that, I'll turn it back to the Member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger), the critic here.

Thank you very much.

Ms. Oswald: I thank the member.

The issue of those 1,000 babies actually has a lot to do with why this interim placement policy is being explored and developed. Surgical capacity,

obstetrical capacity, the fact of the matter of the community that's growing is certainly well-known to this minister and I appreciate the comments.

I wanted to add one thing, just some information about HOMEWorks! relating to our discussion before. HOMEWorks! is the provincial housing department's affordable housing initiative. Two sites have supports to seniors in group living, these being the Heritage Village in Winkler, 140 units, and Morden, Tabor apartments, 50 units. Morden Manor is also scheduled for supports to seniors in group living this fall, and all the services to tenants in the supports to seniors in group living are provided by the Central RHA. So that's a little bit of information, perhaps, to get you started in your dialogue with the other minister.

Mrs. Driedger: One question before I return to some pandemic questions. It's in relation to capital, and it just came to mind as I was listening to my colleague here. But when I look at the accreditation survey report that was done for the WRHA in November 2007, one of the comments in that was that, currently more than \$300 million in capital projects are under way, and this statement always intrigued me. Some projects are political and I wonder if the minister could indicate, seeing as these outside accreditors came in and were looking at the WRHA in 2007, at the end of 2007, they noticed that some capital projects were political in nature. Can the minister indicate which ones those might be?

Ms. Oswald: I don't know why the people that wrote the report would write that. We're talking about hospitals, personal care homes, access centres. People of all political stripes, as far as I'm aware, have babies, have elderly loved ones and need primary care.

* (16:10)

Mrs. Driedger: One question that would come to mind was, were there some announcements made in 2007 that perhaps weren't part of capital planning, that came out of the blue, maybe in the election or at some point through 2007, that might have been deemed political?

Ms. Oswald: Well, if it said \$300 million of projects were in construction, then they wouldn't have been made during the election, I don't think. They would have been in flight. *[interjection]*

The Minister for Science, Technology, Energy and Mines (Mr. Rondeau) wants me to say: in progress.

Mrs. Driedger: It was just certainly an interesting observation from this accreditation report because I do recall the first Minister of Health was always pretty adamant that capital projects should never be political and used to rail quite a bit about that issue and indicated that he was putting in a process to prevent political decision making in capital projects. So it was just kind of interesting to note that this accreditation survey group that came in would make some notice and have some notice that there are some political projects that are—and they didn't say, they just said some projects are political. Certainly, the WRHA would have more information. This just tends to be a bit of a summary of what was going on there, so it was a question I thought the minister might be able to answer.

But, back to looking at pandemics. A year ago, the nurses—in fact, it was Maureen Hancharyk that had made a comment. I'd just like to quote from some comments that she had made, and then I'll ask a question about that. She said, and I quote; Nurses are telling us that other than being fitted for masks in some facilities, there has been no opportunity for them to give input. It's kind of appalling. We are the ones expected to be in the facilities if an emergency did happen. Just let us in on the plans and ask us for input.

Can the minister indicate, since these comments were made a year ago, whether in fact nurses have been included in planning, emergency planning for a pandemic?

Ms. Oswald: Certainly, Madam Chair, the regional health authorities have been in consultation with nurses through their management teams on the development of pandemic planning. We meet with members of the Manitoba Nurses Union. I've had the opportunity to speak with nurses on the subject in '95, surgical mask, full gowning—don't know if that's a verb, but you know what I mean—and I know that the deputy met specifically with Ms. Hancharyk to go through the principles of the pandemic plan and to seek her advice. Certainly that happened prior to her leaving her post, and I think that would fall within that last year. There's also an existing Joint Nursing Council where we have opportunities to raise issues across employers and employees.

But I think the member raises a point that's very important, and that is while health experts—like, for example, the Provincial Public Health Officer—can be very actively involved on the national stage with other chief medical officers of health and people in

their roles, that it's always important to have meaningful conversations and opportunities with the people that come to work every day and that are on the front line. Nurses would be chiefly among those, with health-care aides, on those kinds of very pragmatic, day-to-day efficiency and safety issues.

I think that we can probably never do enough speaking to the people on the front line about important issues like this and important issues on patient safety, and looking for innovations within the system. I think that we have great inventors and doctors out there that come up with brilliant ideas about how to innovate in the system. Some of the best ideas I've ever heard come from people that are just there every day and say, why don't you move this over here, everything will work better. And it's true.

So I hear what the member is saying about, yes, consultation is important but doing even more is always going to help us in what we do.

Mrs. Driedger: Going back to the accreditation report of the WRHA, it had indicated that when compared with national standards, that the WRHA had a shortage of infection control practitioners. Considering that was November of 2007, of course, if we're on the eve of a pandemic, it's something that is concerning.

Could the minister indicate if that, in fact, has been rectified? The reason, I guess, I ask specifically about the WRHA is because Winnipeg is so large, and this is where we may see huge numbers of cases if, in fact, there is a pandemic. Could the minister indicate whether or not this has been rectified, or whether there still is a shortage of infection control practitioners at the WRHA?

Ms. Oswald: Madam Chairperson, we know that the particular accreditation report that the member speaks of—I think it's about a year and half old. Extensive work has continued, and the WRHA is ready to face this challenge, along with the rest of the province, I believe. Just key elements that are now in place that I can inform the member would be an information-sharing agreement with all the organizations in the health-care system; a mutual aid agreement among all the key organizations in the system; the stockpile of antivirals that we've spoken about; contracts with vaccine companies to make sure that we'll have access to needed vaccines as they emerge in the event of this potential pandemic; a cross-government incident command structure that is chaired by the deputy minister of Health for

co-ordination purposes, and she is serving as incident commander as we speak; an inter-departmental committee on pandemic planning has resulted in guidelines for every department on business continuity in the event of a pandemic; we have ongoing participation in the national pandemic oversight committee and other groups responsible for planning a response. Of course, the proclamation of The Public Health Act has led to more tools to help us respond effectively.

Specifically to the question about infection control practitioners, we know that the WRHA has an infection control plan. We know that they have been steadily working to increase the number of doctors, nurses, experts in infection control. Certainly, as we have endeavoured to build more isolation, negative pressure environments in our facilities, staff have been educated on the appropriate use thereof. It is a work in progress. As far as numbers of practitioners go, I don't have that at my fingertips but I can work with the member to endeavour to seek that out.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us if all of the medical officer of health positions in Manitoba are currently filled?

*(16:20)

Ms. Oswald: Yes, I believe so, but we are going to confirm.

Mrs. Driedger: Madam Chair, the accreditation report has also indicated that infection control at the Seven Oaks General Hospital was an issue, and they were the only hospital that was earmarked by this accreditation review committee.

Would the minister have any knowledge of whether or not the issue, specific to Seven Oaks, has been rectified?

Ms. Oswald: Certainly we will confirm with the member. We know, of course, lots of work has been done over the past year and a bit at Seven Oaks hospital, infection control being a priority with the new emergency room situation. But, we will endeavour to find out what the details are on that.

Sometimes these details—they didn't have a manual in the appropriate place. Sometimes they can be more serious than that. But we'll report back to the member.

Mrs. Driedger: Certainly, that's the intent of accreditation reports, is to give organizations an opportunity to see what the results are and then to

work on them. So I do trust that there's been a lot of, probably activity related to addressing these concerns that were identified by the accreditation committee because nobody wants to fail on an accreditation report, not be accredited, and there's always follow-up to that.

So I trust that that activity is happening in those areas. It would be nice to know if they had actually been completed.

The accreditation report had also indicated that the WRHA did not have a completed regional disaster plan. I wonder if the minister can tell us if they have completed it now, and if she has seen it.

Ms. Oswald: I'm informed by the deputy that that plan is complete. I have not reviewed it. It was reviewed through my officials, as is often the protocol. I think what's very important to get on the record today, and I appreciate the member has a right to ask these questions and they're fine questions, but I want to, in the current context of a situation developing across the world with H1N1, just be very clear that the WRHA and our regions across the province have been working full tilt on the recommendations of the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer.

They have plans in place, and they are adapting those plans at the advice of Dr. Kettner as he responds to the specific information that he knows about the epidemiology of this illness. There are plans being made for potentially setting up emergency clinics, if needed. We are ready to go, and could have those unveiled within hours, in some cases. They have not yet been triggered by Dr. Kettner, but they are ready to go.

There are extensive plans in place to deal with surge capacity, whether it involves halting admissions to personal care homes in order to save that capacity, admissions from the community, whether it involves postponing elective surgeries to ensure that we build in that capacity. The planning that's under way takes into account the potential for being down numbers in the work force due to illness or people that just want to stay with family members that are ill. The planning has been extraordinary.

Dr. Kettner said, at one of his media briefings this week, from what I know of the health system in Manitoba, and from what I know of health systems around the world, I think we're probably one of, if not the best situated to accommodate a problem like pandemic influenza.

I want the people of Manitoba to feel safe and to feel calm, that they hear Dr. Kettner's message about all the infection control things we can be doing, but to not panic, but to know that the system is, indeed, in overdrive preparing for the worst. I hope it's a whole bunch of work that amounts to nothing, as I'm sure that we all do.

Mr. Daryl Reid, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

So these are important questions that you're asking and we have to do continual follow-up on issues of disaster management even in our own department. Our own office of disaster management is constantly renewing and improving its plans, but I want the people of Manitoba to know in this context that they are safe, that people are working and that we are ready should this situation escalate into being the worst case. We all hope it's not.

Mrs. Driedger: Thank you, and, certainly, I also feel the same as the minister. We certainly hope it doesn't amount to anything more than what has already happened.

Just a final question on that accreditation report, because one of the observations they made at the time, and just so I'm clear, the accreditation report had indicated that the Province's disaster plan was not completed and that it then made it difficult for RHAs to complete their plans.

Can the minister just assure us that the provincial disaster plan has now been completed?

Ms. Oswald: Well, as was relayed to all parties at the safety and security task force—I think that's the name of it. It's the all-party entity that discusses issues of urgent importance like the flood. Pandemic planning was first on the agenda, and all parties were given assurances that we are well placed, indeed. We are ready for emergencies, disasters, as in having plans in place. Again, the language at that meeting to all parties was that it's the planning more than the plan that enables us to respond. There has been some criticism in past: Manitoba, your plan isn't the same as such and such a jurisdiction.

Mr. Acting Chair, it's a very deliberate course of action on the part of Manitoba to have emergency planning in place within the context of health, you know, Intergovernmental Affairs, wherever, where we can respond to an emergency of any kind and not just singularly one kind of health situation. Indeed, we were able to activate those disaster plans and draw on them during the time of the flood. We were able to activate them in time to help Fargo when they

were going through their dire situation. All of the work had been done already and laid in place.

So, while one should always, I suppose, feel cautious about saying I feel totally 100 percent confident that nothing will ever go wrong, ever, you know, health care isn't like that. We're talking about human beings and human beings that are working, and the plans are in place. The planning has been done, and responding to this specific disaster, as it may come to be, the H1N1 influenza, we believe that we'll be able to adapt the plans that we have to respond to the specific elements of that illness.

So it's being done across government. It's being done across all parties in those briefings and we're confident we can go forward.

Mrs. Driedger: I have two Pharmacare questions, although I indicated yesterday I didn't, but two actually came up, one from the announcement today and then another phone call today that actually brought these two questions to me. After those two, I will be turning it over to my colleague from Arthur-Virden and then my colleague from Inkster. I thought I had better ask these, so I don't waste anybody's time as they sat waiting in case there were some Pharmacare questions.

* (16:30)

But, related to the announcement today, can the minister provide us with a chart of the different income levels and the corresponding Pharmacare deductibles as announced in the department news release today? Would she just be able to provide an actual chart of that?

Ms. Oswald: We will endeavour to provide information—I don't have it at my fingertips right here, but we'll endeavour to provide information in the coming days as we go forward with details of the announcement.

Mrs. Driedger: That's fine. Could the minister indicate for whom the deductibles will be increasing?

Ms. Oswald: Yes, as I believe it says in the announcement today—I don't have the release in front of me—we know that the change in the deductible structure has occurred to make things more fair for Manitobans. We know that we heard from our own constituents, and members opposite did raise this issue, which, I think, is very important that there were some situations when a small increase in income moved people into a new deductible bracket

of the four that used to exist. That left a significant increase for them that was difficult.

So, as it said in the announcement today, that with the new structure, over 60 percent of Pharmacare recipients, that's roughly over 50,000 of the 83,000 Pharmacare families, will see their deductible stay the same. Some will actually see them decrease slightly. The remaining beneficiaries will see increases of no more than 5 percent, and—oh, I'm informed that the income levels are available on-line at the link. I was saying I was going to get back to you on the chart, but it is available to you. You will be able to get it before you see me tomorrow.

In that chart, I would presume you would be able to see where an increase might be or where it would stay the same or—there'll be the rate and the income level, but I can endeavour to get back to the individual for pockets where there will be a modest increase, none of which will exceed 5 percent.

Mrs. Driedger: I was contacted today by somebody who actually wished some anonymity, so I'm just going to call her Mary Brown. The question was specific to her situation, and I'll just indicate what she's passed on to me. On February 23, at the request of her private health-care insurer, Mary Brown was asked to fill out a Pharmacare application and consent authorization under the provincial drug program. Weeks went by with no sign of the form being processed, so Mary Brown made two separate calls to the provincial drug program asking when she would receive notification that her application had been processed. Her insurer had made it abundantly clear that if the proof of enrolment was not provided to them by a certain date, her private insurance coverage would be cut off.

Employees of the drug program, when she called, told her that they had heard that type of concern from applicants all the time, but they could not provide any assurances to the woman that her application would be processed in a timely fashion.

Mary Brown's insurer had cautioned that the processing times could be as long as 10 weeks. My question would be, what is the average length of time that it would take to process these forms, and are steps being taken to reduce the processing time? Ten weeks certainly sounds a bit long.

Ms. Oswald: First of all, 10 weeks does sound like a long time for pretty much anything, except a vacation. I would concur with the member. I'm

informed that that does not, at all, sound to be normal. I understand, with the element of anonymity, it will be somewhat difficult for us to investigate a specific case. If there is some way that the member knows that we can assist a specific individual in smoothing this out, we'd be happy to try to do that, but I can also ask the department to do some work to come up with what that average response time is and get back to the member.

Mrs. Driedger: Yes, because it sounds like it's not just her that had the problem when people in the department had indicated that they hear this happening on a frequent basis. So I just pass that on.

The other part to this, the final part to it, was that, on April 28, Mary Brown got a letter saying the application had been processed; however, upon reading the letter, she noticed what she felt was a serious problem. The approval letter had been issued jointly in the name of the woman and her common-law husband, with the letter citing his last name only, and they were listed jointly as John and Mary Brown.

In order to meet the requirements of her private health insurer, the woman specifically needed a form that was issued in her name only. So, upon contacting the Pharmacare program to share her concerns, that she had been unofficially married off by the program, she was told that it was their normal practice to issue the approval letter this way for households, i.e., in the name of one spouse only, regardless of their marital status.

I guess, from this person's point of view, the questions were: Why is it the practice of the Pharmacare program to issue letters for common-law couples in the name of one spouse only? Do they not recognize that this poses challenges for individual applicants under the program? It seems a bit presumptuous to do this. If it must be issued in both names, why not have it say, John Smith and Mary Brown—oh, sorry, because he was John Smith, she was Mary Brown. So if it must be issued in both names, why have it say John Smith and Mary Brown, so that each person is properly identified.

So there were some concerns here related to that, but also just around privacy issues, around this specific issue.

Ms. Oswald: It does sound like a problem to me. Allow me to investigate. I think if somebody chooses not to get married, that would be their right. So let me investigate and see why that is.

Madam Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): I just want to ask the minister a couple of questions in regard to some of the health facilities that we have in Arthur-Virden and the southwest corner, and maybe a little more broad than that.

First of all, I know that there are a group of Philippine nurses coming into the region in several of the RHAs. I guess there are four of them, actually. I understand there are six or eight of these persons coming to Virden that will certainly help our circumstances in the community. I know there are a number of nurses there that have, for whatever reason, chosen not to work in the local facilities, but I wonder if the minister can provide me with an update on the timing of the arrival of the Philippine personnel, the nurses, that will be coming in and what they'll have to go through once they get here and how soon they'll be able to start to work.

* (16:40)

Ms. Oswald: I believe the member did ask me questions, I think, about specific numbers of Philippine nurses that might be going to different places. I don't have that specific information, you know, for facility to facility but I can endeavour to get that for him.

He is right in that the overseas recruiting initiative had a few RHAs participating in it. The nature of the recruitment was to find candidates that were practice-ready, and I believe that they did very well in that recruitment initiative. So we are anticipating those individuals to be arriving now, maybe just slightly before now, through the month of May. There will be a Canadian licensing exam that needs to be written; there'll be a sitting in June and also one in the fall. In the meantime, they will be practising as grad nurses, you know. They'll be working in close proximity to colleagues that will assist them in transition to a new environment, but they will be working as soon as possible towards completing this exam process.

Mr. Maguire: I think there are 30-some coming to the Assiniboine Regional Health Authority, eight to Virden. I think it was something in that neighbourhood, six or eight for sure to Virden. I know, Madam Minister, that the community is certainly looking forward to it.

Yes, as I say, there are people there that—nurses that have been working there who have chosen not to for whatever reason; some of them have gone to

Moosomin; some of them are working in Brandon and other reasons. I think I've spoken to the minister privately about that in the past, and I appreciate the work that you have done to make some changes in that regard. As well, with the regional health authority people that are there as well.

I guess the process is around timing and how much time from the time they write the exam then until they will know whether they can go to work in those local facilities. What is the lapse in time?

Ms. Oswald: I can let the member know that because of the nature of the recruitment initiative to really focus on practice-ready that, notwithstanding some time to get settled in the community, that work can begin almost immediately, even prior to their writing of this exam. They'll be able to work as a grad nurse which, you know, is a different level of independence.

As they go forward and complete the exam it goes through an evaluation process and there is notification that comes back through the college concerning are they now an R.N., do they maintain grad nurse status, and that process is the one that will define how they move on in terms of what their designation is. But in terms of bringing more hands to the front line, there will be very little delay in having that happen. It will just be the amount of time for that exam to get evaluated and notification to come back through the college. I don't have the specific time in mind, but, mercifully, it's not going to be stopping them from, the very minimum, providing assistance to the nurses that are there and, in reasonably quick order, being independent.

Mr. Maguire: That would be great for two reasons. One is, of course, their own personal well-being and getting settled in the community and needing some revenue right away to be able to help get established in the community. I know the towns that I am familiar with are working very hard as local individual groups to get them established, get them settled, make them feel welcome as they've done with the doctors that have come into the region. Of course, secondly, it's a great plus for the community to be able to move forward.

The Westman Nursing Home that I've asked the minister about, read petitions, probably have several hundred more names from petitions that I haven't read yet in the Leg as well, in regard to it. From '06 it said 20 percent. There's been 10 empty beds in that facility out of 50 for the last three or four years now. I'm wondering if the minister can indicate to me if

it's the intention of the regional health authority there to utilize some of these persons to be able to fully open that. I've just spoken to many of them this afternoon again. It is virtually the only personal care home in Westman that has any vacancies at all other than one or two, and persons in each of those facilities usually get picked up within days of someone—of a space becoming available there. So I wonder if the minister can indicate to me just what the situation will be in Virden in regard to the personal care home and whether or not we can expect that to come back to full occupancy immediately.

Ms. Oswald: The notation that I have here concerning nurses that the ARHA has prioritized to Virden does indicate that at least two will be going to long-term care. I would want to check with the region to find out the exact destination of what that means. I know that their recruitment efforts continue to fully staff that environment so that the best possible use of those beds can be made.

I know it has been a challenge as the member acknowledges, for a variety of reasons, but we do think that the arrival of these new employees is really going to help change the tone and the environment there, that is going to be an enabling act for our ability to recruit and go forward there. It's nobody's dream to have those beds not filled with the loved ones that exist in your community, and so we're going to keep working with the region to do that. We think this is going to be a very good way, not the magic bullet, but a very good way to change the tenor.

Mr. Maguire: Well, as the minister knows, it certainly helps with morale with the rest of the people because there are holidays available; we're moving into the summer again when we see circumstances deteriorate from a personnel point of view, simply because of the fact that people are required and should be allowed to have a holiday in those areas, nurses as well as doctors.

So I appreciate the fact that there are four doctors; new ones have moved to Virden now. There's a complement of six. We aren't quite to the point where—I mean, there's still a doctor coming out of Moosomin to Reston and Elkhorn each week. There's a reciprocal agreement between the provinces there I know. There's a doctor taking maternity leave in Virden there as well shortly, but only for a short time, and I know it's been established that there will be a locum come in to take that slack

up. So that's working well. I just wanted to inform the minister that it looks like people are coming back and using the facilities there as well. The doctors are becoming busier the longer they stay and, hopefully, that's a good thing.

Madam Chair, the situation that I want to refer to next is Melita's case and, of course, very seldom is the emergency room facility open there. Apparently it was over the Easter weekend with certain circumstances there. It's a catch-22 there. I know that they closed last summer because of lab shortages of lab personnel. I believe that there are lab personnel there now and looking at another person coming. I'm hoping maybe the minister can provide me with more information on the status of the lab personnel there.

The other side of it is that two doctors that are there have certainly been Trojans in keeping the facility going. They've been extremely good doctors in the region for years and years, decades, in fact, and Dr. Beauchamp and Dr. Dizon, and I wonder if the minister can update me on whether some of the new doctors that are taking the training right now will be available in June, whether one of them will be available in June for Melita as well.

*(16:50)

Ms. Oswald: We're checking on the specifics of the question, about the plan of the region to assign doctors. I don't have that at my fingertips. Certainly, we know that the RHA has unique challenges that don't exist in other RHAs, in terms of numbers of facilities. We are pleased that the Virden situation has been stabilized; that would be the word that I would use. The more doctors that will do call the better for that situation. We know that that doesn't always work for every individual, and that the RHA has worked very hard to prioritize—*[interjection]* I think there are both in the dictionary; I just never know—that they are endeavouring to make a priority.

The most frequently used ERs, the regional centres and that having Virden be closed for as long as it was, was against that plan, but all the work that the community has done to welcome these new physicians, to really nurture them and have them want to stay is no small thing. So I commend you and others in the community, the mayor, for the work that's been done in that respect. It's not over yet, but we all can continue to work together to keep supporting that community and working forward with Melita and others.

Mr. Maguire: Just to add my congratulations to Mayor Dunning, to particularly, I think, Maxine Chacun, town councillor, and also chair of the local retention committee and recruitment committee for the work that they have done, and Mayor Walker, down in Melita as well. I know they're working to try and continue to improve their facilities as well. There's upgrading required there in the lab side as well. Maybe the minister can provide me with information on the lab side in Melita as well.

One of the comments that I'd like to make, and have the minister consider, and the regional health authority consider, is the fact that Boissevain and Deloraine seem to work very well together in regard to the on-call situations and the facilities there. With Virden coming up to a more acceptable level of doctors, and if another one was to come in to that region, would there be such a thing, and I've talked to the people in Melita about this, as well, in meetings that I've had with them, to work between Virden and Melita in the southwest corner. Up and down 83 highway seems to be a very natural fit in regard to being able to supplement what Melita's requirements would be for being able to have emergency room status there as well.

Ms. Oswald: Yes, you're quite right in citing the example that you do about Boissevain and Deloraine. It's a very collegial shared-call arrangement that functions very nicely there. We certainly did endeavour to explore an option like that. It wasn't the right fit at the time for the professionals that were involved. However, that has changed and as willing as physicians are to do shared call, the option's open for us. We'll discuss it with the region to see if they have renewed any discussions of that nature. We're always wanting to look at the best possible solution for multiple communities.

You're right in citing that example. It works very well and, perhaps, with new individuals into the mix we can make it work with Melita and Virden. We'll continue to explore.

Mr. Maguire: Yes and, of course, I guess my ultimate—I think from a Manitoba perspective it would be great, too, if there was a facility, if doctors were available for Elkhorn and Reston in that facility without having to come from Moosomin. Of course, that's their prerogative, and the people in Elkhorn are very close to the community of Moosomin, distance-wise, and almost as close if not closer than coming to Virden. They have supported the Moosomin hospital as a local community, and

they certainly don't have any problem with the doctor and the personnel that are coming now. But from a Manitoba perspective, I don't know what kind of an agreement we have with Saskatchewan on that kind of a format. I appreciate the fact that the minister is looking into that. I know there are shortages in Birtle as well, to the north of us, because when we held the public meetings last summer, those people from the U.S. border all the way to Birtle, in Virden last summer when we had the meetings there.

I think those are the major issues that I wanted to raise with the minister today. I appreciate the fact that there is a movement to bring some of the personnel in. I also look at the fact of the personnel that are actually on the ground managing the facilities today, and I think that maybe having more staff kind of alleviates some of the tension of that whole situation that has taken place as well.

I would look forward to the minister—just one last question, if she can inform me just what the situation is in Hamiota at the present time in regard to the health facilities there and the number of doctors that are presently there. I understand they've had a tremendous facility in Hamiota over the years; they've had a tremendous team of doctors and personnel there as well. I know that some of them are nearing retirement as well, and I wondered if she could inform me. Those doctors may have not informed anyone that they're ready to retire, but they aren't graduates, put it that way. I wonder if the minister can give me an update on that.

Ms. Oswald: Madam Chairperson, on the specific present day situation in Melita, I'll speak with the regional health authority or certainly have my officials speak with the regional health authority to get the most up-to-date information.

I, a few moments ago, said that I would give you details on the ER situation in Melita. I have that now. The ER is open at present Monday to Friday. It's closed on the weekends, related to staffing concerns, Friday at 16:00 to Monday at 8 o'clock. Work is continuing, and one of the suggestions that the member has raised about revisiting a potential shared-call situation might be an answer now that there are some new players in the medical field that we might be able to speak to about that. I will get some details for him about the Hamiota situation.

I recently had a meeting with the president or the lead of the Society of Rural Physicians, a very interesting individual from Ontario, who is speaking, of course, with a united voice from concerned

physicians in rural environments. It was a very constructive meeting. He offered some very interesting advice about medical schools in rural environments. I think he himself is a dean at a medical school and had a lot to discuss about the best possible path forward on the question about Brandon, based on his experience. He also looked at some of our statistics in our U of M medical school and how many rural students had been brought into the fold over time and looked at the initiatives that our physician recruitment office has been doing. He threatened to give us an award.

I told him the Member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire) is going to kill me if you give me an award for rural physician recruitment, but in the context of what's happening across the nation and—the challenge that doesn't exist only in Manitoba, but across jurisdictions, in bringing health-care professionals to harder to recruit areas, and we're not even talking about the north where, arguably, the gaps are so significant across our nation—but I thought I needed to put on the record, less for me but for the people that work in the PRCO and the individuals and regional health authorities who are working so hard every day to do what other provinces in many respects haven't been able to do as well, in bringing providers to rural Manitoba, I wanted to let you know that. That's not me saying that, it's an independent voice from an organization.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you very much. The time being 5 o'clock, committee rise.

AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND RURAL INITIATIVES

* (14:30)

Mr. Chairperson (Rob Altemeyer): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. Before proceeding with the Estimates on Water Stewardship, I'd like to inform the committee of a correction that needs to be made for the record.

Yesterday, when passing the resolutions for the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, I mistakenly quoted the incorrect resolution number. I said Resolution 3.2, and it should have been Resolution 3.3—Master's thesis notwithstanding.

Therefore, for the record, I will simply redo that resolution.

Resolution 3.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding

\$27,218,000 for Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, Agri-Industry Development and Innovation, for the fiscal year ending 31st of March, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

Mr. Chairperson: Would the committee like to take a brief recess to recover from this momentous event? [Agreed] So, done. We are in recess.

The committee recessed at 2:35 p.m.

The committee resumed at 2:38 p.m.

WATER STEWARDSHIP

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 Water Stewardship.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement? Please proceed.

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Water Stewardship): I would like to, very briefly, talk about the accomplishments of the Department of Water Stewardship over the past year and then talk a little bit about our priorities for the coming year. But, at the very start, I would like to very much to thank staff for the work that they do day in and day out. Without their commitment and expertise and knowledge, we would not be able to accomplish the list that I'll read out.

In particular, I would like to thank the entire department, both the sung and unsung heroes of this spring, who worked tirelessly in so many ways around the safety of the people in the south of Manitoba, the city of Winnipeg, the north. I know that there were some difficulties north of Winnipeg, in particular, Breezy Point, Peguis First Nation and Fisher River. I know it was the utmost of care, expertise and dedication that helped us get through what was a very challenging time. Not only staff from Water Stewardship, but MIT, IGA, Family Services and Housing, Health—really, to thank everyone who worked so hard, and also to acknowledge the commitments that had been made by communities, again, throughout the south of Winnipeg, throughout the city and the north. Without the teamwork that we have seen over the last 10 years and then the acute teamwork, I would say,

over the last five or six weeks, I think Manitoba might look and feel very different today.

So those are my very opening comments.

I'd like to talk about a few things that we've done in the department through the year. We passed The Phosphorus Reduction Act on June 12. This, of course, limited phosphorus content of cleaning products. We were the first jurisdiction in Canada to do so. I'd like to thank the professional organization which came out to support us on that event. Also, I understand that the federal government was looking at similar legislation. I encourage them to do so because it's only through a national perspective where we can sort of bypass provincial and territorial boundaries that we will see real achievement here.

* (14:40)

I was also very pleased that we passed The Shellmouth Dam and Other Water Control Works Management and Compensation Act. I think that's probably the longest name of an act. We just call it the Shellmouth Dam act, for short. But this allows for the development of operating guidelines and compensation available to Manitobans for artificial flooding. This was crucial this spring as we worked with the committee to set the levels, the cfs that would be coming out of the Shellmouth Dam and, of course, controlling that with the Portage Diversion—and I see my friend from Portage la Prairie is here as well—and the floodway, we were able to control an awful lot of water, not only quantity, but also the flow.

We have, I would say with great pride, initiated seven integrated watershed management plans in Manitoba in 2006. Five more were initiated in '08-'09, five in '09-'10, and five more will be commenced in 2010 and '11, and, again, the great work of the department in partnership with the Conservation districts throughout Manitoba is really showing incredible improvement in the way we manage water all around.

Last August, again, thanks to folks in the department for their incredible work around the first-ever Manitoba-Israel Water Experts Symposium. It was a real success, a unique event on the community day, even though it was a beautiful hot day in August, the kind we were all yearning for in the middle of March, we had 125 people come from around Manitoba who are involved in water in various aspects, and, again, thank you very much to

the department for all of their work on that very successful international event.

I know it was reported internationally. I also want to thank the Manitobans who took the time to come out on that day, as they have on so many other events, to show commitment and progress on water here in Manitoba. I also want to say I was very proud to be awarding the Minister of Water Stewardship Scholarship for International Studies, the study for water research, et cetera, in and with the State of Israel for Manitoba students and congratulate our recipient, Bryan Oborn, with the IISD and look forward to many more achievements such as that.

We also—and what proved very important this spring and continues to be so—established additional offices in Arborg, Stonewall, Shoal Lake, Swan River, Neepawa, Deloraine, Ste. Anne and St. Laurent for water resource officers. So that was a commitment that was made and that was followed up on.

Mr. Chairperson, it was very exciting to announce the Wetland Restoration Incentive program that we have. Again, we have tremendous partners in Gordon Goldsborough and our other partners around the wetland restoration.

It was very good to work with the Department of Justice to amend the Offence Notices Regulation under The Summary Convictions Act this past year. For the first time ever, there are set fines for offences under The Water Rights Act for illegal drainage.

Of course, when we enhanced the Fisheries Enhancement Fund, we allocated a record high of \$850,000. Again, congratulations to the project review committee who go through hundreds of proposals every year and have the incredibly tough job of choosing who will receive the funds. I always say, as the minister, I have the easy job. I just give out the money, but they have to make the decisions.

So that was last year. We look forward to the coming year. We are working on very specific and very important initiatives following our vision statement which is just simply, the best water for all life and lasting prosperity.

The main areas we work in are eco-health, so the health of the aquatic systems themselves; human health, which is, of course, the provision of safe drinking water and safe water for recreational purposes; security or water risk management, which deals with the parameters of a healthy ecosystem; and economic prosperity, so, making sure that water,

which we know is critical for industrial and economic activities, is in abundance and is in good shape.

So the priorities, specifically, for the coming year. We will continue to build capacity in conservation districts. I'm pleased that we were able to prioritize \$280,000 in additional funding to the Conservation Districts program this year. I believe that takes the amount for conservation districts just over \$6 million, which is a tremendous achievement. Of course, now we have 18 conservation districts, covering, I believe, 90 percent of municipal Manitoba, and we strive for 21 districts by 2012.

We are working on the new strategic framework initiative. We will continue to roll out watershed planning across the province and, again, continue with our wetlands restoration. Mr. Chairperson, we are developing new funding mechanisms for water-related infrastructure and water protection investments. We are continuing to establish long-term ecologically based nutrient reduction objectives for Lake Manitoba, and we will be working on new water quality standards, objectives, guidelines and going out for consultation with the public on that.

We're working to establish and manage a new framework for sustainable development among the fishers in Manitoba. Mr. Chairperson, for the first time ever, their voices are being heard around the table all year round. Continue with our very important strengthening of the hydraulic forecasting centre and expand our hydrological monitoring. We will work to improve and implement new drainage licensing and enforcement policies. It's important that we continue, as we know, there was one-in-150 year event in the Interlake last year, and we're watching very closely for what will happen this year.

We're continuing to complete regional ground-water studies, and we'll work with our federal, other provincial and municipal partners towards a regional planning framework. Continue to complete the review on The Ground Water and Water Well Act, and work to prioritize the upgrades required for drinking water systems throughout the province.

This year, we more than doubled our capacity to mitigate ice jams, and we believe this was effective, although there are always improvements to be made. Of course, we will be expanding the work of the shoreline erosion technical committee, something that is important not only around Lake Winnipeg, but throughout Manitoba as well.

So those are some of the opening comments that I have, and I'll be pleased to accept questions from members opposite.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the minister for those comments.

Does the official opposition critic have an opening statement?

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. I thank the minister for her opening statement, for her comments.

Certainly, I know that, with the flooding that took place this spring, and we continue to see some of the aftermaths of part of that and continue to see things going on with respect to the flooding. I know that the staff has worked extended hours and that certainly we want to thank them for everything that they do to try and make Manitoba a cleaner place with respect to our waterways and a safe and a better place for all to live.

So I certainly want to thank them for that. I also want to thank all the volunteers out there who helped to save various communities and houses by way of sandbagging and doing other things to protect homes out in Manitoba. I know that there were hundreds of volunteers who took part in this. The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen), myself, several of my colleagues had the opportunity to get out—it's not the greatest opportunity that we want to have—but certainly we did get out and have a chance to talk to the people who were affected by the flood, whose houses were affected. We had a chance to help them with their houses by sandbagging and talking to them about some of the issues that they have concerns with.

* (14:50)

Certainly, Mr. Chair, it opened our eyes as to how generous people are in Manitoba when it comes to, I don't want to say crisis situations, but situations where it very well could have been more of a crisis situation. Certainly, we just see how generous Manitobans are and how everyone comes together to ensure the safety and the betterment for people in living conditions, et cetera. We certainly saw that.

I want to thank Manitobans in general and all those volunteers, whether it be from the high schools—various schools around Winnipeg I know participated in several areas of the city, whether it be in St. Norbert—I know the minister's riding as well. I think there was some sandbagging that took place in

her area, parts of St. Vital and other areas, many other areas in the city as well as in our rural areas where a number of my colleagues who represent those areas were out with people in their communities. It's certainly a tribute to all of those who came out and set aside their day-to-day activities to do what's for the betterment of helping people in our communities. So thank you to them.

Mr. Chairperson, I also want to thank those who work in our conservation districts. I know that these people work tirelessly at the local level to ensure that local programs are implemented that help our environment and various projects at the local level. I think they go above and beyond the call of duty in what they do on a regular and daily basis for us. I think in many ways—and I know the minister has mentioned that a little bit more money has been put towards the conservation districts—but over the years I think we also downloaded a significant amount of responsibility. I'm not saying that that's a bad thing. I think the more we can handle things at the local level, the better. Unfortunately, I think what we need to do is ensure that the resources are there for the conservation districts so that they can implement the programs that are a best fit for their communities.

Mr. Chairperson, I know that there has been a struggle. I know they've met with the minister about this. I've also met with a number of the conservation districts who have serious concerns over the future of conservation districts and the role of conservation districts in the province. It seems to me that there needs to be more communication there as to what the vision is of this government and what is expected of the conservation districts. I know that the people in the conservation districts want very much—I think we're all out for the same thing, but it's just whether or not they have the resources in place to be able to implement some of the programs. Many of them and most of them very, very good, solid programs; but, if the funding is not there to be able to implement them, I think we're maybe expecting a little bit more from the conservation districts than can actually be carried through with. So I think it's one area we need to focus on a little bit more.

I also want to—and I know the conservation officers maybe fall under the Conservation Department, but I did want to take the opportunity, because I know they work with your department as well, I certainly want to thank all of the officers out there who, I think, are working tirelessly to try and implement or try and enforce the various regulations and so on that have been passed over the last number

of years by this government and previous governments. I know I have several questions around that area which this minister may be able to help a little bit with. If not, we'll defer that to the Conservation Department.

In general, just in closing, I think what we really want to do is to ensure that we have the best quality of life we possibly can in this province, and that includes clean waterways, clean drinking water, a healthy fishery and, I think, just a healthy environment for all to live in. I think we all want to see that. It's just about how we go about achieving that, that we may differ in how we get there. I guess I may just leave my opening statement at that and, perhaps, we could get into some questions.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the critic from 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 the Committee of Supply.

Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 25.1.(a) contained in Resolution 25.1.

At this time, we also invite the minister's staff to join us at the table and once settled in we will ask that the minister introduce them to the committee.

Ms. Melnick: Yes, thank you. Just a moment, please.

Yes, I'd like to introduce the senior staff of the Department of Water Stewardship. We have our Deputy Minister, Don Norquay; we have our Assistant Deputy Minister, Corporate Services, Lynn Zapshala-Kelln; the Assistant Deputy Minister, Ecological Services Division, Dwight Williamson; Executive Director, Regulatory and Operational Services, Steve Topping; the Director, Regulatory Services, Kim Philip; Director, Fisheries Branch, Joe O'Connor; Manager, Water Control Systems—

An Honourable Member: Not here.

Ms. Melnick: Okay. There are a few folks who may be joining us later, but right now this would be the complement that we have.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much, Minister.

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

Mrs. Stefanson: We would prefer a global discussion.

Ms. Melnick: Yes, that's fine.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, very good, thank you.

Just for the record, then, it is agreed that questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner with all resolutions to be passed once questioning has concluded.

The floor is now open to questions.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Chair, I wanted to maybe start off talking about the Lake Dauphin Fishery with respect to the walleye, the spawning right now. It is to my understanding that the spawning hasn't even really begun in some of the tributaries until the last couple of days, if it has at all. I'm wondering if the minister could just indicate where we are at, you know, if the fish have started spawning yet and when.

*(15:00)

Ms. Melnick: Yes, this has been an unusual year weather-wise and water-wise all around, as we've seen south of the province and now in the north. The temperature for the walleye to spawn would have to be between eight and 10. It has gone as high as seven. However, it did snow a couple of nights ago in Dauphin so the temperature is just above five today.

In regular years, we would be going in to physically check the fish, but because it's such a delicate situation this year, we actually haven't been testing them so we're watching visually. We have not seen evidence of spawning beginning even as of this morning. I just confirmed that with the Director of Fisheries.

Mrs. Stefanson: Thank you for that. I appreciate the update on that.

I know, back on April 16, the minister made an announcement about a two-week closure, a temporary closure, on two of the tributaries, the Turtle and Valley rivers, from April 20 to May 3. Given the fact we are now at April 30 and there is no indication that spawning has begun, is the minister willing to look at extending that temporary closure at least on those two tributaries as well as the others that you've put a limit on the number of fish that can be caught?

Ms. Melnick: Indeed, on Tuesday, the closure was extended to May 8. We did communicate with West Region Tribal Council, and we are sending out

broad communication now. But I think the member has hit on a very important point here.

Normally, the spawn would be complete by this time. It would be well complete and we actually thought we had left quite a good buffer by going to May 3 this year, but again, because of the coolness of the water and to protect the spawn, which is what the closure is all about, we have, in fact, extended to May 8 which is when we believe it will be finished. But we keep monitoring that.

Mrs. Stefanson: Would there be a willingness upon the department to extend that further if we're into a situation where fish are still spawning at the time and it hasn't been completed? Will she indicate whether or not she'd be willing to extend that?

Ms. Melnick: It would be highly unusual to have to extend past the 8th of May, but again, we are taking actions to protect the spawn so we are looking at what actions need to be taken to do that which is why the first extension was given. We will continue to monitor the spawn. If it seems complete by May 8—If we believe several days before that, it will be complete by May 8, we'll watch the May 8 date, but I think we have to leave options open right now because it is such an unusual weather and water year.

Mrs. Stefanson: What was the scientific evidence that was used to determine that the Turtle and Valley rivers would be the tributaries that would be closed as opposed to other tributaries?

Ms. Melnick: When we looked at the—there are a couple of points to the answer. When we looked at this spawning year class, for this year, we were concerned about the numbers. We also looked at where the majority of the spawn takes place and at least 70 percent on any given year, at least 70 percent of the spawn will take place in the Turtle and Valley river tributaries. So there is actually a closure, which I think was first announced in 2002. Every year we have given a general fishing permit to treaty rights holders.

So this year because of the low numbers we're not doing that for the Turtle and Valley rivers. Treaty rights holders are able to fish in the other tributaries with a limit of six per day. They can also fish in Lake Dauphin itself. So it's these two primary spawning areas that are the focus of the closure this year.

We did go out for consultation throughout the area and I believe your colleague, the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Briese), is it—[interjection]—Ste. Rose, might have that document. I can undertake to get you

a complete document. He did table some pages from that last week, but we can undertake to get you a complete document if you'd like to receive that.

Mrs. Stefanson: Is there a ban on commercial fishing and just regular fishing aside from treaty fishing in Lake Dauphin right now?

Ms. Melnick: There is a commercial fishery on Lake Dauphin. Some steps that we have taken in previous years to protect the fishery in Lake Dauphin included reducing individual commercial net fishing quotas from 750 to 500 pounds. That is now—that was not for one year, that's a permanent measure that we've taken. Since this measure was introduced the commercial catch has been reduced by almost 50 percent.

Now, it is a winter commercial fishery, so your question of is there a ban on commercial fishing, the season for that is the first day it opens, the first day of ice making after the first of November, and then it closes at the end of February. So I think your question might be: Is there any commercial fishing going on right now in Lake Dauphin? The answer is no.

Mrs. Stefanson: I wonder if the minister can indicate how much departmental—or how much money from her department has flowed to the West Region Tribal Council over the past five years to address the Lake Dauphin fishing issue and develop, I believe, the co-management plan.

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Chairperson, the amount that has gone from the Department of Water Stewardship to the co-management office is \$10,000. That was this year to facilitate the consultation process around the closure, this spring's closure.

* (15:10)

Mrs. Stefanson: Sorry, I missed the first part of that, but is there a completed co-management plan?

Ms. Melnick: That question would be better put to the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers) as that resides under his department.

Mrs. Stefanson: Just with respect to last year's trap net program, what was the cost of the program?

Ms. Melnick: That was under a thousand dollars; we don't have the exact number. The net that was used actually belonged to the department, so we loaned them that net and then we were paying salaries for First Nations people who were hired to maintain the net. So it was under \$1,000. I don't know if the

member wants something more specific. We don't have that figure right here, so, yeah. That's okay?

Mrs. Stefanson: No, that's fine. That just gives us an indication, ballpark figure of where we're at there.

Can you tell me a little bit about the program, how effective you felt it was last year? Is it something you're looking to implement again or—where are we at for this year?

Ms. Melnick: We felt that there were some positives around that program, but this is a different year. This is a year when the science is telling us we need a closure. So you're not seeing anything other than a closure this year.

One of the things that we're doing, as you know, as your colleague raised in the House, was making sure that families are not going without sustenance. We are at both of the main tributaries with the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation frozen fish. Because there was the need to really implement the closure this year, we felt it important to make sure that families which have traditionally used this time of year to make sure that there was fresh fish on the table, hence this year, frozen fish, we wanted to make sure that they were able to access that.

It is never our intention to bring hardship onto people who would be utilizing this natural resource were it a year when there wasn't a need to take the steps that we're taking this year. So, last year, you saw a way to manage allowing the fish to come up and to spawn and then the trap was set up such so that fish going back upstream would get caught in that trap. We would have a fairly good idea that they were post-spawn fish if they ended up in the trap, but they were all physically examined to make sure that they were post-spawn, and if they were pre-spawn, they were put back to spawn. If they were post-spawn and there were people there wanting to take the fish, then they were given—again, I believe we had a six-fish limit a day last year for that net, as well.

Mrs. Stefanson: How is the department monitoring the six fish per day right now. like, has anyone been warned for taking seven or eight, you know, or more than that? How is it being monitored?

Ms. Melnick: I'm sorry. Are you talking about the frozen fish? Is that what you're—

Mrs. Stefanson: Sorry, I'm talking about the spawning fish. Sorry, jumping around a little bit here. I'll get back to the frozen fish later.

Ms. Melnick: Okay. The natural resource officers in the Department of Conservation are there. They're at all of the tributaries. Of course, there is a focus on the two main, the Turtle and Valley rivers. They are around the clock. So far there have been three written warnings, four verbal warnings and there have actually been two charges laid.

I think it is quite a positive indication of respect for the closure this year that, I believe, it's 90 percent of the people who are going to the tributaries are actually going to pick up the frozen fish. Many people are not even going down into the grotto to the water and are coming up to the Water Stewardship—it is Water Stewardship who is actually handing out the fish. So they are coming up to the Water Stewardship truck that we have there and, I understand there's some quite good communication around that.

Mrs. Stefanson: I'll speak about the frozen fish now. Is there a limit on a per person basis as to how many fillets are given out per person?

Ms. Melnick: Yes, it is the six fillets a day, which would have been if they were harvesting. We're trying to ensure that the amount of sustenance that would have been taken during the spawn, which would have been a limit of six, is available to the people.

Mrs. Stefanson: Where are those trucks located?

Ms. Melnick: The trucks are located at the two main tributaries, the Turtle and the Valley rivers. They're not in the grotto area. They're not down by the water, they're up above. In the other location, they're sort of at the end of the road. So they're very apparent. They have Water Stewardship decals so that people are aware of who they are and what is happening. The folks from Water Stewardship, I want to commend for the work that they've been doing right at the spawning area, where, I understand, there have been some very good conversations with people about the closure and why the closure is necessary. Again, a good response has been had from the people who are coming to receive it.

Mrs. Stefanson: So would people be allowed to go and fish in some of the other tributaries where they're allowed up to six fillets and then be able to come back and, also, be able to access the frozen ones as well?

Ms. Melnick: Yes, at the two main tributaries there is—first of all, it's angling only at every tributary. The two main tributaries, they're frozen fish, so people are being watched. I don't mean to say that in a

Big Brother type of way, but people are coming in and getting their six fish. There is a limit, again, angling only, at the other tributaries, a limit of six per day, and there is no access to frozen fish at those tributaries.

* (15:20)

So every indication is that people are respecting the limit, whether it's fishing or whether it's the frozen fish. Of course, I just read off a couple of warnings, et cetera, and charges, that seems to be very much out of the norm for this year.

Mrs. Stefanson: So there's nothing in place to stop someone from going to the other tributaries where there's the limit on six fish at that time and coming back and accessing, as well, to the next tributary. I guess, on a per-tributary—I guess they can go to each tributary and get six, or how does that work? Or there's a warning saying there's a maximum of six per day. How is that being enforced, I guess, if that's the case?

Ms. Melnick: People are taking this seriously. There are a lot of discussions going on. There's a lot of communication between Water Stewardship staff and people are coming to the tributaries. So we have established basically an honour system, except where charges have been laid or verbal warnings have been given or written warnings, and people are respecting this. If there seem to be unusual behaviour of, you know, the same car appearing everywhere, there would be discussion. The NROs are also discussing with each other, but so far I really want to recognize that there has been what I think a respectful response to the closure by the people who are coming.

Mrs. Stefanson: Sorry, just to get back to the NROs, and I know you mentioned that they're at—I believe you said at the main two tributaries, but are they also monitoring the other tributaries as well, and how many—you said it was 24-hour monitoring. Is that at each tributary, even the ones that—the ones with the six fish limit?

Ms. Melnick: Again, I think, for real detail that question would be best put to the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers). Our people are in contact with the NROs and there is a methodology that the NROs are using that really—I think the Minister of Conservation could speak more specifically to.

Mrs. Stefanson: How much money has been spent to date on the frozen fish fillets by your department?

Ms. Melnick: I'm going to give you a bit of a long answer, because I'm going to give you what we have to date, what we expect for the original end of the closure, May 3, and then what we expect for the extension to May 8. So to date, we have the total cost of fish purchased and the freight cost, \$44,352. The reefer costs and fuel are estimated at about \$250 a day. We expect that, by the end of Sunday, the original end of the closure, we might be around \$55,000 total. By extending to the 8th of May, we expect that there may be, if the same pattern continues for this coming week, maybe an extra \$15,000, which would be in total about \$70,000. We know that we have saved, if we look at what was taken in 2007, there were 19,000 pounds of walleye harvested; in '08, 11,000 pounds. We've saved by spending the approximately \$70,000 for the extension we will have saved—well, it looks like anywhere between 11,000 to 19,000-plus pounds of harvested walleye.

Mrs. Stefanson: I think the minister mentioned earlier that all the fish is coming from the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation.

Ms. Melnick: Yes, the FFMC is our sole provider.

Mrs. Stefanson: There is no indication where the fish would be coming from—if it's coming from Manitoba or outside. Is it all from Manitoba or, how does that work for the walleye? And is it all walleye that's being given out? I don't know the answer to that.

Ms. Melnick: Yes, it is 100 percent walleye. We believe a very large percentage is Lake Winnipeg walleye.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Before I start, I just want to say I see a lot of the staff here today that have been working very hard over the last month, so my hat's off to you. I know that it's been a trial and lots of long hours put in. Kudos to you and the people that work with you.

Having said that, I want to ask some questions in regard to floodway operations. The reason I want to do that, I'm not being critical of the operations and what decisions were made, but there are rules of operation and I know that my constituents south of the floodway look at these things very carefully. I know many of you know that, and nobody in that area disputes the fact that the floodway operates. The floodway gates need to operate, which in some incidents, does back up water onto them.

There's a critical issue for them—that being artificial flooding and what is or is not artificial flooding. They watch these things very carefully. The reason, as you all know, the artificial flooding, if there is artificial flooding, leads to compensation. If there is no artificial flooding, it does not, and so how artificial flooding is determined and how the rules are followed every year. So, when I ask these questions, I'm not being critical, but I'm seeking some information.

I know that the Minister for Water Stewardship has said that I haven't asked questions on behalf of my constituents, but maybe she doesn't understand this, that the operation of the floodway does affect my constituents. I'm sure that the staff know the operation of the floodway. There are charts available that show that water does back up a considerable way down the Red River and does, in every flood event—of which people in the Morris area will tell you; they've had seven flood events in 14 years. It's just not maybe as high as the one we've seen this year. They are very cognizant even of a little bit of a rise in water, because it does make a difference to them. There are several people that have charts, chart this every year. Even though they are not engineers and maybe don't hold the qualifications, they live it every single year.

* (15:30)

I want to just ask, first of all, under rules of operation, was this considered a major flood operation or an extreme flood operation?

Ms. Melnick: I appreciate the comments from the Member for Morris about the good work done by the department, and I can assure you no one will take any statements personally except those.

On the operation of the floodway, for this year, the floodway was operated purely according to rule No. 1, which I'll just read into the record.

Normal operation 1: Maintain natural water levels on the Red River at the entrance to the floodway channel until the water surface elevation at James Avenue reaches 24.5 feet or 7.46 metres or the river level anywhere along the Red River within the city of Winnipeg reaches two feet below the flood protection level of 27.83 feet or 8.48 metres.

So what does maintaining the natural levels mean is often referred to as state of nature and upstream means upstream of the floodway. Is that the water levels upstream, had there been no flood control in place, so the Shellmouth or the Portage

diversion or the floodway would be the levels they were in 1968, which was the year of development of the floodway.

There was an awful lot of very good work and, as we all know now, very, very accurate assessment into how to handle the very unusually high water levels coming from different areas of the province. I'm very, very pleased to say that we were able to maintain the state of nature upstream in this year.

Mrs. Taillieu: I think there is a daily operational log of the floodway that has to be submitted to the minister, I think by the end of June, which actually states the levels at the floodway intake structure, but we don't have those numbers available because they aren't made public until the report is made—well, I think the report is made public at the end of June.

Why would we not be able to get those numbers? There's a lot of flood forecasting numbers of levels along the Red River from the border all the way to James Street, but there's no available data on the daily operational log of the lowering and raising of the gates. Why is that not public?

Ms. Melnick: I just want to clarify. You're not talking about water levels. You're talking about the raising and lowering of the gates specifically. Is that your question?

Mrs. Taillieu: I'm talking about the Red River Floodway operational data. Just a minute. It's the operational log, I guess, of the floodway gate operations.

I'm looking at a report from 2007, and it details the times that the floodway gates were—start of operation, end of operation daily. If I'm wrong, correct me, but this is my interpretation of this, is it goes in April 2000 from April 3 to the 17th, when the floodway was operated. There's specific times: sometimes twice a day, start of operation, end of operation and what the levels were at those times.

Ms. Melnick: You actually asked a couple of questions so I'll go through them and then let me know if there were any that weren't answered.

The report is presented to the minister in June every year that the floodway is operated. It is, in fact, a public report once presented.

There is a phone number, which we don't have handy. That's what Steve was looking for, but we can get that for you. It does talk about the raising and lowering of the gates on a daily basis. People can access information through that.

There is also the flow metrics which we did put on the home page of the government Web site during the flood, the actual flood process.

Mrs. Taillieu: I asked this question in question period and I didn't get an answer then. It would have been helpful because I was asking on behalf of a constituent who was trying to find this information. What we were looking for was a phone number or a Web site to access, so he could get this information. But I did not get an answer to the question, but I appreciate getting an answer now. As soon as I have that number, I will refer it and see if that works for my constituent.

I have another question in regard to—it appears to me that under the operating rules, that a report must be prepared and presented to the minister who then makes a decision to operate the floodway. It says the department, Mr. Chairperson, will present its report and recommendations to the minister who is subject to rule 4.8, who will make a decision respecting floodway operation based on his or her consideration of the report.

So was the report issued to the minister this year by a floodway operational review committee, as I'm quoting from the rules? Was there a report issued to the minister by the Floodway Operational Review Committee?

Ms. Melnick: Can you tell us exactly where you got what you just read out? I'm trying to find that.

Mrs. Taillieu: Rules of Operation, Red River Floodway Control Structure. I believe that they came from the Department of Water Stewardship Web site. I have it. It is referred to as the Rules of Operation, Red River Floodway Control Structure. There are four pages. On page 2, it says that a report will be prepared and given to a review committee, which this committee is to have input before finalizing the report and making recommendations respecting floodway operation. Then the department will present its report to the minister. Then the minister makes a decision on operating the floodway.

So my question is: Did this procedure take place?

* (15:40)

Ms. Melnick: I think the member is reading from 4.5, or 4, section 5? Yes, that's of the operating rules.

This committee did meet, but if she's referring to the decision to operate the floodway when we

initiated the raising of the gates, is that what your question is really referring to?

Mrs. Taillieu: My question at the moment was: Did this committee meet according to the rules of the operation of the floodway?

Ms. Melnick: This committee would meet under this rule, but it was not this rule that applied this spring. What applied this spring was major flood operation—*[interjection]*

What applied this spring—if that's your real question; I think it might be—was, again, the normal operation where we talked about the level at James Avenue, maintaining natural levels. And if you go down to initial gate operation with ice? Go to normal operation, it's the very first one, No. 1. Okay, and then you have No. 2, major flood operation; then you go extreme flood operation, No. 3; and then right below that, initial gate operation with ice? That's what applied for the operation of the floodway this spring: The floodway gates should not be operated until ice on the river is flowing freely, unless flooding in Winnipeg is imminent.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, just to clarify, so are you telling me then because there's ice, then none of these following rules applied?

Ms. Melnick: If I can take you back to No. 4, emergency operation to reduce sewer backup in Winnipeg, that would be, for example, if there was one of our famous prairie thunderstorms and there was a very large downpour in a very short period of time, that may have caused—because we have the combined sewer flows—may have caused backup into people's basements. That's what the rule that you first referred to, the 4.5 applies. It would be in that sort of a situation, but not in the situation of having ice in the floodway, which, again, I'll take you back to rule No. 1 and then the initial gate operation with ice.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, is the minister saying, then, that emergency operation to reduce sewer backup in Winnipeg, everything else in this report, in the operating rules, applies to that?

Ms. Melnick: Again, we're talking about in rule No. 4, an extreme rainstorm in the spring, for example, or in the summer, which is not dealing with the situation we were dealing with, which was ice in the floodway, upstream of the floodway, which is how we operated the initial operation of the floodway this spring.

Mrs. Taillieu: For example, then, 4.9, the department will issue a news release announcing a decision to operate the floodway at least 24 hours before commencing operation. That does not apply unless there's sewer backup—unless there is emergency operation to reduce sewer backup in Winnipeg?

Ms. Melnick: That, again, falls under the rule No. 4, which is, again, more summer operation. Does that clarify it?

Mrs. Taillieu: Okay, thank you. I just thought that there were a number of things that related to that, but there doesn't seem to be much in relation to initial operation with ice or anything else. So, okay.

So this was a normal operation of the floodway, as you indicated, not a major flood operation or an extreme flood operation. So, under normal operation, then, correct?

Ms. Melnick: Yes.

Mrs. Taillieu: Under normal operation, then, whose decision is it to operate the floodway?

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Chair, there is a process within Water Stewardship. There's a Water Stewardship engineering team, which is chaired by Steve Topping. Other members of that team are Eugene Kozera, Alf Warkentin, Bob Harrison and Duane Kelln. Duane Kelln, actually, is the operator of the floodway. So he would determine, according to what we need water flow wise and water levels, he would calculate how far to move the gates up or down. That team met consistently over the last five or six weeks. They were continually calculating, particularly with the unusual circumstance of having ice just hovering upstream of the floodway. They determined when the time to make the recommendation to the Deputy Minister of Water Stewardship was, and the deputy then informed me of the recommendation from the expert engineering team.

* (15:50)

Mrs. Taillieu: I know in 2005 when The Red River Floodway Act was enacted, I believe it was 2005, there was a level that was—was there not a level that would be determined, at that point—and I think it was 24.5 feet at James—that if the water levels would be approaching that, that the operation of the floodway would begin to divert water, but it would back up water south of the city? So what was the actual level

that James street reached when the floodway was operated?

Ms. Melnick: I don't have the exact level with me right now, but rather than misspeak, you know, give a, sort of a suggestion, I've asked the department to go back and get that level and we can bring that forward next time.

Mrs. Taillieu: I ask these questions because I was in contact with a number of my constituents who are still actually in a flood situation, and they were fairly concerned that they didn't really get much notice, and they were lacking in information. I know that there were many press releases that go out from the government, but that doesn't always translate to getting into the homes of people that are affected.

There was a lot of variation in the water levels when the floodway was operating. It came up, then it went down, then it came up quite high, then it went down, came up again. So it sort of indicates—I know that it's in part due to ice jams, but in part due to the operation of the floodway. As well, I think it's pretty well known that when the floodway's operated, there is a backup into Ritchot. In fact, I think that I have seen some charts that indicate that the water can back up as far as Morris and maybe even beyond that. I'm wondering if there was a charting done this year in terms of how far the water backed up.

Ms. Melnick: There was no artificial flooding this year, which I think is quite an achievement. When we look at what we were dealing with, the second largest flood in the history of Manitoba, in some places the largest flood, again, I know we can both agree that people worked very hard. There were some very tough calls, some very tough decisions. We worked with communities, municipalities, the City of Winnipeg.

I think it's important to recognize that we still have, as you were mentioning, water levels are very high in some areas of southern Manitoba. I think Alf Warkentin said this is, if not the, one of the longest crests he has ever experienced. I remember the day when we were told that Emerson had gone down by 0.03, we all felt that we were seeing just the tiniest bit of relief there for the people in the south.

So we did calculations very carefully. The engineering team worked very, very hard. Again, I think it's quite important to recognize that there was no artificial flooding upstream this year.

Mrs. Taillieu: I may have some questions later, but I have another commitment right now, but, again, I

just want to again thank the staff. It's been a tough one, and I'll say it's still tough in Morris and Ritchot. So we will look forward to getting the levels down, getting the roads open and getting some compensation for people that need it, should that be the case.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Let me start with the situation along the Fisher River. I think that the minister may have a recent agreement with the federal government that she might want to talk about. What is the plan in terms of dikes or buyouts or building a diversion, or whatever, to protect people in Peguis and Fisher River?

Ms. Melnick: I was up to Peguis last Saturday and had some very good meetings with the Chief, Glenn Hudson. I also was able to meet with Chief Crate from Fisher River. Chief Nelson was there as well although his area wasn't as affected as we know in the way that the other two First Nations were.

Mr. Chair, I assured them that we believe it's time for permanent flood mitigation in those two communities and that the two ministers were going up to Ottawa this week, Minister Eric Robinson, Acting Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, and Minister Ashton, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. They are the two gentlemen who were meeting with the federal government. I understand there was a positive feeling about those meetings; however, we are not ready to make an announcement as of yet. There is still discussion undergoing, but, certainly, the provincial government, as we've been very clear, the Premier (Mr. Doer), Minister Ashton, Minister Robinson and myself believe it is time for permanent flood mitigation in those areas.

Mr. Gerrard: What is the minister's view of what actions would be taken with regard to permanent flood mitigation? Is this dikes or buyouts or diversion?

Ms. Melnick: This was the second meeting I had had with Chief Hudson. He was kind enough to come to my office in the Leg the previous week. It was at that meeting that I asked him if he would be our partner around the table because I believe that the voices of local communities have got to be around the table, particularly in discussions as serious as this. He did agree.

I asked him at that time if he felt it would be okay for me to come up and he agreed to that to. I asked him to let me know when would be convenient for the community because the community had been,

as we all know, going through a difficult time. So the focus of our discussion was again the partnership, was again the upcoming meetings and as we know, they were good meetings. There is a lot of discussion going on about how we move forward together with the partners of the First Nations and the federal government.

Mr. Gerrard: Is the minister in a position to provide any assurance with regard to residents of Peguis who were flooded with regard to what levels of compensation and other matters?

Ms. Melnick: That would be under discussion and I think as a former federal Cabinet minister himself, the Member for River Heights fully understands the need to be very careful around times like this, to understand that we are very supportive. As the provincial government, we need the feds. I understand that the feds are very supportive as well as are the First Nations.

So I know he's trying to fish for some information here, and I guess as minister of fisheries that pun was sort of intended. But I think the big picture here is to respect the negotiations, to respect the negotiators and continue to be very clear on our position around permanent ice-permanent flood mitigation strategies in those communities.

Mr. Gerrard: Well, I would certainly have hoped that the minister would have something to say in terms of people who had been flooded and what would be done in the short run as well as the long run mitigation, and to ensure that the people in Peguis were treated equally with other people who had their homes flooded, et cetera. So I hope that will be the case.

* (16:00)

Let me ask the minister as well, there was significant flooding in other areas of the Interlake, what the plans are with respect to the Interlake in areas south of Peguis, where there was significant flooding in terms of the water management approach.

Ms. Melnick: I'm sorry, could you repeat the last part of that question?

Mr. Gerrard: It was in the Interlake, and there were quite a number of people talking about the flooding problems, whether it was in the area of St. Laurent, or elsewhere in the Interlake, and it was partly because the land was pretty waterlogged from last

year, going in, and so, when the melt happened, there was a lot that ran off very quickly.

So what are the minister's plans in terms of water management for the Interlake to reduce the problems of flooding in the future?

Ms. Melnick: As the member will remember, last August we had a one-in-150-year rain event in the Interlake, which set quite an incredible starting point. We had saturation of the earth over the winter, and then relatively high water coming up, some overland flooding, some flash flooding. So we've been working very closely with the Interlake municipalities. In partnership with MIT, there was unprecedented work being done. We had the event of the thaw; culverts thawed, froze again. That was the first time we had seen that. So what we did, in working in partnership with MIT, was provide to communities that were needing it, the sort of steamers that, I know, were very well reported on. There was a lot of work done around that.

We're finding out now, and will for probably the next while, what the results of the 150-year event, the land being saturated and the events of this spring. Restoration would certainly be our first priority and we're working, again, with local communities and MIT. We understand that 50-plus culverts, major culverts, were washed out. So that's a high priority area. And that, roughly, 40 private-access, or what might be termed minor culverts, were washed out as well.

So, again, I sense this is rather unprecedented, but the recovery is beginning, again with the continued partnership. I would like to speak about that partnership. We have worked very hard through the last while to make sure that we're working very well with communities, through AMM and individually. Staff has done an incredible job of establishing the sorts of working relationships that withstood the test of the difficulties that we experienced this spring, and that's not easy to do. There were some very difficult situations in an overall difficult situation.

So, again, working with our partnerships at the local R.M. level, certainly, working with MIT, we're establishing priorities as a team and working on those.

Mr. Gerrard: Yes, just back to Peguis for a moment. When I was there, there was a lot of mention of the fact that one of the problems seems to have been that word had been provided from the

provincial government that there would be minor flooding and not much in the way of problems at Peguis along the Fisher River.

I'm just trying to look for an explanation as to why the forecasts seemed to have missed the mark.

Ms. Melnick: Well, again, certainly we had an unusual spring. One of the very unfortunate events here is that our main communication person with INAC had left the position for three weeks before we found out. So we were actually providing very detailed information that we thought was going out to the communities, but the individual was not there to disseminate it anymore. So that was an extremely unfortunate event.

Mr. Gerrard: Is the minister saying that her department was actually predicting the size of the flood that occurred in Peguis?

Ms. Melnick: Well, again, in an unusual spring, there were a series of events that occurred. We had notified Peguis that sandbagging would, in fact, be needed, and they were, in fact, busy working on that. We had the cold spell. We had the ice jamming, which is unpredictable: ice jams as to where they will form, how long they will stay, what the effect will be on them. Then we had a very quick melt. So, where there was an unusual set of circumstances to begin with, the ice jamming made things much more complicated, and then it was followed by the quick melt.

When I was up in Peguis, I got a tour of the community. I was shown around some of the areas that were much affected, and there were not only the areas of Fisher River itself, but there were creeks which run into the Fisher River. There was also water coming from overland flooding. So you had this culmination of several different events and several different supplies of water, if you will, coming together at the one time there.

The Province did provide unprecedented support there. We had one of the excavators up moving the ice through one of the main bridges in Peguis, that we found to be quite helpful, and the St. Mary's bridge on the floodway channel there. So we made sure that we were providing that. We did provide tubes for rapid deployment to both the Peguis and Fisher River communities, and I understand that they were deployed.

We continue to look for ways to, not only in the Peguis area but throughout all of Manitoba, to look at how the circumstances came together this year,

what can be done better, because there's always something that can be done better, what we have learned, and how to apply that in future years.

* (16:10)

Mr. Gerrard: I'm, you know, interpreting what the minister is saying. I'm hearing that the Province was not able to do as good a job as they could've done in terms of predicting what the height of the water was going to be, and that that was, indeed, part of the problem.

I'm also, quite frankly, a little bit surprised in terms of the communication being required through INAC, because, I mean, in the rest of the province these flood bulletins get out, not just to municipalities, they get out to the radio stations, they get out very broadly in a lot of different ways, and so I just don't find it as credible as some might in terms of the excuse that it was just one person in INAC who caused all the problems.

Ms. Melnick: I think the member has misunderstood what I've said there. He talked about notification to the communities. There was a point person in INAC whose job it was to communicate, and we were told to communicate through them, and that's what we did. I had the discussion with the chiefs actually about this point, and they too were very disappointed that this person had seemingly disappeared without anyone knowing about it. I think it might have come as a bit of a surprise to them as well.

Mr. Chairperson, there is also communication through EMO to communities and there was discussion. I know the flood co-ordinator there was working very, very hard. There are traditionally 11 homes that are at a low level that are sandbagged pretty much every year come what may. He was working very hard with the community as well to determine where to go next. So there was a lot of effort put in by the local community, certainly by Water Stewardship. But I don't think that anyone could've predicted exactly how all of these events would align themselves for this year, and not only in Peguis. But when we look at, for example, the crest—the Red River crest that lasts for about three weeks, that is unprecedented and that was unpredictable. When we look at the ice jamming that, unfortunately, happened just north of Breezy Point, again, unprecedented and unpredictable.

So, when we look at the unusual situations that developed this year, I think we need to take the lessons that we learned from that to, again, improve

forecasting where we can, to improve mitigation where we can, to improve whatever we can, wherever we can.

Mr. Gerrard: I hear the minister. I certainly would not have called the ice jamming north of Selkirk unpredictable. The people there locally were telling me this was going to happen a month before it happened, and if the department was caught out, then, you know, the department has some work to do obviously.

One of the areas which has been, of course, a major concern is Lake Winnipeg and the phosphorus in Lake Winnipeg. Let me move on to that and ask the minister, is the minister's target still a reduction in 10 percent of the phosphorus in Lake Winnipeg?

Ms. Melnick: I have to take issue with the comments of the member about the flood-fighting efforts in Manitoba this spring. People worked very, very hard long before it was coming. We had an enhanced ice-mitigation strategy, which had been developed since last year. People worked extremely hard and, I think, over all, did a very good job in a very difficult circumstance. So I think the minister is taking a rather cheap shot at all Manitobans, not only people who worked for the provincial government, but people in their local communities and volunteers who went out day after day after day. You know, I know people took a day off work. We had several Hutterite colonies who came and, you know, God bless every one of them. They came and worked very, very hard, all because we believe in helping neighbours when our neighbours need our help, and the kinds of shots that the member is taking are cheap, and I think are not at all warranted when we look at the big effort.

Mr. Chairperson, our government has said all along, and I know three of my colleagues here who have worked very closely with their communities, the Member for Gimli (Mr Bjornson), the Member for Selkirk (Mr. Dewar), the Member for Interlake (Mr. Nevakshonoff), our government has said all along these were unprecedented conditions. There are lessons. There are a lot of lessons to learn from that and we are learning from them, but to be so uncharitable in his comments to the vast number of people who worked so hard throughout this is, I think, a real cheap shot. Some of the volunteers put their lives at risk to help other people.

When we talk about the 10 percent target of phosphorus for Lake Winnipeg, that was an initial target. Certainly, we are looking at ways to improve

the quality of Lake Winnipeg in a lot of different areas. I'll remind the member, he's voted against every one of the budgets that we put more and more into the research, more and more into application of the legislation and regulations we've put in place. We are continually looking at water quality. We are continually looking at research, providing monies for research and then turning what we find into legislation. For example, we were the first to bring in the phosphorus reduction in the dishwashing detergents and we've left that bill open to other items. I know the member wants to take full credit for that, however when he sat federally, the credit they can take is cutting the Department of Environment by 229 workers.

We will be replacing our targets as we get more information. We're working with the consortium; we're working with the Lake Winnipeg Stewardship Board and other experts in post-secondary educational institutions, so we are continually working to improve the quality of Lake Winnipeg, but also throughout the entire watershed. Everyone knows it's not just Lake Winnipeg that's important here, but it's all the rivers and streams. We're the only jurisdiction in North America, I believe, to have buffer zones along every waterway. The buffer zones increase depending on how the water is used, particularly if it's used for a drinking water source.

So there are a number of different initiatives that we have. The water conservation initiative that we've brought in, WaterSmart, was very, very successful. We sold more than three and a half times what any jurisdiction who has used this model has sold, so it's not just improving water quality, but it's also making sure that there is lots of good water for Manitobans in this generation and all of our generations to come.

Mr. Gerrard: I think the minister has deliberately misconstrued what I said. I have great praise for all the volunteers who helped, people who worked so hard on the flood situation. The point that I made was that the predictions in terms of the ice jamming, the predictions, from what I can see, on the Peguis River, were not made at a level which we would really need them to be made, and not made at a level which people on the ground north of Selkirk were suggesting that things were likely to happen.

The Member for Selkirk says that this happens every year. Well, okay, then you can comment elsewhere.

I would ask the minister what her targets are for nitrogen on Lake Winnipeg.

* (16:20)

Ms. Melnick: I'm glad to hear the member attempt to clarify his comments. His initial comments are on record in *Hansard* now, and will be there.

Mr. Chairperson, the Clean Environment Commission has just given us a report that states we need to keep nitrogen in balance with phosphorus; the ratio they've given us is 15 nitrogen to one phosphorus. We will be maintaining that balance, working towards maintenance of that balance. We are looking to achieve the interim level of phosphorus and nitrogen loads but, again, it goes back to my original comments around phosphorus where we are continually looking at research, supporting research and finding ways to improve the water quality in Lake Winnipeg, particularly around the issues of algal blooms. So we are following, we have accepted in full, the recommendations by the Clean Environment Commission, and we'll work to those targets.

Mr. Gerrard: Could the minister tell what plans she and her department have to restore the pickerel fishery at Lake Winnipegosis to a reasonable level?

Ms. Melnick: We have reduced the daily angling catch from six to four fish in Lake Winnipegosis, and have delayed by one week the opening day of the recreational fishery in the north basin. This is primarily in the Red Deer River area.

Again, this is a precaution for spawning fishery. We bought out the three-inch perch fishery—I believe that was last year—and we're monitoring the utility of the Fairford fishway. So we are looking at Lake Winnipegosis as a whole and, again, we continue to work with the local communities around these initiatives.

Mr. Gerrard: The minister was very definitive that there was no artificial flooding south of the floodway. My understanding of what is artificial flooding is the water going up above what it would have gone up had the floodway not been operating. It's my understanding that the water did rise south of the floodway when the floodway gates were raised and that there is a fair sense that the water levels even now may be a little bit higher than they would be if the floodway gates were not raised.

I think that there's probably at least a number of people who live in that area who would disagree that there wasn't elevation of water above what it would have been in a fully natural state without the floodway and without the floodway gates.

Ms. Melnick: The member actually is incorrect in his definition, and I'll just go through that again. If you look at the floodway rules, rule No. 1 is normal operation: maintain natural water levels on the Red River at the entrance to the floodway channel until the water surface elevation at James Avenue reaches 24.5 feet or 7.46 metres or the river level anywhere along the Red River, within the city of Winnipeg, reaches two feet below the flood protection level of 27.83 feet or 8.48 metres.

So when you talk about maintaining natural water levels, it's sometimes referred to as the state of nature, and the terminology is not south of the floodway; it's upstream. So maintaining the state of nature upstream was achieved this year. What is the definition of maintaining the state of nature? It is that the water level upstream, when there was no flood in place, such as in 1968 which was the year of development, that is the water level that is looked at. So the water level upstream in 1968, when the floodway was developed, is maintaining the state of nature. It's not saying that water levels won't rise upstream when the floodway is utilized.

Mr. Gerrard: Of course, upstream is south, so we're talking in slightly different ways of expressing the same thing in terms of the floodway. Where we are looking at the impact with respect to—1968 is a particular year, a particular water flow, and, obviously, I don't have the specific calculations here. But certainly there's, I think, some continuing concern that operating the floodway raises the water levels upstream and that that has an impact on people.

But I leave that at this point and I'm going to pass it back to the MLA for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson). Thank you.

Mr. David Faurchou (Portage la Prairie): Just out of the room at this point in time and checking up on the progress to repair the breach in the Assiniboine River Diversion at Portage la Prairie. It is progressing. However, the seminar that the University of Manitoba is putting on this weekend—participants are not yet secure that they'll be able to drive in, so we'll have to look to alternative modes of water travel.

I believe the minister is aware and I don't know, though, whether her department is working with Dr. Goldsborough in that respect at the present time.

* (16:30)

Ms. Melnick: Certainly, we had a good conversation about this about 48 hours ago, and, as the member knows, the research station is accessed through the diversion embankment. We know that there are repairs needed due to the spring water flood situation. Those began earlier this week. My understanding is that those will be completed Friday evening or Saturday morning.

They're getting to quite an interesting time in the repair in which, as the opening gets smaller and smaller, the velocity, and I would imagine the cfs, would increase substantially as well. So this is kind of a tricky time to repair.

We are aware of the important event that is taking place at the research station. There have been communications with them. They have put in place their own contingency plans for bringing people in, and, certainly, there will be communication as to what will happen throughout the weekend to have that embankment accessible again.

Mr. Faurchou: The minister mentioned the point that the contractor emphasized to me just a few minutes ago was that the northern portion of the dike to which they are coming from the south with the repairs is getting farther away from them. As the water velocity increases, it's washing away, so they're making progress but the dike continues to erode.

The problem is not one that we haven't had in the past, Mr. Chair, and I want to ask the minister whether there is a long-term recapitalization—capital for re-investment and rejuvenation of the Assiniboine River channel.

Ms. Melnick: Well, as the member knows, when the channel is used, even not as heavily as it was used this year—and I think the Member for Portage la Prairie would be the one most aware of the heavy use this spring—there can be wear and tear, particularly around the fail-safe area which is an area of focus for both of us.

The repairs will be done through the department of MIT, and I would refer the member to the minister of MIT for specifics on their plan.

Mr. Faurchou: I appreciate the handoff that the minister just did in regard to the reconstruction of the channel, and I will pursue that very vigorously.

I do want to though, make mention of my private member's statement the other day regarding government employees and how very fortunate we

are in this province to be served by individuals completely dedicated and committed to serving the best interest of all Manitobans. In particular, I cited two members of your department that stood, too, at the flood control gates in Portage la Prairie when the ice jam released and mammoth chunks of ice that were striking the dam control structure so violently that their lighting actually went out because the mercury vapour lights, when significant gyration takes place, actually go back to the restart mode. Virtually the entire night they had to operate the gates in darkness because the lights were constantly in restart mode. I think perhaps we need to learn from our experiences and maybe the mercury vapour lights are not the best lighting, although they do do the job but, under adverse conditions, which I've described, were not at all satisfactory.

With the reduction of the water level so very quickly—although we all recognize was necessary—on the river between Portage la Prairie and Winnipeg—there has been some substantial erosion of the riverbanks. I know that the minister in year's past, the department has done a fair amount of work on the riverbanks to prevent them from further erosion. I wonder whether the minister can say whether the department is planning for this activity to continue because there are a number of places where, if the riverbank is not attended to right now, the erosion will begin to eat into the dike system. If you lose your dike system, it's very difficult to re-establish those dikes because, even if they are reconstructed, the soil hasn't had that chance to settle and is not as effective as the existing one.

So I'm leaving with the minister right now that it's very, very important that the bank erosion situation be addressed in a timely fashion, and does the minister have plans to do so?

Ms. Melnick: I think the member might be referring to the dikes between Portage and Baie St. Paul specifically? Yes. About 90 kilometres worth. There will be certainly a very detailed assessment when the time is right. Again, that would be in MIT, where you would—you can call them back as many times as you want, I think. Twice I think.

But I'd like to thank the member for his comments about the provincial civil service. I think they are the unsung heroes of our province. The work that goes on, not only in Water Stewardship, but in every department, every day. Rarely do you see a headline of oh, this went very, very well or a difficult situation was averted or you know, what you

were talking about? The two gentlemen around the failsafe. There might be a line or two, but certainly it's a privilege to be a minister in a government, and it's very, very nice to hear a member from the opposition being as complimentary, and I think well-placed complimentary, as you've been towards the efforts in this recent flood-fighting effort.

* (16:40)

Mr. Faurischou: Those two individuals I referred to were actually in the dam operating the gates at the time that the ice came through. I appreciate the interest. I'm hoping the minister has a mechanism of communication between herself and colleagues in this regard, because I think it's very important that we preserve the infrastructure that we already have investment in and for a little bit of repair work at this point in time, we save substantive monies in future.

I would like, though, on that point, to ask the minister in regard to her meetings with the conservation districts. In her opening remarks, she made mention of increased resources going to the conservation districts and also to a number of additional conservation districts being established and look to establish more yet. But the additional responsibilities that the conservation districts have taken on is worrisome to a point where the existing infrastructure that they are responsible for is once again, not being maintained to points where the conservation districts are wanting.

Mr. Chair, my question to the minister is, the communications that she has between her department and the conservation districts, is she keeping those channels of communications open, and she is fully apprised of the true need for additional resources? In my way of thinking, the conservation districts are truly where the rubber hits the road and value for dollar investment through the conservation districts as they work with the rural municipalities in Manitoba is a very, very cost-effective way of investing in infrastructure.

Ms. Melnick: Well, and again we find areas to agree on, is the very important work of the conservation districts. I believe that it is the people who are in the communities who know what their communities need and the conservation districts are certainly a very positive channel to communicate with the local community and understand their needs and make sure that we're working in a partnership which is—the conservation district framework is, in fact, a partnership.

Last year, the conservation district program funding exceeded some \$9 million. Of this, the provincial government contributed \$6.3 million. Every year we've seen increases since 1999, often in the number of CDs, but certainly in funding. The conservation districts leveraged over \$1.5 million in additional provincial, federal and non-government funding. This is through programs other than the base funding. For example, Fisheries Enhancement fund, the Sustainable Development Innovations Fund, those sorts of things. Partner municipal governments contributed themselves \$1.9 million to the Conservation Districts program last year, and I'd like to thank them for their contributions and for their commitments.

There is, as the member would know, the framework document that is currently under discussion. I might just bring him up to date. Currently, it's being reviewed. The first draft went out and we created a committee to review the second draft with AMM and MCDA, and they've again been very good partners in this exercise. Currently, the second draft is out for comment by AMM to their municipal councils and by MCDA to their individual conservation districts. The review is focussing a lot on a fair and equitable funding formula. It's a little bit tricky, so we're happy that all the partners are at the table and are giving their comments and suggestions.

Another area of discussion is what would be an appropriate appointment policy for a seat on a conservation district. Different districts have different ideas, but I think we're going to be able to come to an overall framework there.

The target for the first fiscal year under which the framework document would become live, if you will, would be the 2010-2011 fiscal year. That's where I think we would be seeing a lot of improvements. This is the first time in 40 years that there's been an actual review of the conservation district framework, so it's not surprising that there's a lot of discussion, and that a lot of that discussion is around funding. Of course, a funding formula that might have worked 40 years ago may not be the funding formula that will be working today.

Also that conservation districts have moved and again, I applaud and respect that they've moved from municipal boundaries to watersheds. So you have conservation districts, some of them working on three different integrated watershed management plans. Some working on one with other CDs. That,

too, is the way to really deal with the inherent nature of water as it flows through our province. Again, funding is always a big issue, but also the organization and, I think, the re-organization that we're going to be seeing will be showing a lot of improvements as well.

Mr. Faursehou: Well, on the topic of conversation, this is to back step just a little bit. I don't think it's been quite 40 years. I'm not quite that old. I was a founding member of the Whitemud Watershed Conservation District, which was the original conservation district.

Is the city of Winnipeg a member of any conservation district? I know I asked this question a couple of years ago, and the answer was no. Has any progress been made towards having the city of Winnipeg represented on the conservation districts that surround the city?

Ms. Melnick: No, there has not been discussion coming from the City of Winnipeg, but I think the member highlights an important issue which is in a fair and equitable structure for funding. Brandon, too, has not yet joined, but there is discussion certainly. There is a councillor, Errol Black, on the City of Brandon council, who's very supportive. We are supportive of them joining. One of the major discussions under fair and equitable funding is, in fact, around Brandon joining. Which conservation district and what does that do to the base that that conservation district would have compared to all the others.

Mr. Faursehou: I think the minister does recognize that it is important to have all municipal jurisdictions part of conservation districts because of the nature of the responsibility of the conservation districts ultimately impact on the urban areas.

Having said that, Mr. Chairperson, I would like to ask the minister about the relationship her department has with the federal government's PFRA, Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration, as this agency has a tremendous history in the area of conservation district support programs. If she could enlighten me as to the relationship that her department has?

* (16:50)

Ms. Melnick: Well, again, I truly do thank the member for the question because it allows me to put on record that we have a very good relationship with PFRA. I particularly want to make the point, I remember the day the deputy told me that PFRA had

called, this was before the flood was beginning, had called to offer their services in any way that would be helpful. So I think that speaks volumes for the character of PFRA and the relationship that the department has nurtured with them and continues.

So I guess what I'm saying is a public thank you to them. In fact, they were extremely helpful in providing survey crews, which were used to forecast levels for emergency sandbagging. So they were actually out there measuring, surveying and making sure that safety was issue No. 1 for many communities in Manitoba.

They have just come out with a new mandate, which is very, very positive. The department met with them, probably, within the last month. I don't know when you found time, during the flood, but thanks for doing that.

Their focus is on climate change; beneficial management plans for farms; wetland protection, which is, I know, an issue important to yourself as well; phosphorus research in soils, which complements a lot of the work that we're doing around, not only phosphorus research in the water, but how it gets into the water; ecological goods and services; looking around research policy; and then implementation of that policy.

I'm sure you can see many areas where our partnership can continue to grow.

Mr. Faurchou: Well, thank you very much for the answer. I truly concur with the minister in regard to the department and the professionalism that's over there and the experience, and I'm glad to hear of a close working relationship.

We only have 10 short minutes left and two questions that I have to get off here. First off, the Lake Manitoba Water Stewardship Board recently held hearings for the catchment basin for Lake Manitoba. The one, in particular, that I attended in Portage la Prairie was very well attended by others. The report, I understand, will be coming in the not too distant future. I'm looking for the minister's support for that organization to continue after their current mandate. So that's my question this afternoon.

Ms. Melnick: Yes, I just wanted to add one more point that the member might be interested in. PFRA, although, I'm sure he's well aware, is the partnership we have around Shellmouth Dam enhancing water retention. So, again, that's been a very positive working relationship.

As for the Lake Manitoba Stewardship Board, I'm very supportive. It was under my watch that the board was established. Certainly, it's a board that we're looking at having continue on into the future, sort of, the brother or sister of the Lake Winnipeg Stewardship Board. I think I might say it all when I almost misspoke the name of the current chair, Gordon Goldsborough, who I almost called Golden Goldsborough a few minutes ago. Certainly, he's someone who I think we all have tremendous respect for, and it's not a surprise to me that the meetings that are being held with the board are going very, very well, that they're dealing with real issues. I look very forward to receiving their report and then continuing to work with them.

Mr. Faurchou: A quick snapper in between that, seeing that you raised the water retention issue. You know very well that the publications from the Department of Agriculture, the challenges of living here in Manitoba are twofold. One is inundation or flooding; the other is drought.

I know the Department of Conservation prepared a report that identified more than 400 potential retention areas within the province. That report, is it within your department? Do you still have that report, because I believe it's something that we should be reviewing and actively pursuing? I've got a Treherne Dam proposal is the one that comes to mind.

Ms. Melnick: Yes. The report does reside within Water Stewardship now. It was one of the reports that came out resulting from 1997. Again, the member, being much closer to the land than I am, would certainly understand the cycles of feast and famine. I always find it interesting that the history of Manitoba has been one of 30-year cycles of very dry periods and then wet periods.

Certainly, we're in a wet period now, and I find it interesting that when the European settlers first arrived, we were in a wet cycle. If we had been in a dry cycle, they probably would have continued on to British Columbia, and the history of our province might have been quite different.

There were reviews done of several different areas of water retention. You mentioned the Treherne Dam. The result of the review is, it was decided that the Shellmouth was the best method of retention for large, not only large quantities of water, but for large periods of time as well. So that's where that review landed. It doesn't mean that it can't be looked at again.

Mr. Faursehou: I would concur with the department personnel about the benefits of water storage at the Shellmouth Dam, but further on down the stream, there is a very viable option and that being the Holland No. 3 Dam, just by Highway 34. I think I've mentioned it before.

But the last question this afternoon, we only have a couple of minutes, and that being the Rural Municipality of Portage la Prairie yesterday declared a state of emergency, based upon the number of road washouts emanating from Rat Creek. It is of grave concern to the municipality that there are a number of farmsteads now cut off because of that tributary to the Whitemud River. I know the department has been studying that particular watercourse, and I'd like to know where the department is as far as the study towards mitigating the flood damages through a diversion channel.

Ms. Melnick: Well, I must say that's the most creative way I've ever heard the member bring up Rat Creek.

We have received the information from the R.M. of Portage that we had requested. Also, I understand, a helicopter has been chartered to really get a good visual of what is happening there; aerial, video data would be helpful.

The report is in draft stage. I know the member appreciates Water Stewardship has been extremely busy over the last number of months. They are looking at having that completed by the fall, and it will be presented to the R.M. of Portage at that time.

Mr. Chairperson: The hour being 5 o'clock, committee rise.

EDUCATION, CITIZENSHIP AND YOUTH

* (14:40)

Madam Chairperson (Bonnie Korzeniowski): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply has been dealing with the Estimates of the Department of Education, Citizenship and Youth.

Would the minister's staff please enter the Chamber.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): Madam Chairperson, I just wanted to correct something that I noticed in *Hansard*, and I'd like to take this opportunity to do so.

At the beginning of one of my answers, I identified that the COLA would be 0.375 percent COLA adjustment, and subsequently in that answer, it came out as 0.37—pardon me, 0.37 percent at the beginning of the answer and 0.375 at the end of the answer. I just want to make sure that it's clear with the member that the COLA adjustment is 0.37 percent.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): The minister was going to get us a calculation on what increase that would be on \$1,000, and we were just getting to that answer and the gavel came down on the table.

Mr. Bjornson: Actually, the calculation that I can provide for the member isn't on \$1,000, but we've actually provided it based on the average monthly pension. The average monthly pension is \$1,975. So the COLA adjustment 0.37 percent will mean \$7.31 per month on the average pension of \$1,975—*[interjection]*—\$7.31 per month.

Mr. Schuler: I appreciate that. I would also like to ask the minister about a report that came out from the Canada West Foundation. It's a troubling report, and I know we've asked the minister questions about this in question period. Unfortunately, question period is exactly what it's called. It's called question period, not question and answer period, and thus did not actually get any answers and uniquely enough that's the way it's termed.

I'd like to ask the minister: In light of the fact that Manitoba now has the highest dropout rate of any province, can the minister tell us what he would like to see going forward dealing with this issue?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, actually, we have been dealing with the issue of students that are leaving school ever since we've been in office. There are a number of different variables that might impact the decision for a person to leave school, one of which is the opportunity for employment. Manitoba's economy in the past few years, as the member knows, has been steadily growing and there's been a lot of employment opportunities as well as some of the efforts that have been made to improve earning potential for Manitobans. So you do have a tendency for young men, in particular, to leave school early for the purpose of employment.

I know in a conversation with the Minister of Education from Alberta a couple of years ago when the tar sands were pumping out oil at \$158 a barrel, or whatever the top price had been, they were losing an incredible number of young men from the high

schools where the average education for the Manitoba male—pardon me, an Alberta male, would have been grade 10 education because of the lure of the big money that could be made in the tar sands, and the resulting impact on the local economies of other employment opportunities for young men, but that's just one of the factors.

There are a number of factors that we have to take into consideration: challenges of remoteness in geography and what that means for Manitoba learners; the gap that we have in achievement for First Nations and Aboriginal persons in Manitoba, which is something that was addressed at a national summit in Saskatchewan in February. Certainly that's been a priority for our government with the Aboriginal Education Directorate and the Aboriginal Education Action Plan, an incredible strategy that—that same report the Canada West Foundation notes, and I quote, that Manitoba has, and I quote, made closing the educational gap for Aboriginal students a priority with new pilot projects which could serve as a model to the other provinces. That was, quite frankly, recognized at that summit in Saskatchewan, that we are doing a lot to bridge that gap.

The First Nations population is the youngest population in Manitoba. It's the fastest growing population in Manitoba, and we have a number of initiatives to address educational issues that are related to that population. We continue to work with INAC, as it is their fiduciary responsibility to address the educational needs of First Nations learners, and we continue to find ways to partner with INAC to improve the gap that we have in their achievement.

There are a number of other initiatives that we've implemented for at-risk learners. One of them is the Intensive Newcomer Support Grant, because another group that is potentially at risk of dropping out of school is war-affected children. We've done something that no jurisdiction has done before: we've introduced the Intensive Newcomer Support Grant, which is targeting war-affected students who bring with them a litany of issues that you and I can't even begin to imagine the experiences that they've endured in refugee camps or the circumstances that put them in the refugee camps in the first place, where they might have an eight-year period before they've had any formal education. So we're targeting funds to support the war-affected children.

Madam Chairperson, we have targeted programs in low socioeconomic neighbourhoods where the success rate has been identified as being lower for

student retention and student success. So we have community schools initiatives that are engaging community in being a part of that educational institution. Certainly, I, as a teacher, know that not everybody is ready to learn as a teenager in school. As a teacher, I know that if they're not prepared to learn in school, then many times they come back to the adult learning centres and the other high school equivalency programs that are available to them later on in life when perhaps they've made that realization that a formal education is an essential part of who they would like to be.

Another thing, I'll leave this last comment with the member. Madam Chair, we have been engaged in an engagement assessment, and nobody has done that before. We're trailblazers in this one. We're the pioneers in this one. Because we know that students mentally drop out of school, or start to think about dropping out of school as early as the middle year grades, grades 7 and 8. So we are assessing how engaged students are in the school and in the community of their school because we want to see what we can do better and how we can provide more resources to support their learning so that they don't think about leaving school and so that they are engaged and continue to be focussing on a formal education as high school students.

It's not just a matter of what we're doing next, but it's a matter of all these things that we have been doing to support our learners and our learners who are at risk.

Mr. Schuler: On April 20, when the Premier (Mr. Doer) was asked this question from the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen), the Premier said that at the Frontier School Division, and you compare those to other investments, and in communities where we don't even have high schools, there are 13 First Nations communities, remote communities, and I take it he's talking about First Nations communities, most of them that don't even have schools.

Can the minister tell us, having had a look at this report, did it actually include First Nations communities?

Mr. Bjornson: I believe that's the case. You know, I do read a number of reports that come across my table, but I leave that—I believe it does include First Nations learners. I think it's fair to draw that conclusion because, as I said, the Canada West Foundation identifies the initiatives that we've brought forward. I'll have to check for sure that

they're included in the statistics, but I think that would be the case.

Mr. Schuler: The minister might want to check to see if it's the difference between on-reserve and off-reserve, because the on-reserve education I don't think would be included in a public education document. So if the minister would check on that, because that makes the big difference in the numbers.

Again, I'd like to point out to the minister that the answers are fairly weak when you consider that we have the highest rate, and he mentions the economy. Well, you know, there are other areas that had a more booming economy than ours, and he even went into that. Yet ours is the highest rate. The average rate for Canada was in and around 9 percent. Manitoba's was 12.6 percent. That's substantially, substantially higher than the national average.

I'm dismayed that the minister is taking it so cavalier. I mean, he lists all the things he's done over the years, and yet a report comes out that states, by and large, those aren't working very well.

What we'd like to hear from the minister is what is he going to do going forward, how's he going to deal with this. The minister might indicate this could have been an anomaly, and he certainly would be looking at the numbers to see if that's continuing even to this present day. But to just trot out tired old programs that, if this number is in fact true, those programs aren't working as well as they should be.

To say, well, it's a mindset and we'll catch them later—I mean, he trotted out all kinds of reasons and rationales. That's probably not what the committee's looking for. That's probably not what Manitobans are looking for. What they would like to know is: In light of the fact that we are the highest dropout rate, certainly as of this last report, what's the government going to do about it? Is the government going to take this seriously and actually deal with the problem?

Mr. Bjornson: One thing that I neglected to mention in my last answer was the fact that the graduation rate in Manitoba has gone from 71.1 percent in 2002 to 79 percent in 2008, so for the member opposite to suggest that the programs are not working is inaccurate.

I've had the opportunity, as I said yesterday and the day before, to visit a number of different schools throughout the province of Manitoba, and one of the things that I've really been amazed at, quite frankly, is the variety of programming that is available that

has been developed by the local school board in recognition of the specific needs of their students. I cited a school that I visited in The Pas where some of those individuals that are at risk of not completing high school would be young mothers. Now, this particular school in The Pas had a tremendous program where they could take their high school equivalency program while their own children were being looked after in an infant lab at an early childhood education centre in the school, right in the school. In fact, they would get a credit for their participation, in some cases, in running that infant lab and working towards perhaps a career in early childhood education.

Another example that comes to mind, when I was first appointed five and a half years ago, was two days later opening the renovations to the Argyle alternative school, an open campus concept where students who have trouble in the traditional setting of a high school find their own rate and their own pace of programming where they determine how they can best learn and when they can best learn. That is a very successful program in the inner city, in the Point Douglas area.

So it's not just the innovations that we've been doing—and we've been funding a lot of them—it's also the innovations of the local school boards and the initiatives that they take. We've supported initiatives in I believe it's Thompson—I'd have to check for the member, but we provided funding to support an initiative in Thompson where they were concerned about high dropout rates for teenage males attending a high school in Thompson.

So there are a number of different initiatives under way, a number that have been successful, a number that we continue to monitor to see how successful they are, and, if they're not, then we'll find out why and we'll go back to the drawing board, but the best solution is the solution, often, that's locally driven and we support those local solutions to the best of our ability.

But, again, the graduation rate in 2002 was 71.1 percent; in 2008, 79 percent. Thirteen hundred more students graduated in '08 than five years earlier. Again, a lot of what we have done is being reviewed, and we're looking at what we do next, because we know that the programs that have been implemented are making a difference and we know that the programs that we're going to support in the future will make a difference.

But I think, Madam Chair, it's key that the member understand that the work that we're doing on assessing engagement is something that many other jurisdictions across Canada are very interested in the outcome of that particular exercise. Many other jurisdictions want to see what we discover from our students about how they feel about school and how engaged they are in school and how they are engaged as a learner, because this is groundbreaking work that's being done, and that will likely have an impact on what we do in the future to support learners who are at risk of leaving school.

So I would argue with the member that we've done a lot, but I'll also tell the member that we're going to do more because our commitment is to provide the best learning opportunities for all learners, regardless of where they live in Manitoba, regardless of their ability, and regardless of their socio-economic circumstances, we are going to do our best to provide the best possible learning opportunities for each and every student that goes to school in Manitoba.

* (14:50)

Mr. Schuler: Before we go line by line, I would like to once more take this opportunity to—I would like to thank each and every individual who is involved in the education of our students, and we would like to thank the front-line workers, the teachers, administrators of schools, school boards. I'd like to thank the parents for everything that they do for our schools. Personally, I'm a very big supporter of the public school system. I believe we are producing outstanding, well-rounded, well-educated students.

There's always room for improvement. Nothing is static. I would encourage the minister to try to not become static as he seems to be coming on some issues, but we've encouraged him on those particular ones and would now be prepared to go line by line through the budget.

Madam Chairperson: Resolution 16.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$27,925,000 for Education, Citizenship and Youth, School Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to

Resolution 16.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$10,497,000 for Education, Citizenship and Youth, Bureau de l'éducation française, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to

Resolution 16.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$266,706,000 for Education, Citizenship and Youth, Education and School Tax Credits, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to

Resolution 16.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,110,157,000 for Education, Citizenship and Youth, Support to Schools, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to

Resolution 16.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$6,920,000 for Education, Citizenship and Youth, MB4Youth, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to

Resolution 16.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$46,779,000 for Education, Citizenship and Youth, Capital Funding, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to

Resolution 16.8: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$350,000 for Education, Citizenship and Youth, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of the department is item 1.(a) Minister's Salary, contained in Resolution 16.1.

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

The floor is open for questions; seeing none—

Resolution 16.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,704,000 for Education, Citizenship and Youth, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to

This concludes the Estimates for this department.

The next set of Estimates that will be considered by this section of the committee is the Estimates of Competitiveness, Training and Trade.

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

The committee recessed at 2:55 p.m.

The committee resumed at 2:59 p.m.

COMPETITIVENESS, TRAINING AND TRADE

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 the Department of Competitiveness, Training and Trade.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade): It's my pleasure to be here to speak again on behalf of the Department of Competitiveness, Training and Trade.

In looking at the year past, it would have been difficult to anticipate let alone predict the dramatic financial and economic changes and shocks in events worldwide that have occurred in a relatively short time span. Canada is not immune. It's faced some extraordinary challenges in the past few months dealing with a global economic downturn that really is unprecedented in recent times.

* (15:00)

Throughout and despite all these challenges, Manitoba's economy has shown remarkable resiliency. It's been the most stable economy in Canada over the last decade enjoying continuous and steady growth. This stability is based on a number of important factors including a diversified economic base producing a wide range of consumer and industrial goods, a relatively large service sector that tends to be more stable through the business cycle and more diversified export markets.

Manitobans enter this period of international economic uncertainty in a position of relative economic strength. According to Statistics Canada, Manitoba's estimated 2008 gross domestic product

growth rate was 2.4 percent. In fact, this was the second best provincial increase in Canada trailing only Saskatchewan's 4.4 percent growth. Canada's growth, by comparison, was only 0.5 percent. Manitoba at 2.4 percent growth in 2008 follows up a 3.3 percent increase for 2007. This was also the second best provincial increase in GDP and above the average 2.7 percent rise for the rest of Canada. As well, Manitoba's private capital investment in 2008 increased by 15.2 percent, which, in fact, was the highest among all Canadian provinces.

For each of the last three years, 2006 to 2008, Manitoba's annual growth in gross domestic product has exceeded that of Canada. In addition, the Manitoba economy grew by a total of 10 percent since 2005 compared to only 6.4 for Canada as a whole. Manitoba's 10 percent rise was also the second largest increase for the last three years and I compare that 10 percent expansion in our economy to Québec at 5.5 percent, Ontario at 4.6 percent, Saskatchewan at 6.7 percent, ahead of even Alberta's at 9.1 percent and B.C. at 7.3 percent.

Manitoba's unemployment rate in 2008 was 4.2 percent, the lowest rate in over 30 years. Overall labour income grew by 6 percent helping to boost retail sales in the province by 7.1 percent. Last year as well, Manitoba marked its best employment growth in six years. Many employers, in many sectors but especially in construction, continue to have concerns about the skilled labour shortages going forward. The unemployment rate fell to its lowest level in over 30 years in 2008.

The opportunities in the labour market have not only motivated a record participation rate, but also in 2008, a record employment rate. In other words, a record number of adult Manitobans actually had jobs in our labour market.

Madam Chair, as of January 1, 2009, Manitoba's total population was estimated at 1,213,815 persons, an estimated increase of 13,337 persons or 1.1 percent since January 1, 2008. As minister, I was pleased to celebrate Manitoba passing the 1.2 million milestone with students out at Sargent Park School.

Manufacturing shipments in 2008 grew by 1.8 percent to a record \$16.4 billion and international exports increased 5.1 percent with exports to the United States up by 6.2 percent.

Manitoba is again expected to post one of the best economic performances in Canada in 2009.

Independent forecasters predict the economy will again outperform Canada's for the fourth consecutive year remaining relatively stable this year even as the global economy contracts.

I'm very pleased, Madam Chairperson, that a new Canada-Manitoba Economic Partnership Agreement or EPA was recently signed. This joint federal-provincial agreement will see each government commit \$25 million for a total of \$50 million over the next four years to build upon a history of successful federal-provincial economic development partnerships.

The agreement provides a means for federal-provincial co-operation to further strengthen and diversify Manitoba's economy, enhance the skills of Manitoba's work force and promote regional development. Canada and Manitoba will work together with economic organizations, non-profit community organizations and service delivery agencies on five strategic economic priorities that focus on: (1) supporting knowledge-based research and development, (2) increasing value-added production, (3) supporting trade and investment promotion, (4) enhancing productivity and competitiveness, and (5) promoting economic development through tourism opportunities.

Our commitment to Manitoba's labour force is a critical factor toward our economic success. In 2007, we pledged to create an additional 4,000 apprenticeship training spaces over the next four years. To that end, we've made significant investments in the last two successive budgets and we remain confident that we will achieve our goal.

In the last two years, we've increased our support to Manitoba's apprenticeship training program through a suite of tax credits such as the Co-operative Education and Apprenticeship Credit, the Journeypersons Hiring Incentive, and the new Advanced-Level Apprentices Hiring Incentive tax credit. New legislation has very recently been introduced to enable the apprenticeship system to be more responsive to the diverse needs of apprentices, employers, industry and educational institutions.

A marketing and promotional campaign to increase awareness of apprenticeship opportunities and position apprenticeship as a post-secondary education option of equal choice has been recently launched. If my friends in the Chamber watch *Hockey Night in Canada*, or *CSI*, they may have seen the television ads now running.

Through the network of employment centres, Employment Manitoba continues to assist over 30,000 Manitobans annually to access appropriate training and employment supports to meet current and future labour market needs and address individual career goals.

Madam Chair, The Canada-Manitoba Labour Market Development Agreement, the LMDA, and the Canada-Manitoba Labour Market agreement, the LMA, provide funding to over 8,000 individuals annually to access skills development and training in a variety of occupations throughout the province.

Hydro-electric development and Red River Floodway construction are supported through the Job Referral Service, or JRS, which refers qualified workers to fill job opportunities on these projects. Rebound is a new initiative with Manitoba Family Services and Housing. It will be introduced in the coming months to provide training and employment supports to those Manitobans affected by the current economic downturn in order to reduce their need for income assistance.

Madam Chair, the Hydro Northern Training and Employment Initiative, or HNTEI, is a multi-year training and employment strategy. It provides a variety of training interventions and supports to enable northern Aboriginal people to prepare for jobs on the proposed northern hydroelectric projects. The initiative is scheduled to conclude on March 31, 2010.

Manitoba sector councils continue to be key partners in linking industry, labour, education and government in skills development. Through our sector councils we continue to implement new and innovative industry-relevant training programs and provide workplace skills upgrading and training for over 12,000 individuals per year.

Madam Chair, The Manitoba Sector Training Network and the Workplace Essential Skills Training Centre have co-located at 1000 Waverley Street in Winnipeg, creating a state-of-the-art training facility for innovative industry-based training programs designed to increase productivity and global competitiveness of Manitoba businesses.

Madam Chairperson, Manitoba's committed to implementing training strategies for those industries particularly affected by labour market changes as well as for unemployed and underemployed people who require upgrading. With the federal government's Community Development Trust we are

implementing a \$1 million Forestry and Mining Training and Workforce Retention Initiative and also the \$4.5 million Northern Essential Skills Training Initiative .

We are committing to ensuring that Manitoba's employers' human resource needs are being met through increased government efficiencies and providing exceptional service. The Advisory Council on Workforce Development Act was passed in June, 2008. The advisory council will consist of representatives from sector councils, from labour, from education and from government, and will provide strategic information to the development of Manitoba's labour market development strategy as well as advice on labour market policy, programs and trends.

A comprehensive integrated service delivery model for employers is currently being developed to provide employers with a main contact who will assist them directly with their current and future human resource requirements. This value-added service will assist employers to attract, retain and retrain existing workers and new employees as well as assisting those individuals who require upgrading or skills enhancement to maintain or improve their employment status with a specific employer.

Developing and expanding the small business sector in Manitoba is also a priority. The Canada-Manitoba Business Service Centre, a federal and provincial partnership, has celebrated more than a decade of successful operations. This centre continues to provide business information, entrepreneurial training and business counselling services to Manitobans in both Winnipeg and rural centres via 33 regional offices located across the province. As well, the centre continues to operate the e-learning network, a videoconferencing network that broadcasts approximately 200 business seminars per year to over 1,000 seminar participants.

*(15:10)

The Business Start Program is a loan guarantee program to assist entrepreneurs in establishing new businesses and creating jobs. Since inception, the Business Start Program has supported the start up of over 1,000 businesses, leading to the creation of 2,500 jobs and has resulted in an—

Madam Chairperson: Order, please. The honourable minister's time has expired.

We thank the minister for those—Honourable Minister.

Mr. Swan: I know the previous Estimates ended a bit sooner than we had expected. I'm presuming that my staff is here and ready to go.

Madam Chairperson: We'll come to that in a minute.

We thank the minister for those comments.

Does the official opposition critic, the honourable Member for Carman, have any opening comments?

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): My comments won't run over the time period. First of all, though, I want to thank the minister for his co-operation in the past year. I know we've had some issues on a constituency level and on a Manitoba level, and certainly, I appreciate his co-operation. We've solved some of the issues and some others are ongoing, but I appreciate his co-operation.

Certainly, Manitoba's stable economy is helping us somewhat in this economic downturn. It's easy to look back and you can pull—and I know both sides of the House do pull our own particular numbers—however you want to push it, but I am more interested in future plans and how the department runs and that's where my questioning will come, both to get a better idea for myself how the minister's office and the department runs, and also just for general information because we are interested in what happens in the future in Manitoba. Like I said, it's easy to look back. It's all about planning for the future.

So with that, we will touch in to the Agreement on Internal Trade and The Labour Mobility Act. Madam Chair, I know we had a bill briefing the other day and it's brought out a few more questions for us—apprenticeship training, training programs, competitiveness. It's about competitiveness and promotion outside Manitoba. We will get into that also, and, of course, labour and wages and tax regimes. Those are all very pertinent topics for us here, so I certainly look forward to this number of hours that we're going to be here.

With that, Madam Chairperson, I'll turn it back to you.

Madam Chairperson: We thank the critic for his remarks.

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.(a) and proceed with consideration of the remaining items referenced in Resolution 1.

At this time, we invite the minister's staff to join us in the Chamber. Once they are seated, we will ask the minister to introduce the staff in attendance.

Mr. Swan: The four horsemen have arrived here. First of all, Hugh Eliasson, who's the deputy minister of Competitiveness and Training; Bob Knight, who is the senior executive director; and, as well, Jim Kilgour, who is the industry development financial services executive director; and Craig Halwachs, who is the financial administrative shared services executive director, or the money man, as we call him.

I think my staff are pretty much ready to go here.

Madam Chairperson: Does the committee wish to proceed through these Estimates in a chronological manner or have a global discussion?

Mr. Pedersen: Global.

Madam Chairperson: Is it agreed there'll be global discussion? *[Agreed]*

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Pedersen: First of all, we'll start out with a—if the minister could provide me with a specific list of all staff in the minister's and the deputy minister's office.

Mr. Swan: Yes, in my office I have Greg Merner, who is my special assistant; Andrea Dyck is my executive assistant who works in my constituency office. Right now I have two additional staff: Lisa Rowe, who is my secretary, Alison DePauw, who is my administrative secretary. Right now, the other secretary position is vacant as Cindy Field is on maternity leave until May 22, '09.

Within the deputy minister's office, of course, there are Hugh Eliasson, the deputy minister; Gail Lemoine, who is the secretary to the deputy minister; and Barb Wild, who's the administrative secretary.

Mr. Pedersen: I need a list also of all the political staff, including the named positions and whether it's full-time equivalent.

Mr. Swan: Yes, those are the two people that I had already mentioned: Greg Merner is my special assistant, and Andrea Dyck is my executive assistant. They are both full-time positions.

Mr. Pedersen: Could the minister give me the number of staff currently employed in the department? That would be within the entire department then.

Mr. Swan: Yes, as of April 1, 2009, there are 442.8 positions in the Department of Competitiveness, Training and Trade.

Mr. Pedersen: Sorry, I should have included, how does that compare with—do you have the numbers for a year ago, April 1, '08?

Mr. Swan: The number of positions as of April 1, 2008 was 438.3.

Mr. Pedersen: Do you have a listing of the vacant positions? If you have a listing, I would appreciate the listing of all vacant positions.

Mr. Swan: Yes, I do have that information as of April 15, '09, in front of me. I can read it into the record or we can simply provide that to the Member for Carman, whatever's easier.

Mr. Pedersen: You can just provide it. I take it that it's a fairly length list?

Mr. Swan: To save time, we'll simply provide that to you.

Mr. Pedersen: I need a description of any positions that have been reclassified within the department in the past year. Again, we're talking fiscal year, I assume, right? April 1 to April 1.

* (15:20)

Mr. Swan: Yes, I'm told there were nine positions that have been reclassified in the last fiscal year, and I'll answer the questions in terms of fiscal year, you're right.

So there is a planning and policy analyst. The old classification was F14; the new classification is now a PM2.

Senior financial analyst in financial admin services, old classification was P7; it's now an F14.

Administrative assistant within Manitoba Trade was an AY2, now an AY3.

Manager, Agribusiness within Manitoba Trade was a G3, is now an IC3.

The executive director of Employment Manitoba was an XM3 and is now an XM2.

The executive director of Industry Training Partnerships was an XM1, now an XM2.

The director of Client Services and Operations within Apprenticeship was an EAC and is now a P10.

The head statistician with Manitoba Bureau of Statistics was an SS3 and is now an ER4.

Finally, the senior consultant to Advisory Council within Employment Manitoba was an X04 and is now a PM3.

Mr. Pedersen: Madam Chair, I would like to have the names of the staff that have been hired in 2008-2009, and that would be to April 1, 2009, including whether they were hired through competition or by appointment.

Mr. Swan: Yes, again, in the interests of time, I do have this information in front of me, and I can read it into the record or we can simply provide this to you.

Mr. Pedersen: If you just provide it, that's good.

Mr. Swan: We will do so.

Mr. Pedersen: Madam Chair, the question is: You listed some vacancy. You're going to give me a list. I'm looking at staff years that are currently filled. Are you going to give me a percentage or an actual list of staff years being filled, realizing that you are going to provide me with a list of vacant positions?

Mr. Swan: Yes. I see here in the vacancy report, as at March 31, 2009, there were 35.2 vacancies at the beginning of the month of March '09; six were vacated during the month, 7.2 were filled. Total vacancies at the end of the month, and, therefore, at the end of the fiscal year, were 34, and the vacancy rate, as a percentage of approved full-time employees, was 8.15 percent.

Mr. Pedersen: Madam Chair, I ask the minister when there are contracts being awarded, is there a dollar value? What is the dollar value when 10 contracts being let out, where they have to be tendered, or versus they can just be directly awarded by the department, is there a dollar value?

Mr. Swan: Just to make sure that I'm providing information that the Member for Carman is looking for, are we talking about contracts of individuals, or all contracts to individuals, to agencies, to

companies? If he can just give me some direction, I can try and help out.

Mr. Pedersen: All contracts, whether it's individual or companies.

Mr. Swan: Well, the great majority of contracts are tendered every two weeks. There's actually a document prepared to confirm any untendered contracts over the value of \$1,000. My staff have actually prepared a list of all of these untendered contracts over \$1,000 for the fiscal year. I see there are seven of them, and I can highlight them or go through them if the member wishes.

Mr. Pedersen: Again, if you just provide the list. We can go through it, if that's acceptable.

Mr. Swan: We will do that, thank you.

Mr. Pedersen: So those were untendered contracts. What about the tendered contracts? I'm sorry, I kind of missed in here. I didn't hear you correctly. There must be tendered contracts going out also.

Mr. Swan: All other expenditures, of course, are set out in the Public Accounts, and they're—as you probably noticed looking through the financial documents, this CTT is a department that actually contracts quite often with outside agencies to deliver programs and services. It's a pretty full list, and it is fully disclosed through the Public Accounts process.

Mr. Pedersen: How many positions have been—have there been any positions relocated in Manitoba, either from rural into northern or into Winnipeg, or vice versa. Just relocated around the province and, if there are any of those positions, the rationale for doing it.

Mr. Swan: I understand from staff that in the past fiscal year there were no positions that were transferred as you've indicated.

Mr. Pedersen: Perhaps I didn't catch it in the minister's opening statement, but what I'm looking for is a status update on any new departmental initiatives announced, undertaken in 2008-2009, and new department initiatives. Would you include a dollar value on those too.

Mr. Swan: Well, maybe what I'll do, because there were so many good things that are going on, I did run out of time, so rather than continue to simply read out the rest of my speech, I will highlight some of the things that I didn't have time to get to.

One of those projects is the single window for business initiative, which is intended to make

business services easier to find, use and understand. One of the best examples is the BizPaL service, which is an on-line service combining federal, provincial and municipal permit and licence information. It's been introduced in Winnipeg, in Brandon, in 16 other municipalities now housing the great majority of people in Manitoba. I was recently in Portage la Prairie, in months gone by I was in Dauphin and Steinbach, and I hope to be in a number of other communities in the months ahead.

We're also working on the Manitoba Business Portal to provide access to the province's on-line business services and information.

The Invest in Manitoba Web site is being developed to focus on the international investment community.

The Web-based TAXcess service allows more than 40,000 Manitoba businesses to file their returns and pay provincial taxes on-line in either official language.

The First Peoples Economic Growth Fund has now been established to help First Nations business development.

We're continuing to work on the development and role out of the Métis Economic Development Strategy.

We continue to develop and expand the Provincial Nominee Program for business. I'm sure later on in the Estimates, the Member for Carman (Mr. Pedersen) will want to ask more details of how that program is going.

Of course, on the trade front, we're always looking for ways to continue doing the best we can to promote Manitoba abroad and increase our trading opportunities.

Of course my department is somewhat connected and involved with the development of CentrePort Canada, Manitoba's new inland port.

Also, as my friend indicated in his opening comments, my department has been very busy over the past year dealing with the labour mobility provisions of the internal trade agreement. I expect later on we'll get into more details of what that has required.

* (15:30)

Just a couple of months ago, together with the Minister of Advanced Education and Literacy (Ms. McGifford) and the Minister of Education,

Citizenship and Youth (Mr. Bjornson), we announced our five-year international education strategy that will begin the process of developing a more targeted, efficient and effective approach to the international promotion of education to assist in attracting more students to Manitoba, which is actually a winning situation for a number of reasons.

So those are some of the other initiatives I didn't get to, but if the member has more detailed questions, of course, I'll do my best.

Mr. Pedersen: I was looking for also some financial costs for some of these, particularly you mentioned things like BizPaL and Business Portal and that. There must be a financial amount designated for those programs and that's what I would also like to hear.

Mr. Swan: Do you want me to try and assemble this as we go, or do you want to ask about specific programs and we can then give you some better detail? What works best for you?

Mr. Pedersen: I think if you can assemble these programs that you have talked about, if you can assemble a dollar value on those and whether it's read into the record or whether you provide it for me at a later time, I'm just—and again I just use BizPaL and Business Portal as examples, you know, the dollar value that was assigned to those programs within your department. So whether you read them in now, whether you have them now or whether you provide them to me, I'm good with either.

Mr. Swan: Okay, well, we can start down that road. Some of the initiatives I mentioned such as BizPal, the Single Window for Business red tape reduction, Single Window for Business service excellence training initiative—those types of initiatives are located at section 10.2.(e) of the Estimates, and in 2008-2009, the expenditure on all of those ventures was \$344,500. The budget amount for this year for 2009-2010 is \$348,300, so an increase of about \$3,800. That's for salaries.

In terms of other expenditures, in 2008-2009, those expenses were \$98,800. In fact, for 2009-2010, that's been reduced to \$97,300.00.

I can continue with each other area. I'm just a little concerned that it's not going to be the most efficient for me to pick through seven different areas. I expect that, over the course of our Estimates, as we turn to those areas, maybe if you and I remember, we can get those numbers. But most of them you will find—all of them you'll actually find in the purple

supplementary information booklet that will maybe help focus where we're going.

Mr. Pedersen: That's fine and when—again, we're not sure whether we're here tomorrow or not, but I'm sure over either tonight or over the weekend I will come up with those particular questions.

I want to turn to ministerial travel, and I want to preface this by saying I am not going to be criticizing the minister for travel because I realize how important travel is in terms of promoting Manitoba. But, having said that, I also still need to know where the minister has travelled and how many out-of-province trips the minister has taken in the past year and the pertinent details such as purpose, dates, who went, who paid, what were the costs. Let's just start with that for now.

Mr. Swan: There were eight out-of-province trips that I can tell the member about. Obviously there's more travel within the province of Manitoba but out of province, No. 1 was a trip last April to Banff, Alberta. Minister Ambrose pulled together ministers from the western provinces responsible for economic development and science and technology. My total costs were \$676.43, and my deputy minister came along on that trip as well. Do you want me to continue going through more or do you want to ask questions about—if you have any questions, just flag it and we'll be flexible.

The second trip was in May 2008. It was a trip to Québec City, Québec to meet with M. Bachand, who is the Québec trade minister. I also participated in a Manitoba delegation reception which actually indirectly resulted in Manitoba now hosting Centrallia, a trade fair, which will be held in October 2010. Total costs of that were \$1,940.30. On that trip were Diane Gray, who is the Deputy Minister for Trade and International Relations, as well as David Kennedy.

In June of last year, there was the Committee of Internal Trade Ministers meeting. That was in Vancouver, B.C. Total cost was \$1,066.49. My special assistant, Greg Merner, came with me for that trip.

Number 4 which was, I guess, the biggest trip in August and September was a trade mission with Manitoba businesses to Columbia and to Brazil. My total cost for that trip was \$7,151.09. I had with me the A-team: Mr. Velasco from Trade, as well as Arturo Gardewig, who's also in the department, as

well as Alfred Durhack. As I say, it was the A-team that were doing the work down there.

Madam Chairperson, the fifth trip was all the way to Grand Forks, North Dakota. I spoke at the Connect—U.S.A./Canada economic summit, which was a project of Winnipeg and Grand Forks to promote more trade up and down the Red River corridor. My expenses were the grand sum of \$236.64. From my department were Don Callis and Bill Ratcliffe.

The sixth trip was in November to Minneapolis Minnesota. I attended the Midwest Higher Education Conference, or MHEC. The Midwestern Higher Education Compact is an organization of various states that have banded together to try and promote exchanges and save money for higher education. They have a very good presence at the Midwestern Legislative Conference, which I know some of your colleagues attended. They've been trying to get Manitoba to join, so I thought I would go down to find out whether there's appropriate value. In fact, I was travelling solo that time. The costs were \$1,741.69.

Number 7 was a trip to Ottawa, Ontario for the Committee on Internal Trade Ministerial meetings. That was \$1,585.93. With me were my special assistants, Greg Merner as well as Alan Barber.

Finally, in March of this year, right at the end of March, I attended a trade event in Montréal, Québec, promoting Manitoba and speaking to the French Chamber of Commerce in Montréal. We only have the approximate costs right now, but that was \$1,400. Greg Merner, my special assistant came with me for that trip.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you for that information. On your trip to Columbia and Brazil, what specifically were you doing? Who were you meeting and any other pertinent information you care to share with that?

Mr. Swan: The trip to Latin America was suggested by Alfred Durhack, who's the manager, I believe his title is Manager of Emerging Markets. Latin America is seen as a potential growth market for Manitoba businesses. The trade mission was set up largely for the benefit of Manitoba's agricultural manufacturers. I believe there were seven or eight that came along, including Wallinga Inc., which has its manufacturing facility in Carman.

* (15:40)

For Columbia, it was an opportunity really to profile Manitoba. As the member may know, Canada and Colombia have actually negotiated a free trade agreement. That free trade agreement is now making its way through the Canadian Parliament. As it turned out, we were the first Canadian province to have a mission, or, at least a ministerial mission, to Colombia.

Before I got there, the companies had gone to a city called Medellín and had a very positive experience. I joined them in the capital, Bogotá. Gave a speech to the Colombo-Canadian Chamber of Commerce, which I didn't even know existed, to profile where Manitoba is located, the expertise we have, and to open up some doors for Manitoba businesses to trade in Colombia.

Then we went on to a city called Porto Alegre in Brazil. Porto Alegre is the capital of Rio Grande do Sul, which is the southernmost state in Brazil. There was a fraternity agreement that was signed more than a decade ago with that province, or state, which shares a lot of commonalities with Manitoba. It's a strong agricultural state. It also has a very strong manufacturing sector. It enjoys a fair amount of ethnic diversity. So there seem like a lot of reasons to promote that relationship. Soon after I became minister, in April 2008, the governor of the state, which is about 10 million people, Yeda Crusius, came up and visited Manitoba. We entered into discussions about kindling or rekindling that relationship. I was very pleased to sign a memorandum of understanding with Rio Grande do Sul to promote co-operation and mutual promotion of the other.

While in Porto Alegre, there was a very large agricultural trade show called Expoiner. I had the chance to go there to see the Canadian pavilion, to speak at the opening of that pavilion and, indeed, the Manitoba delegation—not just the government people, but the businesses there—made such an impression on the Brazilians that Manitoba actually won recognition for being the top international delegation at that event. In addition to those companies, there was also Miles Glasman, who was judging some cattle and livestock. There are continued trade missions now and trade delegations that are going from Manitoba and Rio Grande do Sul, and vice versa.

My counterpart minister, who also stands 6'6", came up here a couple of months ago to further those relationships. Apparently, they also went on to visit

Agribition in Saskatchewan to see what other possibilities there are, and we are certainly hopeful that that will continue to be a valuable relationship for Manitoba to promote.

Mr. Pedersen: At that particular trade show, Madam Chair, did Manitoba have a booth there or was it the manufacturers that had the booth, and was there any financial input from Manitoba government, if there was a booth there?

Mr. Swan: In fact, we did have a Manitoba booth there. The government of Rio Grande do Sul very generously donated to the province of Manitoba the space for the booth. It was more than a booth. It was an entire enclosed area and, indeed, Manitoba's companies, in addition to Wallinga, companies like Buhler were able to use that site for meetings, to promote their products. Every time I stopped by, there was a constant flow of people coming in to see what's going on. I can tell you, and I'm sure you won't be surprised to know that Manitoba's expertise in farm machinery is well appreciated in Brazil.

It's not always the easiest country to do business with. There are a lot of obstacles for companies that wish to start doing business there. But there were certainly a lot of positive things that happened. One company, Westeel, I understand no sooner had their representative back to Manitoba, than he planned another trip down there to try and get ahead.

I've just received some information in the past couple of days that a number of companies are going to be back with an even bigger presence in Porto Alegre for the show this fall. I understand that more than one Manitoba company is now making arrangements to containerize and ship some of their equipment. So, rather than just glossy brochures, they're going to have their products on the grounds. I'm hoping, as I know the member does, that it's going to wind up with more sales for Manitoba companies.

Mr. Pedersen: Well, there is huge potential in Brazil, along with some political instability and whatnot there, too. When you were in Brazil, did you meet with JBS? JBS is probably the world's largest meat packer and they now own Tyson Foods in the U.S. You weren't in contact with them?

Mr. Swan: I didn't specifically have a meeting with that industry. If they have a presence in Rio Grande do Sul though, they would have had representatives at the various trade associations that I met with. I learned how the system works in Brazil. In Rio

Grande do Sul, they were very powerful—I guess we would call them sector councils, comprised of different organizations. I did meet with the agricultural sector council, which is comprised of all companies. If that company has a presence in Rio Grande do Sul, I'm quite certain they would have had a representative there, but I will ask my trade people, none of whom are actually present, but you and I got down this road and it seemed like a good place to go. I can try and get more details when my trade people are at the table.

Mr. Pedersen: Just on the one other trip, you mention Centrallia, and I'm not sure I pronounced that correctly. Québec City, I assume your French has brushed up quite well when you were in Québec City, but if the minister could give me some details about that. He's talking about a conference coming here in 2010. Give me some background of that, please.

Hon. Bill Blaikie, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Swan: Yes. The trip to Québec City, the original intention was to try to attract to Manitoba a major international trade show called Futurallia. It's an annual trade show. The general routine has been to alternate that show, one year in France, the next year outside of France. Québec City hosted it. I believe it was the first time that a North American city had hosted Futurallia. It was primarily a Francophone meeting at first, but, over time, it's expanded to include countries from all over the world. I believe this year the meetings are in Dubai. I don't know how many Manitoba companies are going. There were about 70 delegates from Manitoba representing a wide range of businesses in Manitoba who went along. We did meet with the Futurallia people to make them aware of the vibrant French community here in Manitoba, our vibrant business community, to try and encourage Futurallia to come here. The compromise, I suppose, or the *[inaudible]* that was reached, the Futurallia people were very interested. They still want to keep their cards close to their chest in terms of having a main event in France every second year, but they suggested that maybe we could use their plan, use their name, and we decided that Centrallia was a good name for the trade show.

It will be happening, I'm told by Mariette Mulaire of ANIM that the date is vingt dix, vingt dix, which means the 20th of October, 2010. It's going to be an international trade show which will, we think, attract companies from around the world to Manitoba.

Mr. Pedersen: So it's a trade show, but does it have emphasis on any particular trade? Is it labour skills, or is it machinery, or is it all of the above? Just give me the flavour of the trade show.

Mr. Swan: The idea is to bring together sellers and buyers. There is, as I understand it, and if I'm leaving any details out I'll make sure that I get you more details as we continue our Estimates—the idea is to bring together companies and the way it's been explained to me, they use the equivalent of a speed-dating service. Companies who register for and come to the conference list their priorities and their interests and the Futurallia system tries to line up sellers and buyers, potential partners, potential joint ventures, and allows businesses in the course of a relatively short period of time to make a number of relevant contacts with other companies.

So the idea for Centrallia was, of course, sort of a play on Manitoba's central location in North America. We expect that there'll be a lot of interest from Francophonie, from Québec, and from the French-speaking areas of the world. It's also her idea to promote this throughout central North America which, economically speaking, is doing quite well, all the way from Winnipeg down to Missouri to Texas. Hopefully, the Midwestern states will respond and be quite interested in—really, the first time that Manitoba will host an event of this size and of this calibre.

* (15:50)

Mr. Pedersen: So CentrePort would certainly fit in with this type of—when you're talking about international trade and fitting through there. Just one other question on that: Does not Québec and France have some sort of mutual trading agreement? Are you aware of this?

Mr. Swan: You know, again, without my trade people I'm going to tread carefully to make sure I don't put anything incorrect on the record.

Premier Charest, actually, got the ball rolling about a year and a half ago by discussing whether there was interest by the other Canadian provinces and by the federal government of sitting down, not just with France, but the entire European Economic Community. Monsieur Charest kind of, I think, really used as a springboard the linguistic and historic links between Québec and France and has sought a mandate to maybe carry this forward. The Council of the Federation, which is a meeting of the premiers, endorsed the idea, and, as Manitoba's

international trade minister, on Manitoba's behalf, we certainly gave the federal government the green light to at least go ahead and start studying the possibility of some kind of trade agreement between Canada and the European community.

There was some initial work done and now there are some steps being taken to actively sit down and see whether Canada and the European community can work out some form of trade agreement. There's a very strong push by Québec which, frankly, I support on behalf of Manitoba to see if labour mobility can be a part of this, so that we can take advantage of all of our historic, cultural, ethnic, linguistic links with European countries and try and facilitate, not just the flow of goods and services, but also the flow of people between Europe and Canada.

I understand that the initial meetings are going to be taking place starting on May 6. It's going to be a very, very preliminary discussion just to see what's on the table. As the member knows, there have always been some issues between Canada and the European community, especially on agricultural products. I believe, and I know our producers believe, that Europe would be a very, very good market for our agricultural products if we could simply get fair access to those markets.

So the federal government has signalled that they appreciate the role the provinces play, the importance of the provinces, and they've made it quite clear the provinces will be entitled to be part of those discussions as they go forward. I told Minister Day that I appreciated that, and, indeed, we would be an engaged partner to make sure that we can get there.

Mr. Pedersen: Okay, so staying in with travel—and I will just come back, when we talk about trade later, I will talk to the minister about, I believe, there is some sort of labour agreement between Québec and France, but we'll get into that when we get into training and AIT and that type of stuff. So we'll leave it for now.

What I want to know, has this department paid for any travel for the Premier (Mr. Doer) or a delegation led by the Premier out of your department, and if you can provide any details on that?

Mr. Swan: Just to make sure that we put the right information on the record, I'll take that as notice, and I will give you that information.

Mr. Pedersen: Okay, so then I'll just be very specific about it then. What I'm asking for is out-of-province trips—no, sorry, I'm on the wrong line here—any travel by the Premier or a delegation led by the Premier that was paid for by your department and, if so, the pertinent details of the travel location, purpose, states, costs, who went, et cetera.

Mr. Swan: We will provide that to the member.

Mr. Pedersen: Any significant out-of-province travel taken by staff, other than what you've mentioned, that were travelling with you, but this would be travel that staff has taken. Outside of these trips that you mentioned before, in terms of details of the trip, purpose, dates, who went, who paid, and what were the costs.

Mr. Swan: If we could defer that until my Trade staff are here, because I do want to put on the record that we do get a lot of mileage out of our Trade staff. Pretty much every week there is somebody somewhere in the Trade area of my department that is travelling abroad on Manitoba's behalf.

So, I'm not refusing to answer the question, I would just prefer that we could defer that until my Trade people are here. Again, they can provide a global number. It may be helpful for us to highlight some of the different countries where we are engaged and the nature of some of the shows, expositions, events, missions that staff are attending because it will take some time to give you those numbers on the record.

Mr. Pedersen: We'll defer that until Monday, again, assuming we're not here tomorrow—House leaders haven't been around to tell us when we're going to be here. So that's fine, we can defer that.

What I'm looking for is for information on any staff paid for in your minister's office or by your department by another government department or Crown corporation. In other words, any of your staff picked up costs of your staffing by other departments?

Mr. Swan: Yes, I don't believe there are any such costs for the last fiscal year, but if we uncover something—it would be a surprise to us—but if we did, we will let you know.

Mr. Pedersen: And of course, vice versa. What I'm talking about is you paying for staff in other departments and other staff working in your department that have been picked up. So you take

that under advisement and you will get back to me on that if there is such.

Mr. Swan: Agreed.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): I'd like to thank the Member for Carman (Mr. Pedersen) for affording me the opportunity just to ask a couple of questions, fairly short questions. It's in regard to the Provincial Nominee Program, and ask the minister how many certificates would have been issued to his department in the last—even if he can give me the last three years. I just want to get a general indication of if we're seeing increase in numbers.

Mr. Swan: As the member's aware, the Provincial Nominee Program is, of course, divided between two departments. The Department of Labour and Immigration has responsibility for the general Provincial Nominee Program, if I can call it that. Within this department, the Provincial Nominee Program for Business is housed. I have at my fingertips the last two years. In fiscal year 2007-2008, I understand that 51 initial business investments were made by program nominees reflecting a total direct investment in the province in excess of \$16.2 million, which was the largest year to date. In 2008-2009, there were 54 initial business investments projected to be made by program nominees reflecting a total direct investment of—actually twice as much—of \$33.5 million.

Madam Chairperson in the Chair

So I have those two years at my fingertips. If the member wants, I can undertake to provide the numbers for fiscal year 2006-2007, as well.

Mr. Lamoureux: Yes, I would welcome getting those for the last five years. I appreciate you already have given me two. If we can go back five years, I think that would be quite adequate if you could.

* (16:00)

Mr. Swan: I'm assuming the department can pull together, then, for the last five years. So that would be starting in fiscal year 2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007. I've given you the totals for the last two fiscal years. That's fine.

Mr. Lamoureux: If we take a look at the 2008-2009, it's a significant amount of investment, in excess of \$30 million, and it shows a great deal of economic benefit to the province. This is a program that I think has great value, and I'm anticipating that we're going to see ongoing growth in terms of the

number of applicants over the next few years. Is that a fair assessment on my part?

Mr. Swan: I certainly hope the member's right. I know that our Provincial Nominee Program for Business is an office which has tremendous diversity in terms of the people who work there. They provide very good service, both before potential immigrants come to Manitoba and also assisting business people once they arrive in Manitoba. They pride themselves on providing ongoing assistance and ongoing aid to some of our newest Manitobans because, obviously, starting in business, there are certainly a lot of things to learn, starting in business in a new country and a new province. But we are hopeful that the program will continue to grow.

Mr. Lamoureux: Does the minister have classifications of the types of businesses that are being started through that program?

Mr. Swan: We do have. I expect there may be a greater breakdown. I'm told that, since the PNPB program began in November 2000, there have been over 220 initial business investments. I'm told that about 60 percent of those were located in Winnipeg, obviously, with the remaining 40 percent being located outside of Winnipeg. So it's a pretty good breakdown between Winnipeg and the rest of the province. I'm told that, of 220 business investments, 64 of those have been farm-related operations. In many cases, the nominee immigrants actually help out in the succession plan for farmers who may be looking to sell, maybe don't have a son or daughter who are prepared to carry on the farm, and it provides a great source of potential buyers. So too with the other companies.

I have that breakdown between Winnipeg and outside of Winnipeg between farm-related and others. I don't know that we have a more complete breakdown, for example, of how many people started bakeries or how many people started welding shops. I don't see any greater detail here.

Mr. Lamoureux: If the department does, I'm not asking them to create work, but if they do have it, I would be interested in seeing that, along with—I guess it would be the final statistical type of question I'd be looking at—do you have a list of the top three countries where we're seeing most of these applicants coming from?

Mr. Swan: I appreciate the Member for Inkster's comment about his not making a make-work project, but certainly if we have a greater breakdown, I'll

undertake to provide that to you. As well, I know we do have figures on the top-source countries. I can tell the member that, for 2007-2008 fiscal year, the largest source countries were Korea with 37 percent of the business nominees, China was 30 percent, Iran was 11 percent, India was 12 percent, and the United Kingdom was in fifth place at 4 percent.

Mr. Lamoureux: [*inaudible*] more of a, I guess maybe of a favour, I could probably make the phone call. But a couple of years ago I was provided a kit, the PNP kit for business. If the minister could provide me the most up-to-date kit for that—in fact, if he could give me two kits, it would be greatly appreciated.

Mr. Swan: I'm happy to save the member a quarter and get him two of the current kits. Absolutely.

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): I do appreciate the opportunity to have a chance to ask a couple of questions of the honourable minister, so I thank the Member for Carman (Mr. Pedersen).

First, an observation, even though the departmental name seems to change almost every second year, you, Mr. Minister, are still well served by experienced and dedicated staff members that I see are familiar to myself and are continuing to serve the Province and your department.

The specifics of the program of Manitoba employment, or Employment Manitoba, that does provide support for individuals that are wanting to go back to school and take additional training and better themselves and the economy of Manitoba. In the case of the licensed practical nursing program, which your department has supported in the past, but in 2006 there was a policy change and a narrowing of criteria for eligible individuals to participate in the licensed practical nursing training program. It has, as I understand, not had too great of impact on the enrolment to date of the particular classes in the licensed practical nursing training.

But I would like to ask the minister—and I'm sure he's aware of the licensed practical nurses training program that rotates throughout the province, and I wonder whether the minister has, through his department, reviewed as to whether or not the change in policy of support in 2006 has had a measurable impact on enrolment in those classes.

Mr. Swan: I know it was a one-fact situation. I think that has created the member's question, I believe he and I discussed it informally the other day. To the best of my knowledge and the best of my staff's

knowledge, there was no change in policy by Employment Manitoba. That's not to say there wasn't a change in policy from—whether it was a college or whether it was something else, but let me just give a bit of background on where the program is.

The Employment Manitoba branch of this department administers really a wide range of employment and training programs and services in Manitoba, and eligibility for training support under these programs is generally determined by factors related to Employment Insurance, EI; or Employment Income Assistance, EIA; and low-income status.

Now, the Employment Insurance legislation is federal legislation. It doesn't actually stipulate or specify what courses can and can't form part of this training. But the decision Manitoba has made is that, to be eligible for tuition and living supports to attend training, an individual has to fall under one of two categories: they either have to be in receipt of EI or be unemployed and have had a regular EI claim that ended with the previous 36 months, or they have to have a maternity or parental claim that started with the previous 60 months.

So it's only under specific circumstances that someone who actually is employed full-time would be authorized to quit their employment to attend training. It's really intended primarily for people that are unemployed, either in receipt of EI benefits or having been there at some point in the past.

There are ways, though, for someone who's fully employed to quit their employment, but generally it's only if they're in a low-income position at or near full-time work, and their annual income has to be below, in many cases, the low-income cutoff. For example, a family size of four people, the cutoff would be \$34,007. If it's only two people, the family income would be \$23,804, and if it's a single person, the level is right around \$20,000. If somebody is working full-time below those levels, they may, then, be approved for training. If they are above those levels, generally Employment Manitoba wouldn't be involved. They would say, all right, if you want to quit your employment and take the program, you're welcome to do it. Probably, in that case, you should avail yourself either of your personal financial assets, or you should apply for a student loan to go ahead and take the program.

* (16:10)

Mr. Faurschou: I thank the minister for the response. I do fully comprehend the existing of criteria for eligibility when an individual is, indeed, gainfully employed. However, at the levels of income which the minister has mentioned, it is extraordinarily difficult to put away enough monies to effectively have food to feed themselves for the length of a one-year or two-year program.

I would like to leave with the minister the idea that we have to look at the areas where we are in deficit, as far as skilled individuals. Currently, nursing is one of those areas. If an individual is wanting to pursue that line of training and career, I think that we should be able to, within the department, look to supporting those individuals and assisting them in pursuing that type of career.

I look at the minister and I ask, if you have a \$20,000 income and you've got to try and put away enough money to feed yourself for 15 months, in the case of the licensed practical nursing program, I think you're going to be pretty much a lifetime at that level of employment before you're able to amass that type of reserve. I think the minister would agree with me. The rigidity of the current criteria, in the case of areas where we need to have skilled labour, I think, needs to be reviewed. Whether the minister has comment in that respect, I don't know.

Mr. Swan: I accept the comments of the Member for Portage la Prairie. The key thing to remember is that Employment Manitoba provides services. First and foremost, it's to assist people that are unemployed, in some cases underemployed, to try and find a career path that will allow them to be back in the job market.

There are certainly a host of other ways that we support the system. For example, for finding nurses, obviously, we've expanded the number of positions for nurses. We've also continued to support universities and colleges so that the cost of going to those institutions is reasonably low. We have a student loan system that is among the best and the fairest in the country, and we also do offer an expanded bursary system for people who have limited means. Of course, in Manitoba, as we look, there are actually fewer Manitobans than citizens of any other province that need to take out a student loan or that wind up having student loans at the end of their time in university or college.

So we've actually prioritized something that we think is appropriate to help those who are outside of the job market. I understand your comments, and I'm

hopeful that your constituent or anybody else who winds up in this position can avail themselves of student loan programs and other bursaries and other ways to enable them to get on to do whatever it is they want to do.

Mr. Faurschou: Thank you very much, Mr. Minister, for the response, and I do understand; I just hope that, within the criteria which you have outlined, the classes that are being offered for licensed practical nurses do, indeed, get enough candidates to make a full class, because we definitely need more nurses in the rural of Manitoba.

I would also like to say that if the department has within its purview ability to identify individuals for further training, if they are willing, that would ultimately help in actual instruction. What we are faced with is a situation in Portage la Prairie where we'd like to continue with our welding program, metallurgy vocational programming in the Portage school division up in and through the high school level. However, we are unable to secure a person with welding certification that could, in fact, actually be recognized at the instructor level.

Now I know there are firms in Portage la Prairie that would allow some of their welders to go and take this program, but, again, they're gainfully employed and, once again, don't fall within your criteria. But this is an example of where, if one person was allowed to get their instructor status, then it would ultimately assist in filling the void we have for persons that are wanting to be trained in the welding profession in the rural of Manitoba. If the minister has any comment in that regard.

Mr. Swan: If I can just finish off on the nursing issue—not that I'm trying to get the last word in, but I guess I am—the department, actually, in 2008-2009 has been sponsoring 646 Manitobans to go through the nursing program. I'm told that 438 of those are in the city of Winnipeg, 194 are—109, I'm sorry, 208 are outside the city of Winnipeg. So, again, it seems to break down reasonably fairly in terms of the in Winnipeg and outside of Winnipeg population. The department is actually spending almost \$3.5 million on those 646 Manitobans. So there is actually a pretty substantial take-up and a lot of interest by the department in doing that.

Moving over to the other question, and, first of all, as you and I have discussed, I'm a big fan of what's going on at Portage Collegiate. I know they've been successful in getting some funds under the Tech

Voc Initiative, and I know they have some ideas on some other things they can do.

I committed to going for a tour of that facility and only missed going through there the day that you and I were together in Portage because of an in-service, but you can certainly pass on my comments to the school, that they've got the right things happening.

In terms of the specific situation, you have highlighted one of the difficulties. Welders in Manitoba are very busy right now. We know that we don't have enough welders. You raise a decent point that, if we want to get more welders, there have to be some investments to help people get that area.

In terms of the Tech Voc Initiative, I mean, there certainly are ways for school divisions and schools to get more equipment. If you're talking about particular trainers, maybe we can have a bit more of a dialogue about exactly what the school would like to do, who they would like to have come in, and maybe we can have a bit more of a dialogue of a pathway to get somebody, maybe even somebody from out of province, maybe an out-of-work welder in Ontario who might be interested in coming out to the lovely community of Portage la Prairie and teaching in the school.

Mr. Faurshou: I appreciate the comment by the minister that there is, probably in other areas of the country, now looking for employment.

The skills training—Skills Canada is the terminology—came to Portage Collegiate some two weeks ago to provide information to all interested persons. It was, I thought, quite well advertised, but it was extraordinarily poorly attended. To my observation, I think that we as a province and through your department need to more effectively encourage young people to look at trades training as a very, very gratifying career.

*(16:20)

I don't know if the minister has talked over with the department or not, but the experience that I witnessed two weeks ago we don't—our rubber is not hitting the road in this case, as far as encouraging our young people to look at our trades here in Manitoba.

Ms. Erna Braun, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Swan: I'm certainly glad to hear about the member's passion for encouraging our young people to go into the trades. I think I agree with him completely that Manitoba, like probably every other

jurisdiction in North America, has, over the past several decades, neglected or put to the back burner the possibility of careers in the skilled trades. I'm very proud of the fact we've been able to encourage more young people to go on to University, to go on to college, but, frankly, again, over the past several decades, I don't think Manitoba generally has done enough to promote skilled trades.

I am pleased to tell the member that that is changing. To begin with, as I was telling the Member for Carman, we've been given some direction by the Apprenticeship Futures Commission on what we should be doing to try and attract more young people to take up skilled trades and encourage more employers to take on people, in many cases, in apprenticeship situations.

One of the recommendations was to embark on a public relations campaign, an advertising campaign to encourage more young people into the trades. We actually just began that campaign very recently. You may have seen the billboards up around the province. You may have also seen the TV ads. We're running them on hockey playoffs and *CSI* because we think that's where our target demographic may be, trying to get people to see that careers, not jobs, but careers in the trades are not what some people may have been led to believe. They're not necessarily dirty, unpleasant jobs. They're actually highly skilled, highly qualified jobs that require a pretty high level of brain power.

I've told this story many times and I may tell it again. I was out at the new terminal building at the Richardson airport and we were watching the drywallers work. Of course, you may have seen carpenters marking on the studs. Well, the drywallers were doing trigonometry, figuring out how to cut and how to install the drywall because of the rise and the run of that new terminal building.

I tell these stories every chance I get. We've got an apprenticeship department, which is working. We've got the new campaign. There is a Web site, which is www.apprenticeshipmanitoba.ca, which contains a lot of information, a lot of pathways for young people.

As you know, the member knows well, we've got the Tech Voc Initiative to help some of our secondary schools to upgrade their equipment. We're providing some upgrading so that teachers in the tech-voc area can actually go and do some development of their skills. They can get together with other tech-voc teachers to make sure they're

teaching the best, most modern approaches in the classrooms. So far, I've had the chance to visit a number of tech-voc schools across the province, and I'm impressed by the work they're doing, but I agree, we've got to all work together to get the word out about careers in skilled trades.

Mr. Pedersen: Keeping on a little bit of that theme, so you're advertising on *Hockey Night in Canada* and you're advertising on *CSI* trying to encourage more apprenticeships. I'm not criticizing you for doing the advertising. What means do you have for assessing the success of your advertising campaign?

Mr. Swan: As the member knows, we had promised in the last election campaign, and we continue to promise, that we are going to increase the number of apprenticeship seats in the province. Our promise was 4,000, and we're getting there. We are working with the colleges. We're working with other trainers, in some cases some private sector trainers and, in some cases, unions that can deliver training, to have those spaces available.

We also need to fill those spaces and to have an apprenticeship relationship begin. Not only do we need the training seat, we also need a willing apprentice, and we need a willing employer. So I think the greatest way we can measure the success is seeing how the actual number of people involved in apprenticeship programs continues to increase in Manitoba. It has been increasing. The number of apprentices has more than doubled since 1999. But, when I look at the level of business activity and some of the demographic factors, we know we need to keep adding people to the apprenticeship program.

Mr. Pedersen: Do you track, is there any tracking system for apprentices that are signing up? Are you doing any background as to why they're going into that field? Where did they hear about it? Is there any system of tracking apprentices coming into the apprentice trade?

Mr. Swan: We do certainly track every single apprentice that comes into the system. Of course, it's a very sophisticated need to maintain the number of hours that the apprentice is working to make sure they maintain their hours to move on to the next level. We do keep track of every single person that comes into the apprenticeship program.

Mr. Pedersen: I understand that you're tracking the apprentices as they're in. What I want to know is, do you have any method of tracking why they are picking that particular trade? Do you have any

method of tracking— I'm going back to your advertising campaign, is there any measurement of success in there? Do you have any system of going back to find out whether they watched *Hockey Night in Canada*? Is that why they got interested in that trade? Commercial companies do this all the time. They have tracking, and, goodness knows, political parties have polling and all that kind of stuff. Is there any system like that to track the effectiveness of your advertising campaign?

Madam Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Swan: The measure of success that we maintain is the number of people that are coming into apprenticeship programs. That means, of course, providing the training seat for them, when they take out their time in the college or another training facility and making sure that there are reasons for employers to take them on.

As the member knows, over the past short while, we've increased the number of incentives, the number of reasons for employers to step in and take on apprentices. We're finding other ways to incent employers to take on apprentices. The government of Manitoba itself has committed to improving the number of apprentices that we have. As well, in the Throne Speech, we signalled that new major capital projects in which the Province is involved will need targets for apprentices, which, we think, is going to continue to expand the willingness of employers to provide those apprenticeship opportunities.

Mr. Pedersen: Are there any particular sectors—and I'm talking about now, let's say, on the apprenticeship, the trades—that the minister feels will be hardest hit by the current economic downturn?

Mr. Swan: You know, Madam Chair, it's a difficult question to answer. I think really, rather than try and give you an answer in terms of each trade, it's more in terms of each sector. Manitoba's performing relatively well in these times, but we know there are some challenges in certain sectors. For example, the aerospace industry, the equipment manufacturing, farm machinery equipment companies are doing extremely well. They're taking on people—they can't find enough skilled workers to fill their spots. There are other sectors—mining and forestry being two of the main ones which have apprenticed positions—which, obviously, with commodity prices and demand, especially in the United States, have some real challenges.

* (16:30)

There are a number of apprentice trades in Manitoba. More so than individual trades being affected, it's more of the employment sectors that are being impacted.

Mr. Pedersen: None of us have a crystal ball as to what's going to happen by the end of the year in terms of layoffs and that, but we know right now that there are layoffs in mining, in forestry and some other sectors, just to name a couple.

Are there training plans in place in dealing with retraining those people? Like, what are we doing for those people that are being laid off today? What is happening with those in terms of retraining and getting them back into employment?

Mr. Swan: Well, it's a question that's going to take a bit of time to answer. Firstly, I can tell the member that very recently the Northern Manitoba Sector Council was formed. The Northern Manitoba Sector Council is a council of a number of large manufacturers and other companies in northern Manitoba. Manitoba Hydro is a member. HudBay Minerals, which, I understand, you toured a couple of weeks ago, is a member. Inco is a member. Louisiana-Pacific and Tolko are members. Crow Flight Resources, which is a more junior mining company, and I believe that Tembec in Pine Falls is now a member as well. There may be a couple of others that I haven't thought of.

That sector council has been a great partner, both in terms of giving us information on the ground of what's happening, but also on finding more ways for those companies to work together to meet their work-force needs. It wasn't that long ago that those companies may have seen each other as competitors for the same workers, which hasn't necessarily resulted in the best choices in terms of what kind of training is necessary.

One of the things that's happened is the sector council has agreed to step in where there are apprenticeships. Rather than someone's fortunes rising or falling with a temporary shutdown at Tolko or a slowdown at HudBay Minerals, the Northern Manitoba Sector Council has actually agreed to step in and be the employer of those apprentices, so that if there is a slowdown in one company but an opportunity in another, rather than the apprentice having to terminate their apprenticeship and then start all over again with another apprenticeship or another company, the sector council is helping workers and helping companies by letting them move seamlessly.

Now, we support the sector council with some money and some support. There are some other things that we're doing more directly. A couple of months ago, up in The Pas, I was with the Premier (Mr. Doer), and we announced a million-dollar allocation from the Community Development Trust, which is intended to assist forestry workers with some of these difficulties.

We have also announced a \$4.5-million Essential Skills Training Initiative for the north to make sure that employees have the essential skills, literacy being one of them, but others, document use, numerical ability, as well as six others, that I don't have on the tip of my tongue right now, to make sure that those workers are best placed to go and to be able to take on those challenges.

We've also worked with individual companies to see what we can do about helping them through some tough periods. As the member's aware, the Employment Insurance system—or, more properly, HDRC—allows companies to request a reduced work week so that they keep their employees on staff. The employees can receive some EI benefits. We have actually partnered with Louisiana-Pacific to go beyond that to see what we can do to help them keep their skilled employees, help them to create some new apprenticeship employees, even in these difficult times, and continue to advance their work force.

What I'm being told by those northern companies—in fact, what I've been told by most companies in Manitoba, which are experiencing some difficult times—is that they want to make sure they hold on to their workers. Nobody wants to lose workers because they have a lot of optimism that, when commodity prices turn around, they will, once again, be busier than they can possibly handle with the work force they have at the present time.

So, really, I guess the short answer to the question is that we're working with companies, we're working with the apprentices, we're working with the sector council, and we're working with the federal government to continue to allow the development of the work force, give reason for people in the north to stay in their communities with the hope and the promise that there will be jobs for them once things do recover.

Mr. Pedersen: In terms of some of the other companies, I know it's a wide range, but we're dealing with some of the furniture manufacturers here in the city and window manufacturers in

southern Manitoba that have had some layoffs; there are some reduced work weeks. I was just talking to an employee at one of the cabinet makers here in Winnipeg that they're on a four-day week. They were on a four-day week; they're on five now. They're going back to four, but there have been some significant layoffs in that plant, we know in other plants. Does your department track, have any tracking of those people that are laid off?

Mr. Swan: Whenever there's a major layoff—the Department of Labour, of course, must be notified when there's a major layoff by a company. The option of a labour adjustment committee is immediately presented. In the great majority of cases, the company and the workers agree to do that. So our office, Employment Manitoba, provides assistance that labour adjustment committee laid-off workers are screened into Employment Manitoba programs to try and get them employed with another employer as quickly as is possible.

We've also provided \$11 million under the Labour Market Development Agreement to increase the number of options for workers who find themselves in that position.

One of the situations that the member is talking about—certainly, Loewen Windows, being a major exporter of high-end windows and doors, has experienced some tougher times with some difficulties in their main export market in the United States. They are undergoing a pretty comprehensive, advanced manufacturing initiative to find out how they can reduce waste, how they can up-skill their workers to get the most out of their workers, how they can produce more product at a lower cost and also get more product out of their footprint. They have every expectation that things are going to turn around and they're going to be very busy.

We've given them a loan under the Manitoba Industrial Opportunities Program to assist them with their manufacturing processes. If you know Charles Loewen, who's the CEO, he and his management team are a very bright, very savvy group. I think all of us send our best wishes that they're going to keep working on this and be there to take advantage of things when the U.S. market turns around.

Mr. Pedersen: It's always in a company's best interest to try and retain people, if at all possible, and to keep track, but I'm more interested in the department's role in this. Do you keep track of demographics of the people that are being laid off? Do you have some system of tracking the types of

people that are being laid off, their skill sets, their demographics, so that you can come together with some—so you have a better handle as to what's happening out there? Companies, of course, look after their best employees, but there are other employees. It's a natural thing for a company to lay off their least experienced. Do you have some sort of tracking system for those people?

Mr. Swan: Well, again, there are a couple of different responses to that question. First, anyone who's laid off finds their way to an Employment Manitoba office. We hope, frankly, everyone who's laid off, that one of the first things they do is come to Employment Manitoba. They are going to have their skills assessed, find out what their experience is so that as quickly as possible we can get them back in the labour market and working.

* (16:40)

In terms of the actual information on the ground, I mean, you raise a very decent question. We know that if we simply look at Statistics Canada, it's always a look in the rearview mirror at what's happening. Their labour stats do not come out until late in the month after the month where, you know, job lay-offs may have occurred or the job increases may have occurred. That's one of the reasons that we passed the work force council, The Advisory Council on Workforce Development Act, to make sure that we're getting the best word on the ground from these various companies. There are now 16 different sector councils in Manitoba, which represent all kinds of employers. In some, labour has been given a seat at the council, which I think is a positive development. Those organizations are welcome to provide their information to me as minister, and to the department any time they have something to say.

We now have the advisory council, which is being struck, which is an umbrella of those sector councils, not just to speak for the individual councils, but to come up with holistic ways of how we can get the best possible labour information so we can make our decisions, whether it's funding more seats in colleges, whether it's making capital decisions about training programs or determining which companies or even which demographics need the most attention.

Mr. Pedersen: Madam Chair, to the minister, just so you can clarify. Is the advisory council up and working then? Are there people on the advisory council up and working?

Mr. Swan: It's our intention to announce the actual membership for the advisory council and have the initial meeting very shortly.

Mr. Pedersen: So the advisory council is not up and running yet. We do have lay-offs and labour challenges within—we've got labour challenges on both the skilled side and the non-skilled side. Your department is tracking these people through Employment Manitoba and whatnot.

Of course, there are privacy issues. I'm not asking for names or anything, but is there general information available on the demographics, the skill sets of the people being laid off? Is that available to the general public, to myself, or is this with internal department only?

Mr. Swan: Well, each employee who presents himself at Employment Manitoba—and, again, we hope that every employee who's in that position does. Again, I mean their skills are going to be assessed, and there will be an employment plan put in place for that worker. Of course, that's not information that we're going to publish or provide.

I don't want to leave the wrong impression on the record regarding sector councils. We have 16 sector councils in Manitoba, all of which are up and running, all of which are doing some very good things. Since becoming minister, I think I've met with the great majority of them, certainly every council that's asked.

One example of the work they're doing is the Construction Sector Council. It's a relatively new council that has companies as well as labour involved. That Construction Sector Council does collect from its members some more detailed information on demographics, on trends. We're certainly happy to co-operate with sector councils and work with sector councils on what makes the most sense for our labour force development means.

Mr. Pedersen: Could you be a little more specific on the construction sector? Construction is a big word. It covers a lot of trades. Like, is this specific building construction, road construction, or is it all of the above, or what's the make-up of the Construction Sector Council?

If I may, Madam Chair, if I still have the floor, if you could give me a list, Mr. Minister, of these 16 sector councils so that I can get a better understanding of these.

Mr. Swan: I will certainly provide a list of the 16 sector councils.

With respect to the Construction Sector Council—I'm just going off the top of my head until one of my staff can put the note in my hands—there's the Manitoba Heavy Construction Association. There is the Manitoba new home construction association, although I may have the name wrong. There is the Winnipeg Construction Association, and just to correct that, the new home—it's actually the Manitoba Home Builders' Association. As I said, Madam Chair, the Winnipeg Construction Association, the Construction Association of Rural Manitoba, and the Building Trade Council. So those are the constituent members of the Construction Sector Council. So they can provide some various perspectives on everything from building homes to building our highways.

Mr. Pedersen: So when you give me the list. This is, as I understand—I'm having a hard time hearing here. As I understand, the Construction Sector Council is made up of these constructions. The other 15 sector councils, when you give me the list of the sector councils, can you give me a breakdown of those similar to the Construction Trade Council?

Madam Chairperson: Order, please. I do appreciate the members taking the lounge to discuss, but if we could also just keep the tone down, it's really difficult to hear. *[interjection]* No, I want you to just tone it down a bit, please. Thank you very much.

Mr. Swan: You know what, I'll take that under advisement, because it's not really quite as clean as the Construction Sector Council where it's four or five defined sectors. Some of the other sector councils represent a wide range of companies. So for those where there's an easy enough answer, either it's three or four different umbrella groups or just three or four employers will do that. There will be some, for example, the Manitoba Food Processors Association, where there will be a very, very large of number of members. The Manitoba Environmental Industries Association I believe, has between, my recollection is between 60 and 70 different members. So if we have that information, or if the sector council has no difficulty in providing it to us, we'll get it on to you.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you. I would appreciate that, and even if it's a lengthy list, that would be good, because it gives me a much better handle as to who's involved with that particular organization.

Sort of in the same light here, and I realize it overlaps with the Labour Department, but do you have an overall basis of Manitoba population that would be professional versus trades people versus non-professional? I realize it's pretty general to ask on there, but it does give us a breakdown as to our education skills and education levels within Manitoba. I'm talking about the work force here.

Mr. Swan: I'm aware that we breakdown employment within various sectors of the economy, for example, aerospace, there will be professionals. There will be engineers. There will be trades people, welders. There will be other staff. I will ask—hopefully, Wilf Falk isn't too upset about you raising his name in question period today and he'll be his usual co-operative self—to see if there is a statistic that the Manitoba Bureau of Statistics maintains. I can't think of that off the top of my head.

In terms of various professions, of course, each profession maintains lists or rotas, I guess, of people they consider to be members of that profession. Each trade would do the same thing. I will see if there is something beyond just the sector employment figures that Manitoba Bureau of Statistics actively tracks and would have a report on.

Mr. Pedersen: I guess what I'm looking for is a profile of the Manitoba workplace. I realize that's a pretty general term, but when we're looking at skilled versus non-skilled versus professional, that really helps us a lot in gauging where we're at in Manitoba, how we compare with other jurisdictions. That's really what I'm looking for is for a profile on there.

*(16:50)

Now I realize the outward migration of Manitoba has certainly slowed down and particularly with the Alberta economy, the oil economy slowing down, the outward migration has slowed down. But, again, in the last number of years, 10 years, there's been fair outward migration. Is there any sense, again, of how many of these people leaving are professionals or tradespeople? Is there any system of tracking them?

Mr. Swan: Just to make sure that the member doesn't leave the impression on the record that out-migration of Manitobans is something that has only happened in the last 10 years—in fact, Manitoba's interprovincial migration has increased greatly from where we were some time ago. Manitoba, unfortunately, has been a net exporter of people for many decades, and it's only been recently that we've

been able to turn those things around. In fact, if we look at statistics of the past 10 years, over the previous 10 years, they paint a rather different story. I think we want to move ahead, so I'm not going to belabour that point.

The question that the member asks is sort of the status of those people leaving. To the best of my knowledge, that's not something that is actively tracked. People don't report in if they decide they're going to head to Fort McMurray, as people apparently used to do, just as people don't report in when they come here from Ontario or Alberta to pursue opportunities. We do, every month, get Statistics Canada's estimates of the labour force available in each province. Those numbers bounce around from month to month, as the member knows. It's not necessarily a count of how many people are in the labour force; it's the best estimate that Statistics Canada gives us, and they do revise those numbers from time to time.

I think the comments you made earlier today about Mr. Falk and the Bureau of Statistics—there are times when we're not exactly sure what Statistics Canada is doing. Sometimes we don't understand why they revise things the way they do, but we do the best we can using those numbers to try and plan for Manitoba's future.

Mr. Pedersen: I guess that was the whole point. Obviously, statistics Manitoba has what they feel are more accurate numbers than what StatsCan does. They must be basing those numbers on something, so where are they pulling their numbers from?

Mr. Swan: I'm sorry, I'm not sure I understand the question. Statistics Canada issues their numbers on, for example, population growth or on the labour force. There are certainly times when, as minister, the advice I have from the Manitoba Bureau of Statistics is that—when you look at these numbers with a statistician's eye, it seems that there are problems with the month-to-month numbers. Some months, over months, the labour force mysteriously increases by 2,000 or decreases by 2,000, even though there doesn't seem to have been events or circumstances that would suggest that. The labour force, the unemployment rate jumps around month to month because, again, it's not a count. It's a best estimate based on a sample size. There are always some structural difficulties with doing that.

I think the more important message that Mr. Falk tries to get out, and that I understand, is that the more accurate portrayals of where we're going in

population in terms of employment, the more accurate numbers are found the longer period of time you look at. A year-over-year figure is more reliable than a month-over-month figure. That's really the point, I believe, that the chief statistician makes every opportunity he gets. The media gets very excited when the new labour figures come out or the new population figures come out. I think the key thing to take away is that the longer a period of time we look at these statistics, the more satisfied we can be that they actually show trends in existence.

Mr. Pedersen: Not to belabour the point, but where does Manitoba Bureau of Statistics gather their information? Are they using your department, Labour Department? Where do they come up with their statistics about labour and employment, unemployment?

Mr. Swan: Sorry. I just lost my train of thought here—

Madam Chairperson: You've got one minute.

Mr. Swan: —there's some activity in the Chamber.

The Manitoba Bureau of Statistics does a number of things. They analyze the flow of information that they get from Statistics Canada. They also use other sources that they analyze to come up with their determinations. They also do some of their own work in terms of surveys, in terms of requests of Manitobans, and I'm sure that, when

you come to my office for your briefing on The Statistics Act, we can talk a bit more about some of the things they want to do in terms of voluntary surveys of Manitobans to make sure they're getting us the right answers right now, which, I'm told, is their motto.

Madam Chairperson: The honourable member. Oh, you have 10 seconds. Five now.

As previously agreed, the section will now recess and interrupt proceedings for the House to reconvene in session.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Speaker: Order. As previously agreed, the House will now be in session.

Honourable Government House Leader, on House business?

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

I wonder if you might call it for 5 o'clock and adjourn the House until Monday.

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement to call it 5 o'clock?
[Agreed]

The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. on Monday.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 30, 2009

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