



Second Session - Thirty-Seventh Legislature

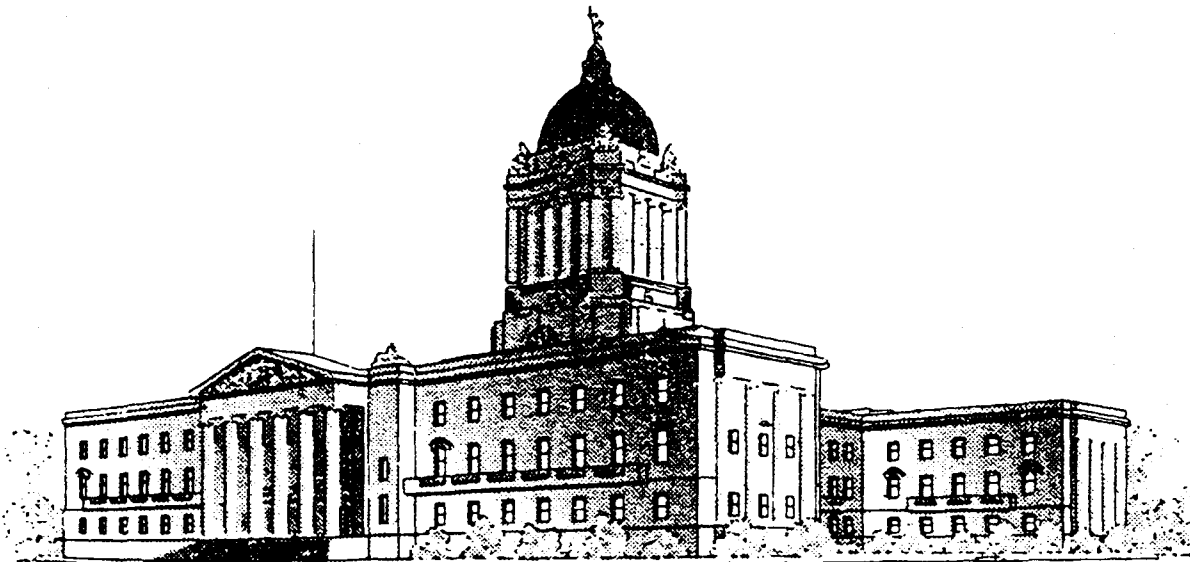
of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Seventh Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 3, 2001

The House met at 10 a.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, before going into Supply, we will be calling Second Readings, but first would you see if there is consent of the House for the Estimates of the Department of Transportation and Government Services to be considered in Room 255 today?

Mr. Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to move Transportation and Government Services to Room 255 for today? [*Agreed*]

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, would you please see if there is unanimous consent for Advanced Education to follow the Estimates of Industry, Trade and Mines in the Chamber for today?

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement for Advanced Education to follow Industry, Trade and Mines in the Chamber for today? [*Agreed*]

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, would you please call second readings of bills in the following order: 9, 12, 14, 8, and 11.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 9—The Vital Statistics Amendment and Consequential Amendments Act

Hon. Scott Smith (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Ashton), that Bill 9, The Vital Statistics Amendments and Consequential Amendments Act (Loi modifiant la Loi sur les statistiques de l'état civil et modifications corrélatives), be now read a

second time and referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present amendments to The Vital Statistics Act. The act has not had substantial amendments in over fifteen years. The Vital Statistics agency has been receiving an increasing number of requests from parents who wish to give their child a surname in accordance with their cultural or religious traditions.

Under the current act, a child's surname can only be the surname of either parent or a combination of the parents' surnames. These amendments will provide parents with unrestricted choice for their child's surname.

Mr. Speaker, the bill also proposes removal of restrictions to access to older records. Birth registrations over 100 years, marriage registrations over 80 years old, and death records over 100 years old will be opened. These older records are historical treasures, and our Government is pleased to share them with the interested parties. In addition, the proposed amendments provide clear instructions on the entitlements to access vital event records.

The bill provides for the creation of a new type of certificate. It can be used by the courts in making decisions on parentage. It is designed to allow the court sufficient information to make decisions while protecting the mother's privacy. A number of administrative and housekeeping changes are also included in the modernization language and make the act easier to understand.

Mr. Speaker, with these comments, I am pleased to recommend Bill 9 for consideration.

Mr. Jim Penner (Steinbach): I move, seconded by the honourable member from Emerson, that the debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

Bill 12—The Real Property Amendment Act

Hon. Scott Smith (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Labour and Immigration (Ms. Barrett), that Bill 12, The Real Property Amendment Act (Loi modifiant la Loi sur les biens réels), be now read a second time and referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, Bill 12 amends The Real Property Act to eliminate the requirement for duplicate certificates of title and to permit the district registrar of the Land Titles office to destroy existing duplicate certificates of title on file in the Land Titles office. The reliance by the public on the duplicate title may be misleading and risky, as the duplicate title may not show all instruments that are registered against the land. A number of documents, such as judgments, liens and caveats, can be registered against the land without an entry being made on a duplicate certificate of title.

This bill will also streamline the procedure to convert paper certificates of title to electronic titles under the computerized land registry. Elimination of the duplicate certificates of title will also facilitate the development of electronic registration of instruments in the Land Titles office.

This bill is consistent with the provinces of Saskatchewan, Alberta and Ontario, which no longer issue duplicate certificates of title. I recommend this bill for consideration.

Mr. Jim Penner (Steinbach): I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire), that the debate on this bill be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

Bill 14—The Consumer Protection Amendment Act

Hon. Scott Smith (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Ashton), that Bill 14,

The Consumer Protection Amendment Act (Loi modifiant la Loi sur la protection du consommateur), be now read a second time and referred to the committee of this House.

Motion presented.

* (10:10)

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, last year, Manitoba broke new ground when we introduced for the first time in Canada legislation which provides protection for consumers purchasing goods or service over the Internet.

Amendments to The Consumer Protection Act and the Internet agreement regulation came into force March 19, 2001. While other jurisdictions are at either the discussion or drafting stage, Manitoba is still the only province which has provided for consumer protection in on-line transactions. We can be very proud of this step taken last year by our Government and the notice our initiative received across this country.

In a recent article in *The Globe and Mail*, Cyber Law, specialist Michael Geist noted: Until last month, however, Canadian e-commerce law had done little to actually provide legal protection that might encourage those who are buying on line to give it a try. That changed on March 19 when new Manitoba laws and regulations took effect.

Mr. Speaker, with Bill 14, we are now proposing amendments to improve the protection provided to Manitoba consumers in Part 16 of The Consumer Protection Act, which deals with Internet agreements. We are proposing the amendment of provisions which prescribe delivery requirements. The amendments recognize that a 30-day grace period for delivery of time-sensitive purchases is not adequate. Examples of time-sensitive purchases include travel services, tickets to sporting events or entertainment events, or perishable products.

Mr. Speaker, just imagine the bride who ordered flowers over the Internet being told they will not be delivered on a promised due date, but that 30 days later should be acceptable, or your children's disappointment when the trip to

Disney World on spring break is missed because you made your travel arrangements on line, only to find that your hotel will not be available until the 25th of April, instead of in March.

The proposed amendments will ensure that these types of situations do not arise in Manitoba for Manitoba consumers. In these types of situations, the goods or service must be delivered or provided by the date agreed upon between the buyer and the seller.

Other amendments to Bill 14 correct some errors in French translation which were identified in Bill 31, passed last year.

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

Mr. Jim Penner (Steinbach): I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson), that Bill 14 debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

Bill 8—The Mines and Minerals Amendment Act

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Minister of Industry, Trade and Mines): I move, seconded by the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Lathlin), that The Mines and Minerals Amendment Act (Loi modifiant la Loi sur les mines et les minéraux) be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Ms. Mihychuk: Mr. Speaker, good morning. I am pleased to stand before you today to introduce an amendment to The Mines and Minerals Act. It will allow First Nations people to accrue greater benefit from mineral development activities on reserve lands.

In its current form, The Manitoba Mines and Minerals Act provides an implicit opportunity for the province to receive up to 50% interest on any rent, royalties, taxes or any other levy related to mineral development on reserve land.

The report of the 1991 Aboriginal Justice Inquiry made specific recommendations concerning subsurface resources, in particular mineral rights. These included that Manitoba formally renounce its half interest in minerals within reserve lands to assist the economic development of First Nations, that First Nations have the right to use and control all mines and minerals on reserve lands and receive 100 percent of the income and other benefits therefrom.

This bill proposes legislative amendments to The Mines and Minerals Act to explicitly renounce Manitoba's half interest in minerals on reserve lands. This is not a new concept. Negotiated land transfer agreements under the Northern Flood and Treaty Land Entitlement have recognized this issue and have explicitly renounced Manitoba's interest in minerals and any land transferred as a result of these agreements.

There have been some concerns expressed that, by renouncing our 50% interest, the Province cannot guarantee that this additional benefit will accrue to a First Nation community. However, I would remind honourable members that the federal government has the responsibility for administering lands for the use and benefit of a First Nation. Any attempt by Manitoba to retain its 50% interest even in trust for the use by a First Nation would limit that First Nation's ability to negotiate their own terms and conditions for the development of minerals on their own lands.

Our Government is proud to endorse this legislative amendment. The proposed changes will allow for greater economic benefit to accrue to a First Nation community wishing to develop its mineral wealth under the terms and conditions set out by a community that will meet their specific needs.

I thank you for your attention.

Mr. Mervin Tweed (Turtle Mountain): I move, seconded by the Member for Morris (Mr. Pitura), that debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

Bill 11—The Highway Traffic Amendment and Consequential Amendments Act

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Transportation and Government Services): I move, seconded by the Member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell), the Minister of Education, that Bill 11, The Highway Traffic Amendment and Consequential Amendments Act (Loi modifiant le Code de la route et modifications corrélatives), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of the House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Ashton: I am very pleased to be able to introduce for second reading today legislation that will bring graduated drivers' licencing to Manitoba and save the lives of novice drivers, Mr. Speaker. I want to remind people of what this is all about because seven other provinces in this country have graduated drivers' licencing. In fact, there are only three that currently do not have it, and both Saskatchewan and Alberta are moving forward to implementation. The reason for this is the fact that graduated drivers' licencing has been proven to save lives. In fact, we have seen accident reductions of up to 37 percent in other jurisdictions within a very short time after the introduction of graduated drivers' licencing. Whether it be in Canada or the close to 30 states in the United States or other jurisdictions, graduated drivers' licencing has proven that by focussing in on the fact that novice drivers of all ages have a much higher accident rate. By bringing in a system that allows those novice drivers to develop the skills they need to become fully licensed drivers, and by doing it over a gradual period of time, the success rate is measured, not just strictly in statistics but, more importantly, the number of people that are alive today in those jurisdictions because of the licensing system.

I cannot speak for why graduated drivers' licencing was not introduced before in Manitoba, but I can indicate that the first opportunity I had to be with my deputy minister and, I think, one of our first caucus meetings, we put in place a process of introducing graduated drivers' licencing. The evidence was overwhelming, but rather than approach it in the way that perhaps we do at times on other issues, recognizing the

fact this is a fundamental shift in the licensing system, what we did as a government is we put in place a task force chaired by the Member for Transcona (Mr. Reid) that went around the province and talked to Manitobans about graduated drivers' licencing before any legislation was introduced, before anything was proposed by Government.

I want to commend the task force, the Member for Transcona, who spent many hours on this and has been a leader on this issue, the Member for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen), the Member for St. Vital (Ms. Allan), the Member for Assiniboia (Mr. Rondeau), the Member for Brandon West (Mr. Smith). In fact, we had members on the task force and other members in our caucus who put a huge amount of effort into it. I want to remind people what the task force found. They found the statistical evidence that I referenced, but they found throughout Manitoba upwards of 90% support in rural and urban areas alike for graduated drivers' licencing.

* (10:20)

What was interesting, and I want to really stress this, because this is really what it is all about, at the hearings they heard from people who had direct experience and a direct personal perspective on this, whether it be Sharon Stewart, whose daughter was killed by a novice driver, whether it be the Malleys, Ken and Donna Malley in my own constituency, whose 14-year-old son was killed by a drunk driver who would have been under our graduated drivers' licencing program.

You know, it hit home in a personal sense that we are not talking about abstract laws, we are not talking about statistics, we are talking about the fact that we know in other jurisdictions a graduated drivers' licence system can make a difference. We will never know in Manitoba whether it would have made a difference for Sharon Stewart's daughter and for Ken Malley's son.

It hit home with me personally, the announcement on Friday of the specifics of the legislation. I was very glad, very proud to have the Malleys there. It was a very courageous decision on their part. But, you know, Mr.

Speaker, their 14-year old son was in the same grade as my son. He was involved in, ironically, Teens Against Drunk Driving with my son and my daughter in high school.

I want to stress to people, particularly because I know there is always going to be some inconvenience when you have anything to do with safety, graduated drivers' licencing is not only something that saves the lives of novice drivers, but it saves the lives of their passengers and other motorists and pedestrians.

In Sharon Stewart's daughter's case and in Ken and Donna Malley's son's case, they were the victims of novice drivers that did not have the skills, or, in the case of the individual in Thompson, the driver who was double the legal limit of alcohol. That is very much part of what this is about. It is about protecting everyone in our society.

I can give you the statistics, and I have them, in terms of the accident rates for novice drivers, but let us never forget that this is a matter of people. When you are talking about safety, ironically you never know whose life is going to be saved.

So I want to give credit to the task force. I want to note also that this is something that has been of interest to other members of this House. I see the Member for Portage (Mr. Faurichou). I want to say the Member for Portage has been a very clear, strong proponent of graduated drivers' licencing. I give him credit, because he has been very vocal, I know, within this House but also publicly about the need for graduated drivers' licencing. He knows too that this is an issue that deals fundamentally with safety and about saving lives.

I say to members of this House that I really hope that we can on this issue achieve unanimity. I say this because I recognize that there will be questions, as there should be, and due diligence on any item of legislation. But I say to members opposite, we took the basic principle. The task force drafted specific proposals. Then what we did is something also that is unusual in legislation perhaps with other areas. We then consulted before the issue came to the Legislature.

I want to give particular tribute to those that did give us specific concerns, legitimate concerns about the proposals put forward by the task force, and particularly Keystone Agricultural Producers. Keystone Agricultural Producers took the task force—they indicated their support in principle for graduated drivers' licencing but pointed to some areas that they felt might impact on the particular situation in rural Manitoba.

We have responded. In fact, we have done something else in this particular case, Mr. Speaker. Rather than simply ask the Legislature to give us the blank cheque on a bill that would allow us to enable the introduction of regulations, we have actually now spelled out what the framework would be if this Legislature passes Bill 11 in this session.

As I go through the framework, I think members will see where we have looked at the facts, looked at the experience of other jurisdictions, listened to Manitobans abroad and have made Manitoba a graduated drivers' licencing system.

I want to start at the beginning on how people access this system. You will access in the same way you do currently. That will remain unchanged. At 15 and a half, if you are in a drivers' education program in high school you can enter the program; otherwise, it is the age of 16. There will be a longer learners' period.

I want to stress that we currently have a two-week learners' period before you can take a road test. That is the lowest I think in Canada. It is one of the lowest anywhere, and I defy anyone to explain to me how in two weeks you can learn all the skills that are necessary to be able to be a fully licensed driver. That is essentially what we have in the province of Manitoba. By moving to nine months, it moves us much more in the range of other jurisdictions that range upwards of one year in the learners' period. What it does is it allows our novice drivers to have exposure to all-season driving, to make sure that they are able in a province like Manitoba where we have six, or in my own constituency and it snowed yesterday, we have seven, eight months' worth of winter at times. It allows them to have exposure to year-round driver training.

Now, what then happens? This is where the system is going to be somewhat different. At the age of 16 years and three months—that is the early stage depending on when one enters the system—you are then able to take a road test. That is no different than what we have currently. Now in the intermediate stage, this is the point—and this I know is often the point that is the most important for novice drivers; it is the question we get asked the most. At this age you can drive unaccompanied at any time of the day. There are some limited restrictions during daytime hours, in this case to the number of seatbelts. You can carry one passenger in the front seat and up to the number of seatbelts in the back seat. I want to indicate that this is basically unchanged from the task force proposal.

Between midnight and 5 a.m. you will be restricted either to a driver and a passenger, or circumstances similar to the learner's licence where you can have a supervisory driver and additional passengers.

So I want to stress one thing here: At as early as 16 years, 3 months, novice drivers will be able to drive themselves to work, to school, to community activities. They will be able to drive unaccompanied. It is only between the hours of twelve and five o'clock that there will be any really significant restrictions. Once again, that has been the experience from other jurisdictions, that there is a much greater risk involved between 12 a.m. and 5 a.m. The task force and our proposal do not restrict the legitimate need. This was an issue raised in rural Manitoba for people to be able to work and attend school and school activities. So at that age you can drive unaccompanied.

Now, an issue, a very important issue raised by KAP, you can also drive class 3 farm trucks in the intermediate stage, as early as 16 years and 3 months. It was a very important concern raised by KAP and essentially will make a significant difference in rural Manitoba.

I want to indicate at both the learner stage and the intermediate stage there will be zero blood-alcohol. Zero blood-alcohol.

One other thing I want to indicate, because I missed this on the learner's before, the situation—

and this is another suggestion that KAP and others put forward—will remain unchanged. In the learner's period you will be able to have passengers. It was pointed out that particularly in rural Manitoba and northern Manitoba, you need that exposure, and the additional exposure by having a learner's period in which you can carry passengers will make a significant difference.

Now, in the intermediate stage, as I indicated, there are some restrictions, but you can drive unaccompanied. After 15 months, at a minimum of 15 months you can enter the final stage. Now, what is the final stage? The final stage essentially allows you to drive unrestricted, but the one main restriction is going to be in terms of zero blood-alcohol. That, again, is proven from other jurisdictions to make a real difference. It establishes a culture of safety when it comes to drinking and driving that starts at a very early age by recognizing the dilemma of new drivers, novice drivers, facing both the challenge of driving and also exposure to alcohol. I can indicate that there are statistics showing that novice drivers can have an accident rate of up to six times with the same level of blood-alcohol—and I am not talking about blood-alcohol that is over .08—up to six times higher than more experienced drivers with the same level of blood-alcohol. That is why there is zero BAC.

* (10:30)

Now, the combined impact of this will mean that you will be able to take a commercial trucking licence at the age of 18. That remains unchanged from the present system, and that is a very significant concern to the trucking industry.

Now, what it will mean is we will have one of the longest or probably the longest period with zero blood-alcohol, a full three years. I want to stress again that although—and I will put this on the record—I think there is a much more responsible attitude towards drinking and driving certainly than when I was a novice driver in looking at that, the fact is you cannot ignore the reality of we are still having far too many accidents on our highways that are alcohol-related. It is a particular risk with novice drivers. The combination of the two factors is deadly.

We will have it three years, the longest zero BAC of any graduated driver's licence program in the country. I can tell you I have not heard one person in any of the consultations who has said anything other than the fact that this makes sense, and it is going to keep our novice drivers safe and alive in this province.

Now, that is the system, but, you know, I want to indicate that I know with the 90% support—

Point of Order

Mr. Frank Pitura (Morris): Mr. Speaker, I am noticing that the minister was referencing a pamphlet, and to my knowledge I have not seen that pamphlet. I was wondering if the minister would be interested in tabling it and distributing it to this side of the House for our perusal.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Minister of Transportation and Government Services, on the same point of order.

Mr. Ashton: On the same point of order, this actually is the mock-up of the pamphlet. It is being translated right now. I can offer to the member opposite to table it as soon as it is available and make as many copies as the member wishes, and other members of the House wish, because it is very important information to get out to the public.

Mr. Pitura: Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable Member for Morris, it is not a point of order, but thanks for the information.

* * *

Mr. Ashton: *[interjection]* Mr. Speaker, I am getting comments on the colour scheme in the pamphlet here. I have nothing to do with that, believe you me. They do not want the Minister of Transportation and Government Services deciding the colour code of our pamphlets.

But on a very serious matter, I want to deal with something, because I acknowledge the work of KAP, and, in fact, KAP was at the announcement and indicated very clearly they

felt the Government had responded to the specific concerns raised by KAP.

But if there is anyone who is concerned that this is somehow targeted against rural or northern Manitoba, I want to put on the record my perspective coming from outside of the main urban centre of this province, and I want to remind people that when it comes to the lives that are going to be saved, the majority of the lives that are going to be saved are in rural and northern Manitoba. The highest accident rate right now in the province is outside of the city of Winnipeg. It is rural and northern novice drivers that are dying disproportionately. So this is very much a rural and a northern issue. It is a rural and a northern issue because it is going to save rural and northern lives.

Now I want to encourage members opposite to look at the statistics, as we have within our caucus. I want to encourage them to talk to the Sharon Stewarts and the Kenny Malleys. I want to encourage them to look at the experience in other jurisdictions.

Mr. Speaker, I notice the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) says they did. If that is the case I have no doubt that the member and other members opposite will support the basic principle of the graduated driver licencing. We can debate the specific elements back and forth. If the member wishes to participate in the discussion and debate, I look forward to it, but the bottom line here is that we have to remember the fundamental, basic principle of graduated driver licencing.

It saves lives, it works, and by bringing it here in the province of Manitoba, we are going to see, based on the experience of our neighbouring jurisdictions, literally hundreds fewer accidents and dozens fewer admissions to hospital rooms in this province, and we are going to see people that otherwise would have died, either novice drivers, their passengers, other drivers and other passengers. We will see them alive in this province. As I said, with safety you never know who it is going to be.

I want to remind people too that with any safety initiative, there is always some degree of inconvenience. I was part of this Legislature

when seatbelt legislation was brought in. There was some discussion at the time, but seatbelt legislation has dramatically cut the number of fatalities over the last 10-15 years.

Once again, safety initiatives do that. There is always some degree of inconvenience. In this case, we believe that the inconvenience is relatively minor compared to the safety enhancement that is going to be there for our novice drivers and other Manitobans.

So I want to urge all members of this House to support graduated driver licencing. I am proud we are able to join seven other Canadian provinces, soon to be all ten Canadian provinces and also territories as well that have moved ahead on this. I am really proud of the work done by the task force. I have been very pleased to work with the safety community, other organizations like KAP, the Member for Portage (Mr. Faurichou) and others, because then collectively we have managed to do a lot of work on this.

I want to say again, as much as this is a government initiative and we are proud to be bringing it in, this should be something of concern to all Manitobans, all members of this House. I want to urge everyone to support graduated driver licencing.

One issue, based on the evidence and based on the fact that it saves lives, that all 57 MLAs should be supporting is graduated driver licencing. I look forward to the votes in second and third readings because I am confident we can achieve that with a reasonable and intelligent debate in this House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if I could ask for leave to ask one question for clarification.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave for the honourable Member for Emerson (Mr. Jack Penner) to ask one question of the Minister of Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Ashton)? Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Jack Penner: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I noted that the minister referred to the farm classification, that they were going to be allowed to drive within the intermediate stage farm trucks.

Could the minister clarify for us how those intermediate drivers driving farm trucks will be allowed to drive farm trucks with air brakes on them or whether they will not be allowed to drive farm trucks and how that classification will work? Many of the farm trucks today are retired highway tractors that have air brakes on them converted to farm trucks. I wonder whether the minister could clarify that for us.

Mr. Ashton: I will be prepared to provide some of the details, but I would point out to the member that the basic intent of what is happening is to provide the ability of what currently is the situation. The intermediate stage rather than the final stage when you are dealing with air brakes, you are dealing with air endorsements. that is unchanged. The bottom line is Class 3 farm vehicles cannot be operated. The airbrake endorsement issue is a separate issue, as the member is probably aware.

What I would suggest on that, I want to make this an open invitation. I have mentioned this to the Opposition critic and others, if members wish to have a briefing on this or meet with me privately, or raise it in Estimates, or anything of that nature, I am more than willing to do that. There are no secrets on this one. I can indicate on this particular issue this was an issue raised by KAP, and I know this was specifically what KAP wanted to see, which was that Class 3 farm vehicles able to be offered in the intermediate stage, and that is exactly what we are going to make sure happens, Class 3 in the intermediate stage.

* (10:40)

I want to acknowledge again the air brake issue, the air brake endorsement, is a separate issue currently, as well.

Mr. Harold Gillehammer (Minnedosa): I would move, seconded by the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings), that debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): I move, seconded by the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Lathlin), that Mr. Speaker do now leave the Chair and the House resolve itself

into a committee to consider of the Supply to be granted to Her Majesty.

Motion agreed to.

**COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
(Concurrent Sections)**

CONSERVATION

* (10:50)

Mr. Chairperson (Harry Schellenberg): Order, please. Good morning. Will the section of the Committee of Supply meeting in Room 254 please come to order. This morning this section of the Committee of Supply will resume consideration of the Estimates of the Department of Conservation. It was previously agreed by this committee to have a global discussion on the entire department and once all questioning was completed the committee would then pass all lines and resolutions. We are on line 1. Administration and Finance (b) Executive Support (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$458,800. Shall the item pass?

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): I believe we will continue with the discussion on the open area. I know we were looking at the organizational chart. I believe my honourable colleague from Ste. Rose was asking some questions yesterday just before we finished, and I think we will continue along those lines in regard to the operation of the department.

Mr. Glen Cummings (Ste. Rose): The minister had indicated that he had a fair number of vacancies. I appreciate that that ebbs and flows and may not be necessarily out of normal context, but did he provide any particular instruction regarding maintenance of vacancies within the department?

Hon. Oscar Lathlin (Minister of Conservation): Mr. Chair, before I answer that question from the Member for Ste. Rose, I believe I made a commitment yesterday to the Member for Arthur-Virden that I would provide copies of the new organization chart for the Manitoba Conservation Department. I will give three copies.

Then the other question that I took under advisement yesterday, I believe, was the committees of the Manitoba Round Table for Sustainable Development, their responsibilities. Also, I believe the member had requested the names of the committees and their responsibilities, so I would like to table those for the members today, Mr. Chair.

With respect to the question put forth by the Member for Ste. Rose, the answer is no.

Mr. Cummings: Well, I was picking up on what the minister said when he said he was actively recruiting for 15 out of the 60 vacancies. My point is that there has been about three quarters of a billion dollars' worth of increased revenue to the Province over the last two budgets. This department has had to take its share of restrictions over the last decade when budgeting was tight, and I would have expected that it would have got perhaps a larger share of increased spending of the Government. I wondered if there was a mandated vacancy rate, or what is leading to there being any vacancies at this juncture other than seasonal.

Mr. Lathlin: Yes, I could not agree more with the member's preamble to his question. I, for the past 10 years—and this of course has been admitted by at least two members of the previous government where I believe during Estimates last year they suggested that our job in Conservation would be very difficult in terms of how the cuts had been made and also in the face of all the work that had been piling up, lack of maintenance on drainage ditches, lack of inspection and enforcement capabilities, so on and so forth, but I am not going to dwell on that too much today. Suffice to say, we have of course made requests for additional funding for this year excluding funding that had been allocated to flooding measures. Our budget was increased by 4.4 percent over last year. I know that is not nearly enough when compared to the work that has to be done not only in drainage but also throughout the whole Department of Conservation. But here we are, we have a 4.4% increase and we are going to do the very best that we can.

Mr. Cummings: Well, I am sure that is the case. What I am trying to determine is if there are this

number of vacancies, why not now or when will there be an active drive to fill them.

Mr. Lathlin: I believe I went over this yesterday. I do not know if the member was present or not when we were talking about vacancies. I believe I said yesterday there is an, I believe the word I used was "aggressive" recruitment going on right now. We are approaching places like the Keewatin Community College where they are training natural resource officers. We are also visiting universities, encouraging young people to finish their courses and their study of the environment and natural resources so they can come and become employed hopefully in government.

The other point that I wanted to make, Mr. Chairperson, was that recruitment for certain positions we have delayed, and again I pointed this out yesterday, because not all of the integration work has been finalized. I believe I said yesterday that we are going before Treasury Board to get certain approvals for parts of the integration and so as a result some recruitment is getting caught up in getting Treasury Board authority.

Mr. Cummings: I am not sure I follow the rationale that the minister just gave. Is he saying that there is a shortage of people with the qualifications to fill the positions that are vacant? Graduates in the main would be coming out of the system around this time of year. I would have thought that now would be when the most active recruitment would occur.

If I am unfairly asking this question, I am quite willing to have the minister tell me, but when he said that there was active recruitment on 15, I would hope there would be active recruitment on the balance as well.

Mr. Lathlin: No, I do not believe the member is unfairly asking these questions. I am trying to answer them the best way I know how; maybe I am the one that has the problem, I do not know. Maybe I do not understand his questions, or maybe I am not being able to express myself as clearly as I want, but of course when there are vacancies there are efforts being made to recruit. Otherwise, if we do not fill the vacancies then my efforts in achieving our goals and objectives

in the department will be severely curtailed. I am not going to be able to do the work without people, that is obvious. So it makes sense for us to try to recruit as fast as we can.

Now let me also say though that, for example, I was looking at certain positions in the regions as they were becoming vacant. One of the things that I found out was that we compete against many employers, including other governments and private industry, who are out there also looking for people with certain skills. Right now, for example, we are looking for a biologist. We are looking for foresters, you know, not just natural resource officers, but we are looking for other skills as well.

I think the other thing that I pointed out yesterday was, and I think the member would agree to this having been a minister before, that you can never achieve full staffing. There is always going to be a certain level of turnover, and, as a result, you are going to have some vacancies, but not to the level that we have now. I think, after a certain time, we are going to be able to. When I say fully staffed, I mean within 3% or 4% vacancy. If we can have 3% or 4% vacancy, then it is almost like we are fully staffed because that is about the normal rate of turnover, around 2 or 3 percent. So, if we can have 98 percent staffed up, then we would be all right.

* (11:00)

Mr. Cummings: I have two questions about the reorganization. One is, if the minister can quantify what savings have been achieved up to this point. Secondly, I would like to have some discussion about the enforcement aspect of the environmental legislation and whether or not there is a conflict associated with where the minister now finds himself. But dealing with the first question, there are a lot of departments across Canada that have been reorganized in this manner, but none of them, in my belief, had as much independent responsibility that rested with the Department of Environment.

In straight numbers, how much saving has the department achieved in terms of staff numbers and salaries in the reorganization? I guess the obvious answer is, within the

minister's office itself, there is only one minister, but I am interested in what has happened at the next level in terms of savings.

Mr. Lathlin: I will answer the first part of the question, that being: What savings have been realized as a result of integration? Last year, for example, we were able to save some \$700,000, as well as 14 positions, and this year we are expected to redirect a minimum of 12 positions to the front-line positions that I mentioned yesterday, because my feeling is that, if we can have as many people working in the field, then I think we can achieve the work that we are trying to do in terms of being right at the field and inspection, enforcement and so on.

As far as the conflict that I know the member is getting at, I have answered this over and over again, and I will try to answer it again the best way I know how. Let me start off by saying that, with the previous government, they had two departments, Environment and Natural Resources, but even with those separate departments, the way they were structured, there were still problems encountered with respect to who do you listen to. Do you listen to the development side, or do you listen to the environmental stewardship side?

As far as I can see, whenever decisions were made, as I am finding out now that I am on the Government side, practically everything comes to Treasury Board, and then it ends up on the Cabinet table. That is how decisions are made. I know that is how decisions were made with the last government, whether you were talking about an environmental issue or a developmental issue.

While we were leading up to this integration work, we visited other jurisdictions to try to learn from their experiences. I talked to the Alberta government, as a matter of fact, just last week during the environmental ministers' meeting. I found out that in fact they have gone separate again from Natural Resources to Environment, but I do not think it was because there was any conflict. The minister that I talked to gave me what I thought was a quite a logical explanation, except that I cannot remember exactly how he put it, but it made sense to me that they did that.

Now, in our case here in Manitoba, we have placed the licencing, the approval function, into a new division that we have created because of this perceived conflict, and that is the Environmental Stewardship Division. The licencing and approvals function has been placed in that division. So we feel that that reasonably separates the licencing function from the enforcement function.

As well, I visited, my staff visited Saskatchewan, and more recently I visited Saskatchewan myself. I met with the Minister for Environment and Resource Management, and the way they are managing their department, the regulator, the licencing, development is not much different from the way we are doing here in terms of organization structure.

Mr. Cummings: I hope the minister misspoke himself a little bit when he said that almost all the environment decisions end up in Cabinet table. That, however, is exactly where the conflict that I see arises. That is that in the end he becomes the appeal to any decisions or recommendations that come forward. Where the conflict arises is if one of those decisions is in fact driven by one of his departments, which would most likely be Natural Resources. At least, when there was a separate Ministry of Environment, it was not the proponent in most cases, or I would think almost never the proponent.

I know the minister might feel from time to time that he is being singled out. It is not because he personally is being singled out; it is because of the organizational situation that his Premier has created that he is now responsible for administering—therefore, the genesis of the question. It is not the competence factor of this minister so much as it is the organizational structure that he is being forced to deal with.

Alberta had a completely independent licensing body. Manitoba did have, has always had, and I support the concept that there can indeed, in the end, needs to be a document signed by the political authorities that completes and recognizes the recommendations that may come from the Clean Environment Commission as an example. The minister, to the best of my knowledge, has not yet had to deal with a Clean

Environment hearing recommendation that has been appealed, and when that situation arises, then I would be interested to know how the minister feels that he would handle that.

* (11:10)

Mr. Lathlin: Mr. Chair, I apologize to the member. I was momentarily distracted, and I could not get the last part. Can you repeat the last part of your question, please?

Mr. Cummings: Getting away from the preamble, my question relates directly to how does this minister anticipate handling a hypothetical situation, because I do not believe it has come forward yet, since his ministry has been organized this way, where you have a Clean Environment recommendation, which is an independent commission. A recommendation comes to government; it needs to have a government sign off, but then it receives an appeal, and it is a project put forward by the Department of Natural Resources, or the former Department of Natural Resources, now the Department of Conservation. How is he going to handle what will be a perceived conflict, if not a real one?

Mr. Lathlin: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairperson. Let me start off by indicating to the member that I am very aware of that situation that he was describing, that hypothetical situation.

When we started out, the way that I wanted to change things in order to avoid that situation was—and we are going to be making legislative changes, as well, as part of our continuing work on sustainable development, the environment, and so on—the way I look at it right now is say if a project comes on, I would like Government to be more of an information giver, an education function, whether you are for the proposal, you get information, we give you information, whether you are the developer, we give you information that tells you how to do things or even the technical information. I would be more interested in doing that, rather than at the start being put on one side, you know, the opponents to a project accusing me of being pro-development or vice versa. So if we can position ourselves to work that way, I think we can

probably get away from, you know, avoid some of the difficulties that the member is trying to anticipate.

After the CEC, for example, the way it works now, if the CEC has done its work, they have had a hearing and they have made a recommendation one way or the other, let us say they recommend that a licence be issued. Of course, the recommendation is directed to the Government and the minister, and then the process now turns towards the director of approvals and he will issue the licence. If there is an appeal, then it comes to the minister, and of course the minister would go to Cabinet for authority as to whether to dismiss the appeal or accept it.

Mr. Cummings: Well, the specific concern that I have is, for example, this Government was very pleased, as we all were, to see the announcement of the expansion of the potato plant at Portage—a new plant, not an expansion, pardon me, a new Simplot initiative. The licence for the water for that plant is likely going to be Water Resources that is going to have to develop the water supply for that plant. I still bear the scars of when the Carman area was looking for water out of the Assiniboine. It is the same principle; we were talking about development and need of sufficient water for development. The Government has, and in this case Water Resources has, the onus upon it to licence withdrawals. It becomes very involved as a part of the proponent's plan. It has to defend its position, and particularly when in this case if that water withdrawal at Portage is of the magnitude that I believe it will be, the surplus water that is in the Assiniboine is very limited right now unless it is augmented.

The minister is going to be in the middle of it whether he wants to be or not, and I can guarantee him that any decision that is made will be appealed. He has answered the process, I agree with him. I feel some empathy where he has been put, and he need not answer my question unless he disagrees with something I just said, but I can foresee situations such as that that he has not yet had to face, that will be a perceived conflict that will be very difficult for him to extract himself from. He is the minister for the licensing department and the department

that is involved in the development of the supply, and unless something is done about that it could well be a challenge that could end up in the courts.

I wonder if the minister believes that that is true or if he would disagree with my observation.

Mr. Lathlin: In my response to the member, I am not going to deny that the work is hard in Conservation. No matter what I am doing, I find it very hard anyway whether I am dealing with a project or not.

But let me respond to the member this way with respect to the Simplot land. As far as I know, and the way it is structured now, the Water Services Board from the Intergovernmental Affairs Department will be working with the City of Portage la Prairie, who, by the way, would occupy the proponent position, I guess. Portage la Prairie is essentially the proponent. In any event, the Water Services Board from IGA would work with the City of Portage to provide water to the Simplot plant. As I see it, that is the way it has been discussed today, and that is the way it will unfold as the project goes along.

* (11:20)

Our water services branch from Conservation, after all that work has been done by the Water Services Board, working with the City of Portage, our water services branch will have to review and approve or not approve the application for water that is going to be required for irrigation by those potato growers. So in that respect there is no apparent conflict on our part.

When these discussions came forth, as well, apparently it had been determined that there is sufficient water for phase one of the Simplot project. We are—as you might be aware because I think we have answered questions of this nature in the House previously—conducting studies to determine how much water there is in the Assiniboine River for phase two for that project, as well as for other users.

While we are doing that, however, we are also going to be determining the health of the water. After all, it is irrigation water, and it goes in and out of the main source. We are also

interested in determining the health of the water so that after it has been used for irrigation, that it is not contaminated.

Mr. Cummings: I agree with what the minister said except if anything has to be done to augment the reserves or the supply in the Assiniboine—and, goodness knows, that river has been studied many ways and the supplies have been looked at in many different ways. If a project has to be undertaken, it will likely be undertaken on behalf of the Department of Natural Resources unless you are going to let the private sector build another dam or put gates on the Shellmouth or do something to augment that.

The Member for St. Vital (Ms. Allan) might be very interested to know that the comment that cities west of Winnipeg on the Assiniboine jokingly comment to each other is flush twice so the river will still run in Winnipeg. I mean, that is a problem that this minister or whoever succeeds him is going to have to deal with at some point. Under the current structure I think there is going to be a problem.

That is enough hypothetical questions. I realize that there is a lot more to discuss in the meat of the Estimates of the department, but this is a policy position that I think the Government has perceived if not a real conflict that is going to have to be dealt with in the not too distant future. It puts the minister in quite an awkward position. Believe me, given things that occurred when Conawapa was first considered in being licensed, you have no friends when it comes down to the crunch. The minister responsible for the licencing and development, it may be convenient but when it comes down to the final crunch it may be very difficult. I have not yet heard an explanation that covers off the eventualities. I wish the minister well. I hope it does not come to rest on his desk during his tenure, but until something is done about this organizational structure that clearly delineates the responsibility of the Licensing branch and who they report to and how that is managed I think there is going to be a black cloud hanging in the corner of that office for a long time, until that is dealt with.

That relates directly to the organizational questions that I was interested in. The minister

has a huge number of independent and semi-independent boards that he has to relate to now with this combination. Does he see himself or anyone else in this department having the ability to keep up on a regular basis with these boards, many of whom are not that active, but the ones that are more active and the ones that are more current in their activities? One that I had a fair bit of sympathy for and respect for was the Assiniboine advisory board. I am looking on the organizational chart for what the proper name is, but I am pretty sure the minister knows the group that I am talking about—Assiniboine River Management Board. Has he had an opportunity to receive advice from this board?

Mr. Lathlin: Yes, Mr. Chair. Again, I do not mind. I think the Member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire) will attest to the fact that I covered that area. I just want to say though that I have met with the group. I met with Mr. Dickson. It was a good meeting. Mr. Dickson told me about all the good work that they had done for the previous government. They told me about some of the projects that they had been involved in. They also told me that they understood after a change in government there is a bit of an adjustment period, transition, people go through. He said he understood that there would be a bit of a lull and that they were quite willing to give me some time to get oriented to my position.

* (11:30)

Eventually we met and I advised them that it was my hope that I could continue to rely on their good advice and counsel and that we would if I can use the term "reconstitute" the board. As a matter of fact, I believe we have earmarked some funding for the Assiniboine Management Board because they are being asked to be involved in the Assiniboine River study.

Mr. Cummings: I appreciate that this ground has been touched already. I did not realize that my colleague from Portage had touched on it, but I do have one further matter that I am not sure if he would have addressed it. That is one of the ways that the department can support this board is providing management and/or staff support. That function was previously held by Mr. Ian Dickson, and he was in fact providing a

dual role while we were seeking somebody with appropriate status to fill the position of chairman. Has the minister appointed a chairman, or has he indicated any staff support? Or is that just being provided in terms of I think he just referenced some financial support?

Mr. Lathlin: Mr. Chair, the meeting that I had with Mr. Dickson, I guess it could be described as, I think as he put it: I am here to tell you what we are all about and where we come from, our history and so forth. Also, of course, I knew that he was interested in finding out as to what kind of a future they had with government, and, as I said earlier, I assured him that I would continue to look for their advice.

Mr. Dickson, unless things have changed since I met with him, is still the chair of the board, and I have not said anything about changing the chairman of the board. We have currently allocated some \$55,000 to support the operation of the board, and our staff will be working with the board as we move along on the Assiniboine River study to, as I said earlier again, involve them in the review of the Assiniboine study.

Mr. Cummings: I appreciate that the minister is providing financial support. Does that mean that the board will make an independent decision to hire staff support, use that money?

Mr. Lathlin: Mr. Chair, in my last response, I said we met to sort of get to know each other. They told me about their history and experiences with government. So at the meeting, although it was sort of a getting together for the first time meeting, I advised Mr. Dickson that the Government was interested in continuing the board, because we advised him that they could serve a useful purpose, as they had in the past.

But we really have not gone to the next phase yet, where we actually talk about the operation. We made financial commitments, because, if I remember correctly, I think Mr. Dickson was looking for, you know, this is what we did for the past so many years, and they were looking forward to maybe, I do not know if I can say, doing more or adding on to their responsibilities. So that is what we have to iron out yet.

Mr. Maguire: Just to follow up on the minister's answer there in regard to the role of the Assiniboine River Management Board, Mr. Chairman, I would like to ask the minister then a little bit—I know while he has indicated that he has been in discussion with the board for a future role, I wonder if he could indicate to us just what their role would have been during basically the last 20 months in that area? What has been the staffing complement and just what has their role been over this last while?

Mr. Lathlin: Probably the best way for me to respond to that question is to indicate to the member that for the past 20 months, and this was acknowledged by the board chairman when I met him, I do not think there has been that much activity, as far as the board is concerned.

But, also, the study of the Assiniboine River, probably the previous minister might be aware of this, is I think in part the result of the recommendations that they made to government previously. So we are just continuing on with that work.

But if I can further indicate to the member, I am remembering bits and pieces of the conversation, the meeting that I had with the board, and it seems to me I recall Mr. Dickson saying that because they did not really have many projects on the go at the time that we were coming into government. Primarily what they were doing was wrapping up the previous projects that they had been involved in, the previous work that they had been involved in. Once we meet with them, I guess, together, I think they have some ideas as to what they want to do, and they want to talk to us about those ideas.

So I would like to say to the member that perhaps we should meet with the board. I know staff will be meeting with them. Then after that we can maybe give a better report as to what type of activities that they had been involved in for the past 20 months. Also I can report at that time as to any additional responsibilities or change in direction that we may want the management board to be involved in.

I think I have already mentioned that we have already asked them to become involved in the Assiniboine River study.

* (11:40)

Mr. Maguire: I appreciate that, Mr. Chairman. I would like to ask the minister, first of all, if virtually the whole management board is the same? Can he indicate to me are there any changes in that board or staffing since the election in '99?

Mr. Lathlin: As far as I know, there have not been any changes with respect to the board composition. I am advised as well that, other than Mr. Dickson himself, they may have hired casual staff here and there, but I do not think they have any staff that works for them on a permanent basis.

Mr. Maguire: The minister indicated, Mr. Chairman, that the Assiniboine River Management Board would be working with a new Assiniboine study team that he has put together. Can he indicate to us what he thinks the responsibilities will be in that part of the project, or how they will integrate?

Mr. Lathlin: One of the ways that the Assiniboine River Management Board I know will be involved is, because the study will be a highly technical one, the board would work with our staff to help interpret whatever data is generated and from there make policy recommendations to government. That is one thing that I can think of right away that they would be involved in, but I would like to add on that probably will not be the only way they will be involved. As I said earlier, once we regularize our meetings, I am sure we will have more activities.

* (11:50)

Mr. Cummings: Mr. Chairman, our interest in the Assiniboine is obvious. If you live very far west in this province, other than the Souris and the Little Saskatchewan, which eventually feed into the Assiniboine, that is really our industrial highway in terms of getting water supplies of any quantity to a number of our larger communities.

The advisory board provided a significant improvement in relations between some of the communities along the watercourse in understanding the usage, and I would encourage the minister to continue to use them in that respect.

The issue that still sticks out as one of the larger issues is increased demand on the water coming down the Assiniboine, which is obviously not a problem in high water years.

Is there a licensing process underway right now with the Simplot expansion?

Mr. Lathlin: I can indicate to the member that I remember when this file first came up, one would have thought that it was going to happen the very next day, given the intensity of their discussions that went on at the time, but so far I am advised that the Simplot plant in the city of Portage la Prairie, has not made application yet to Government for a licence for the process to begin, but I understand we are expecting their applications to come forward this month.

Mr. Cummings: Would that be the application for both the usage and the discharge?

Mr. Lathlin: Mr. Chair, I understand that the application for the discharge part of it which would be coming from the City of Portage la Prairie—well, the application will be made this month for sure, we have been apparently advised. As far as the supply part goes, I think I again mentioned earlier that the Water Services Board of IGA is currently working with the City of Portage, and I cannot say for sure when that application will come in.

Mr. Cummings: I do not think there is any other source around Carberry, so the withdrawals for the plant, would they require a licence then? I presume they will.

Mr. Lathlin: I am sorry for the delay, but I just want to make sure I answer the member with factual information. The information that I have is that water for the Simplot plant will come from the Portage Water Treatment Plant. As far as the other withdrawal, Simplot may already have enough water under their current licence, but this is what is being looked at right now. So there is no additional licence. We think that they may have enough water already under the current licence. So it could be. If that is the case then there would not be a need for the licence the way things stand right now.

Mr. Cummings: Well, this is a new plant. Are you saying that Simplot has a licence to withdraw from the Assiniboine today?

Mr. Lathlin: The City of Portage la Prairie has the licence.

Mr. Cummings: You are saying that the City of Portage la Prairie may have already licence enough to support two plants.

Mr. Lathlin: That is what is being studied right now to try to determine that.

Mr. Cummings: Of course, the other leg of this stool is to support this part of the industry, and I am very supportive of the industry. I am not being critical of the industry; in fact, I want to see this happen, but I want to make sure they do not run into a procedural roadblock when it comes time to start pouring cement. Obviously, the other part of this is the demand for irrigation water to support potato production. Have there been any representations made to the department to deal with that, or are there sufficient reserves and licences in the area to deal with that without any further withdrawals from the Assiniboine?

Mr. Lathlin: I wonder if I could ask the member to maybe give me the last part of his question.

Mr. Cummings: My interest is whether or not there has been consideration or applications being made or a study being done. I do not need to know the details, but obviously with additional capacity, processing capacity, there needs to be additional production. I know that there are certain land areas where potato production is very profitable and possible, with proper soil types and so on, where there could be some question about availability of water. I want to know if there has been any action, in a general sense, on behalf of Simplot and/or producers in the area who will undoubtedly need increased irrigation capacity, if there have been any requests or any compilation of data as to where this additional water may come from for irrigating what would be, could be, I suppose, another 25% or 30% growth in the irrigable acres.

Mr. Lathlin: The information I have tells me that the project will be done in two phases, as I said earlier. The first phase, we think from all the information that we have on file that there will be enough water for the first phase of the project. The second phase, we are confident that there could be enough water, but there is a study going on right now to determine whether there will be enough water, as this member wants to know. The expansion apparently will require some 40 000 new acres of potato production in Manitoba.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. The time being 12 noon, I am interrupting proceedings. The Committee of Supply will resume sitting this afternoon following the conclusion of routine proceedings.

TRANSPORTATION AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES

* (10:50)

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff): 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 Transportation and Government Services. Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Transportation and Government Services): Yes, Mr. Chairperson, I do.

Mr. Acting Chairperson: Please proceed.

Mr. Ashton: First of all, I want to indicate we are in committee on a little bit less notice than we might normally be in committee, and that applies both to the Opposition critics as well as myself and the department. I think we got notice about five o'clock last night, so if people will bear with us. In fact later on when we get into detailed questions, I can indicate that we will have the Government Services deputy minister here, but my deputy minister on the Transportation side is at a conference. I know other senior staff and the acting deputy minister will be able to provide detailed information, but

I did want to indicate this is once again due to the short notice.

I am very pleased to be able to give some opening comments because this is a department of Government that is a very significant department. It has very significant employment. It is a very significant department in terms of the services it provides to Manitobans, and I often like to call Transportation and Government Services the unsung heroes of Government. A lot of the services we provide, people do not really notice them unless they have a complaint, you know, if there is a road that needs a little bit more maintenance or needs fixing up or a government building that needs renovating. At that point in time we certainly hear from the public, but in actual fact the combined services provided by this department are a lot more I think than most people even in Government would realize.

Just a couple of highlights and actually it is a very significant year for the department. First of all, the total budget is \$311.2 million; that is an increase of \$11.2 million over the last adjusted vote. A couple of really significant things are happening this year. Starting on the Transportation side, we have an increase in the capital program. This is an increase, by the way, not a one-time increase. This is an increase in the capital program of \$3.4 million over the 2000-2001 Budget. It is particularly important because it is going to allow us to participate in the Grain Roads Program which is being split between the municipalities. We supported the request of AMM to do that and the province provincial roads, and will allow additional construction in Manitoba. In fact if you combine that with the work that is taking place on the South Indian Lake Road, which our department is co-ordinating, this will be one of the best years for highway construction overall for quite some time. The road into South Indian Lake is particularly important to that community. It goes back to an agreement under the Northern Flood Agreement that was signed in 1992, and I am very, very pleased we are able to extend it.

Some other highlights: We have once again increased expenditures for winter roads. I am really proud to say that for the first time every community in Manitoba will have access if not

to an all-weather road, to a winter road. When we came into Government there were what I thought at first three communities that did not have a winter road: Tadoule Lake, Lac Brochet, Brochet. We negotiated an agreement with the federal government. We have extended that winter road access, and we were able to complete that this year. It has had a very significant impact on the communities. We were also, at our own initiative, able to extend the winter road network into Granville Lake. I would encourage members to look at the highways map which last year for the first time included all of Manitoba, because they will be able to find that a year and a half ago not only did these committees not have winter road service, they were not even on the highways map. So we are putting the whole province on the map, literally and figuratively.

I also want to indicate that we have enhanced the expenditures on our airport system, our northern airports. For more than a decade, our airports were starved of capital funding. At one point they hit as low as \$500,000 in capital funding. We have a new initiative that has increased that again over and above last year where we put into the base increased capital. This has allowed us to do numerous projects in northern Manitoba, ranging from runway extensions to air terminals, and now very significantly looking at alternate airport sites for a number of communities, particularly Little Grand Rapids. So it has made a very significant difference.

I will go through some of these details later on, but I want to highlight some of the new initiatives. On the Government Services side, it has been a very exciting year for Government Services. Anybody coming into this building will see the work that is taking place on the stonework and the Golden Boy. This is a major project. It is long overdue. It goes back to some clear indications as early as 1992-93 of the need for this kind of work. I am very excited because I am very proud of this building. I think all Manitobans are. As I will get into in some detail later on, I am hoping there will be some opportunity for people to see more directly some of the work that is being done. Believe you me, the Golden Boy is really going to be golden in colour after this is finished. If you actually see

the Golden Boy, the Golden Boy definitely is in need of a little bit of brushing up right now.

Madam Chairperson in the Chair

I am also particularly proud of our initiative and our involvement, along with the Department of Advanced Education, of course, and the Red River College downtown campus. That is an incredibly exciting project. That is a visionary project. It is going to keep the most significant heritage features of the buildings in that area, and it is going to be a cutting edge campus. It is going to meet the needs of Red River College, which is dramatically expanding its enrolment as part of our Government's initiative to double community college spaces.

I can tell you that the excitement around that initiative is noticed. Anybody I have talked to in the city, particularly in the business community, they have had nothing but praise for the vision of building the campus downtown. It has already led to a number of significant developments in the area. I believe it is going to play a major role in revitalizing the Exchange District and downtown Winnipeg. Coming from one of the other communities in the province, not coming from Winnipeg, I have always felt that a strong Winnipeg is good for a strong Manitoba. I am very pleased with the role of our department.

I also want to touch on the emergency measures side, because I am also responsible through the Government Services side of the department for emergency management in the province. This is an area where we have had to be very active. Just in the last year alone, we had significant rainfall last summer, July. There was a program established that has paid out \$1.78 million. We also had flooding in November-December of last year, and we are reviewing the financial impacts currently. We will be approaching the federal government for a cost-shared program.

Of course, we are still involved with the latter stages of the current situation, which was somewhat better than expected. At times we did have some concerns, but there certainly is some noticeable impact in southeast Manitoba and Westbourne area as well, the Interlake. We are anticipating once again that there will be some

claims coming out of those particular situations, and our position again is that we will be contacting the federal government to make sure that residents of those areas are able to access the Disaster Financial Assistance program.

* (11:00)

I just want to give one other comment before leaving this very important area, and that is we are finding an increasing number of disasters. I think that is something that is very evident, whether you view it as something coming from changing weather patterns or the bigger issue of global warming. I have said this: I know there is some debate on the reality of global warming. The evidence is overwhelming. The bottom line though is whatever the debate is the reality is we are running into more and more situations in the last number of years, '97 in southern Manitoba in the Red River Valley, '99 in southwest Manitoba, 2000 various different incidents. It points to the really critical importance of maintaining disaster assistance.

I also want to indicate that during the past year we have continued to pursue what we believe is the inadequate disaster financial assistance coverage under the flooding in southwest Manitoba. The previous government, the previous Minister of Government Services and myself both have taken the position in the past that the key thing was to have recognition of costs that not only deal with damage to property but damage to land, particularly lost input costs, some of which the Province already put the money up for, but in other critical areas where the Province had not put the money in.

What is interesting is I was able to meet with the federal minister this year after numerous requests. The federal minister still has not responded to the personal appeal I made to him in regard to what the situation is in southwest Manitoba. I thought it was particularly telling that the member of Parliament for the area was able to obtain a document that basically showed that he had the option of the choice he made, which was limited coverage, or what we had been arguing for as a province, going back to the original flooding situation in 1999. The minister had a choice, and the minister and the federal government chose the narrow route. Our

argument, I think it is an important one, is in the Red River Valley every effort was put forward, every grey area was interpreted in favour of the Red River Valley, and so it should have been, given the circumstances. We believe in southwest Manitoba the real difference was the spirit in which it was dealt with. In the southwest there were opportunities to have a more generous interpretation. They were not followed through.

I want to run through just a number of the other initiatives, because we have other new initiatives and they are quite exciting initiatives as well. I will run through them as I give a quick summary on the various departments. First of all: mould remediation and asbestos abatement pilot program. Last year I asked the department to develop a program that would deal with a huge problem we are faced with in the public sector with mould. We have seen schools close because of mould, we have seen hospitals, hospital beds closed because of mould. We have seen all sorts of difficulties. There is increasing evidence that mould is leading to significant health problems. A lot of it goes back to when we shifted to greater energy conservation and really did not adjust our building methods at the time. We tend to seal buildings in a lot more than we used to, and we do not manage mould. I think it is one of the areas that we are seeing currently that there are an increasing number of people affected by it.

We have done a number of projects, very innovative projects, Milner Ridge with Milner Ridge inmates. We have done work on the Dauphin Hospital and the personal care beds. That has trained 17 people. It has been very exciting, actually. I have been out there and I cannot say enough about the dedication of staff and the trainees, because they have able to do this, and they have been able to save the Government of Manitoba money at the same time. It is not too often you can come out with a new initiative that is actually going to save you money, but we have saved in excess of \$100,000. I am going to say we, not the Department of Government Services, but the Province generally.

I mentioned the community college side. I already talked about Red River. Another exciting

development has been the transfer of the former Brandon Mental Health Centre to the city of Brandon. We signed a memorandum of understanding transferring the Brandon Mental Health Centre. This is going to be a real asset for Brandon and all of Westman. It is going to take a facility that we only have very limited use for it currently, and it is going to allow for developments that could make a very significant development in the Brandon area. I look forward to that, and there may be some possibilities as well, even possibly for Assiniboine Community College on that site, but I can indicate too we have also been working on the existing site with Assiniboine Community College. So we are working on Red River. We have done work with Assiniboine Community College, and we have also made some initial contacts with Keewatin Community College to assess their needs in Thompson.

On the supply and services side, we are working with Manitoba Conservation in the testing of flexible fuel vehicles, something I think that we will be watching very significantly, and we have a number of test vehicles too that are testing particularly innovative ways to use more ethanol, in fact, gasoline up to a maximum of 85 percent ethanol. That is something that has come up in our agricultural committee. If we can help on the development of prototypes that can use more ethanol, I think potentially down the line it could be a win-win because we can produce that ethanol right here in Manitoba, and it could provide a new market for our farmers.

This year, through Fleet Vehicles, we replaced 160 ambulances, recording that replacement for Manitoba's RHAs, a very significant initiative.

A major initiative in procurements, we have developed guidelines that will make our procurements sustainable, at the same time being cost effective. I think that is a very important initiative. We put some additional resources in, and I think it is going to be visionary.

I can also indicate that we are also working on the initial stages on a proposal that will turn government into a model recycler. I have a real interest in recycling. I think it is part of what should be the role of government, which is to be

a leader when it comes to green initiatives. Our procurement initiatives are cutting edge, but, once again, one looks at the waste that comes out of our buildings, our goal has got to eventually be that we will have 100% recycling. That may be an ambitious goal, but, once again, sometimes that is what it takes to change attitudes. So we are committed as a department to being a leader on green initiatives within government.

In terms of transportation, I mentioned the Grain Roads Program. I mentioned the split with the Association of Manitoba Municipalities as significant initiative. I want to indicate that we are beginning negotiations with the federal government on the Strategic Highways Improvement Program. That is the national highway system. Unfortunately, there will be no work done this year.

However, we are looking at numbers indicating a \$20.2-million four-year program, and we will obviously be targeting work on our national highway system which currently, in the province, includes Highways 1, 16, 75 and 100. I am very disappointed with the amount of money. We might want to get into this in a discussion later on, but this year, on the Grain Roads Program, we will see the first federal money on our highway system since 1996, and next year we will see the first money on our national highways system since 1996. So as much as it is probably about four or five cents on the dollar, what is taken out in terms of federal gas taxes, four or five cents on the dollar is better than nothing, but we have a lot of work ahead to enhance that funding.

I want to mention on the maintenance side that particularly last year and this year, we have taken initiatives to enhance the highways maintenance to deal with some of the cost factors that are out there. It is important to stress that there were various aspects to maintaining our highway system and improving our highway system. The capital construction budget probably gets the most attention, but on the maintenance side, we have made some significant initiatives. I am particularly pleased that we have been able to reverse the complete lack of attention to our equipment fleet. When I came into office, we had a 97-year replacement

cycle for equipment. A lot of our graders, you are talking about a cycle of four hours on the road and one hour in the shops. Actually, I think we probably have some that are reversed. You cannot operate a highways system with decrepit equipment of that nature. So last year we started a process that significantly increased our acquisition and this year have continued that. It will over time make a significant difference. I want to stress that is also important to maintaining the highway system.

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I want to indicate that I do not underestimate the challenges on our highway system, and also the importance of developing some long-term plans and strategies as a Province on our highway system. I anticipate being able to make some announcements fairly shortly that will move us in the direction of being able to have a longer-term planning process that was going to involve Manitobans in the process. I think as a Province we have some real interest in moving beyond the traditional one- or two-year cycle for the capital program.

I want to indicate that the sum total of what we are doing on highways continues to put us as one of the few provinces that basically spends what it takes in, on fuel taxes in particular. Saskatchewan is actually probably moving in that direction. For years they have actually collected more than they have spent. In their last Budget they have increased their expenditures, so there will be some balance, but outside of Alberta we are the one province that can look the federal government in the eye, we have been able to do that for 20, 30 years, and say what we take in we spend, and we wish the federal government would do the same.

Just to give you an idea of just how important this issue is, if you consider the fact over the last nine years that federal taxes have basically taken approximately \$140 million a year. You will see what a difference it would make if we could get back some or any of that funding. Part of the challenge, quite frankly, is a lot of Manitobans do not know who raises what tax and where it goes. I find a lot of people ask me how much money the federal government puts into Highway 1. The answer is easy:

nothing. It may be called the Trans-Canada Highway, but for funding purposes you might just as well call it the trans-Manitoba highway, because even though there is a maple leaf on it, it has nothing to do with the federal government. It is because we as a province have traditionally felt it important to have a national link. So it has been the provincial government, by in large, that has been carrying the burden.

I want to deal with some other important issues, particularly impacting rural Manitoba grain handling and transportation reforms. We have been very active as a department, both under the previous government and this Government, in the evolution of grain handling and transportation in this country, back to the Ostey-Kruger process, the current CTA review. We have indicated our bottom line as a Province is to ensure the best and most efficient transportation system is available for clients, particularly when it comes to grain transportation, obviously for producers. If anything, the hearings of the Agriculture Committee have reinforced the need to ensure greater competition, greater efficiencies for producers.

I think it is important to put on the record, because a lot of people tend to forget this, that the bottom line here is, when it comes to grain transportation, when the Crow rate was eliminated, there was between \$750 million- and \$800 million-a-year benefit that went to western Canada. It was basically paid out as a buyout in two years.

So we talk about farm aid and we talk about transportation and even when we talk about the grain allowance program, I do not see that as really coming from federal fuel tax revenues. I see that as coming from the Crow rate that was taken out. Regardless of whether it was a wise move to take the Crow rate out or not, I think everyone can agree that the equivalent to the Crow rate should have gone in to dealing with the transportation challenges that were created by the elimination of the Crow. That is something that we have continued to raise.

Generally with the federal government, in fact I chaired a meeting of the Western Transportation Advisory Council recently. The bottom line is the issue was national vision, I do

not believe we have a national vision for transportation. The federal government is talking about developing a vision, but for a country that was built on transportation, if you go back to 1867 and the development of Canada, the extension into British Columbia which is fundamentally based on transportation; the bottom line is somewhere along the way we have lost our vision as a national government, and we are now falling further and further behind the Americans, who spend a significant part of what they collect in taxes on their national, state and local highway system. This is a nationally collected tax. I think if we do not have that vision ourselves in a visionary sense, we should wake up to the fact that the Americans are our biggest trading partners and competitors, so if we are not willing as a country to have a national vision, we are increasingly going to fall behind them.

There was some suggestion that we Americanize the road system. I will be up front here. I have always said we probably—well, we definitely have a better health care system than they do, a better education system, but this is the one exception where the Americans, not just the Americans, the Europeans, are better than us. Actually, what I would say is we have to Canadianize the system. We used to do this ourselves. We used to be leaders in transportation, and we somehow lost the way.

Speaking of transportation vision, we have a lot of work to be done here in this province. I mentioned some of the work we have been doing in the remote areas on airports and winter roads. I want to indicate that we are also pursuing a remote-access policy that recognizes there are 37 communities in this province that do not have access to an all-weather road—37 communities. Is it acceptable in the 21st century to have that many communities in this province not part of the all-weather road network? We have basically said no. We have said that we have to take on that challenge. We have started contact with the federal government. I have met with Minister Collenette, Minister Nault. What I think is particularly important is to recognize that the best social program and the best economic development initiative that you can bring to a remote community is often the simple fact of

having road access. I know my own constituency where there are currently four communities that do not have all-weather road access. I have seen the difference where road access has been introduced into other communities and the greater opportunities.

So we are working on that, including the east side of Lake Winnipeg. We have raised this with the federal government. We released this past year the original scoping study, and we will be pursuing discussions. The scoping study pointed to the fact that in some cases the cost benefit to the communities is greater than the cost of the road. We are hoping to work with the communities themselves, First Nations communities primarily, but also the Northern Affairs communities, and the federal government to see if we cannot provide greater road access that also recognizes other factors, particularly on the environmental side.

I want to talk about Churchill. Churchill is one of our greatest untapped assets. It is interesting because the construction of this building started around 1912. At the time, this was when the borders of Manitoba were extended. The horizons seemed endless. People were predicting that Manitoba would be the financial capital of Canada, of North America. There was tremendous excitement about Churchill. There were actually plans that I have seen that saw Churchill being a community of 100 000. Throughout the years, Churchill has faced some difficulties in achieving that. First of all, the First World War delayed construction. It was finally completed. In 1929, the Great Depression took place. Churchill is a community that is a survivor, though, and it received a military presence. It has developed significant tourism the last number of years. But this is the first year we have seen, I think, real exciting progress in the Port of Churchill in quite some time. This year we had the earliest season opening and we had a 710 000-tonne season. I want to put on the record that OmniTRAX has really been meeting the challenge with Churchill. A number of years ago, they said you could not put hopper cars on the Bayline, and, guess what, hopper cars are going on the Bayline.

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There has been all sorts of skepticism about various different limitations, that somehow Churchill is only a grain port. You know what they shipped this year in addition to peas? British military helicopters came into the Port of Churchill for military exercises in Alberta. They could not put them in through Montreal and they could not put them through Halifax. The Port of Churchill was able to do it.

As a Government, we have had some involvement, along with the federal government. Dredging is probably the major project, but it is being very much driven by OmniTRAX itself. Our main initiative this year has been to work with OmniTRAX to try and persuade Lloyd's of London, and I have met with them directly to put the case to them. The irony is the current effective season is shorter than the actual permitted season and does not reflect the new technology, the new satellite technology that is out there. Ironically, the shipping season, when we had wooden ships going to Churchill it was longer than the current shipping season, the reality being that it is insurance, not the ability to navigate that is determining the season. That is really critical to Churchill, and I was very pleased with the response from Lloyd's. We are hoping to see some improvements in the short run, the fact that Lloyd's was able to, on a ship-by-ship basis, have some reductions, I think is very exciting. I cannot say enough about how important it is to continue to support the Port of Churchill.

Speaking further north, Nunavut, we have had meetings, and I want to acknowledge the work of the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs (Ms. Friesen), the lead minister in our contacts with Nunavut. We have once again pointed to the importance of looking at issues such as extending ground transportation access into Nunavut. We already have significant trade with Nunavut, by the way. It is worth upwards of \$100 million a year to the province of Manitoba. It is a very important part of what Churchill does, the re-supply. But there is some real opportunities here to further extend that, obviously the ultimate vision being a fall all-weather road, but we have also looked at a winter road. Now we have a winter road extended to every community in Manitoba for about \$20 million estimated; \$7-million annual

maintenance, you could have a winter road system that serves that entire side of Nunavut.

I met with the federal minister of Western Diversification and Transportation, along with Jack Anawak, the Minister of Transportation, in a joint effort. We, in fact, supported their efforts in Ottawa, and we will continue to promote an extension. I talked about national vision. What better evidence of a real vision for Canada now in the 21st century? You know, in the 19th century, we extended from east to west. It is time to extend from north to south. I really believe this would be a huge, huge benefit to Nunavut and would be a huge benefit for us as a country as a whole, because there is huge untapped potential in the North, the far North, and, once again, we are dealing with that challenge here in Manitoba, but it also has to extend up to Nunavut.

Speaking of north to south and speaking of vision, we have also been very active with the Manitoba Corridor Partners Committee developing the mid-continent corridor strategy. Our vision, I believe, sees increasingly with a lot of the north-south shift that has taken place in terms of transportation, that you will be able to go from the Gulf of Mexico all the way to Nunavut, not just by road but to a certain extent it is happening now with intermodal transfers.

We are very supportive of that, and I think it is very, very critical. We have a real advantage, by the way, over other potential corridors, particularly—and this may come as a surprise to people in Manitoba, but the stability of weather. If you look at alternate routes, corridors going through Alberta, there is a much greater number of storms in the Rocky Mountains, particularly in Colorado and other areas, so we have some huge advantages. Once again, that is very much a part of our vision for transportation development.

Our department has also been a leader in sustainable transportation. This is important because 38 percent of the greenhouse gas emissions in Manitoba come from transportation. Obviously, regardless of what the Americans do or do not do with the Kyoto Accord, I think there are some real challenges ahead for us over the next period of time. We

have been very much involved with that, and we are represented, by the way, in the Canadian Fuel Cell Alliance which is established under the Climate Change Action Plan developing hydrogen as a transportation fuel.

I believe that we are about one leap in technology away from one of the biggest breakthroughs we will have ever see in transportation, in this case on the environmental side with hydrogen. I have visited Ballard technologies in Vancouver. Part of it, quite frankly, is the longer we have \$25 U.S.-a-barrel oil, the more this kind of alternate technology is going to be driven. Just think of what it offers for Manitoba, because we not only in this case, I think, have some ability to be part of the development of the technology but we have the excess hydro potential.

I know our Premier (Mr. Doer) has put forward a vision that sees us being involved not only in export sales, which can have significant value added to the province, but having a capacity in the province to develop the kind of hydrogen fuel development that will revolutionize transportation in terms of the environment.

We have been involved in a number of other very significant initiatives: the Manitoba Intelligent Transportation System's strategic plan. I am very pleased with our involvement with the University of Manitoba Transport Institute. We signed a \$300,000 contract this past year, and I think it is very exciting because what we are doing is working with an institute that has a tremendous reputation in terms of transportation research, and we are involving them and up and coming students and graduate students in the research. This is very important, and I am very pleased with our involvement in that. We have initiated a project to look at the potential for a global logistics distribution centre.

Transportation is a growing sector in the economy. It is a very important sector in this economy. It is important to be moving to the next step, because transportation now really is logistics. It is not strictly the nuts and bolts of how you get something to market. When you look at some of the exciting technology that is

out there, shippers now can track via satellite, global positioning systems where an individual container is globally. The real challenge ahead for us as a country, and I think real excitement for us here, is if we can become a transportation and logistics centre of excellence, I think we can become the centre for a lot of this research. That is one of the reasons, for example, we are very supportive of the University of Manitoba Transport Institute.

We have been very involved in transportation regulation issues. Some of the new issues—we have been involved with a carrier profile system. We have been co-ordinating this with Transport Canada providing resources into the Manitoba carrier profile system, commercial operator regulatory education program—that is very important—the NAFTA Land Transportation Standards Subcommittee and also permits. Of course, one of the most significant initiatives we have taken this year—there are such a lot of initiatives in our department this year, so I apologize for the length of this opening statement—but the international registration plan. This is a North American agreement that allows for a single-base reciprocal system that allows our truckers to have immediate and easy access to the global market. It is a very important system. I made the announcement just a number of weeks ago with Bob Dolyniuk from the Manitoba Truckers Association. There will be some costs in the short run getting the system in place, but it is critical. Our truckers now will have access to the North American market with a one-stop shop. That is very important.

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We are involved in regulatory harmonization. That is very important. Increasingly, we are trying to make sure that trucking can be seamless, that we move beyond the 50 states, 48 contiguous states in the United States and the 10 provinces and the 3 territories. We have been very involved with safety initiatives, tightening the entry standards for auto dealers.

Speaking of safety, I will not dwell on this, but this is a legislative initiative, graduated drivers' licensing. This has been a major initiative for our Government and for our

department, and Driver Vehicle Licensing is involved very much on the implementation process. It is going to be a real challenge. I can tell you one of the reasons that we held the announcement there on Friday is because this is going to be very much a focus of Driver Vehicle Licensing in the next period of time, so I want to commend them.

Safety, snowmobile safety, I established a working group that our department is spearheading. We had a lot of snowmobile accidents this year. The bottom line is I think we have to deal with some of the real challenges that are out there. A small percentage of snowmobilers, that are not registered, are not following even the most basic safety standards. Even though we have extended our provisions in terms of drinking and driving to drinking and riding, there are some real issues. What was interesting when I made the announcement is that the most feedback I got was from snowmobilers, including a lot of snowmobilers in my own constituency, who said it is really important to deal with that because they feel at risk themselves because of this very small percentage of people that are continuing to drive in an unsafe manner, and in a lot of cases, drive in an illegal manner.

I want to stress that when it comes to snowmobiles, it is no different than when it comes to our road system. You have to follow the laws, and you have to follow proper safety procedures in this province. We are going to be coming up with initiatives through this process to make sure that our trails can be safer, and that we can parallel a lot of the things that are happening on our road system.

Other safety initiatives, reflective markings on commercial trailers. That has been a fairly significant initiative. I want to stress that throughout what we are doing in the Department of Transportation, safety is one of our main considerations. I mention a number of these initiatives, but it is similar as well in terms of the highways system itself. The introduction of the neon signs for school crossings, for example, which has made a difference. We are working on some other areas right now in terms of school buses and school bus safety. Even when we look at our transportation, our capital budget as well,

there are a number of particular capital items we are looking at, and others that are in the development process that once again comes from specific areas that are safety related where there are high accident rates. So there are a lot of initiatives.

I want to just say I have been very honoured to be the Minister of Transportation and Government Services. The last year and a half has had a lot of exciting times, and I want to put on the record that if there is one risk we have in the department generally, it is probably staff burnout. I know that, and with the number of new initiatives we have, there are a lot of challenges that are in place and probably an increasing number of challenges. Part of it may be that we are moving on things like graduated driver's licensing, that quite frankly I believe should have been introduced in this province a long time ago.

We moved on BMHC, we moved on Red River College, on the Government Services side. We moved on the renovations to this particular building. We have a strategy on remote access.

A year and a half ago when I became minister, the policy of the department and the Government was no new roads. That is not acceptable with 37 communities without road access. We moved on winter roads, and there has been a lot of staff time, believe you me. It was not easy to transfer a vision, in the case of Tadoule Lake, Lac Brochet and Brochet, a vision, and within two months to say why should we not have a road into those communities that is publicly funded when there was not one before, and to implement it. It took us a little bit longer with Tadoule Lake, but we got in this year, and with Granville Lake, why should not Granville Lake? Why should Granville Lake have been the only community in the province left without a winter road? We took the vision, extension of it, and we have done it. We are doing it on our airport system as well, and we are doing it on Nunavut.

I just want to finish by saying I appreciate the pressure it has put on our department. But I can tell you, I know it is exciting times for me as minister, and I know it is exciting times for the department as well. It could not be done without,

I think, the overall vision, and I look to my colleagues in government as well, because they are very much a part of this. This is a government vision, and the vision of so many people in the department as well.

As I said, it has been a very active year for the department. Transportation and Government Services, the unsung heroes at times, you should have seen our staff out, for example, during the recent flood. I mentioned this in the House, but I will mention it again. What do you say about the Transportation and Government Services employees and our EMO people who were out, including the individual I stopped to talk to in St. Laurent. I had made it for 10 minutes, survived 10 minutes out of the vehicle. There was a 70-kilometer-an-hour wind; it was minus seven, coming right in off the lake. He was there on a 12-hour shift making sure we could keep that road open, along with others doing the same sort of thing. This is why I call them the unsung heroes. Maybe we should give a little more credit sometimes to some of our dedicated staff. The same thing can apply to the people who have been doing the work in any section of the department.

It is funny, when we talk about Government Services, I think service is the bottom line, with Transportation, with Government Services, with Emergency Measures. I am very pleased to be in Estimates to be able to talk about some of the many initiatives ongoing and new that are taking place in our department.

Madam Chairperson: We thank the minister for those comments. Does the Official Opposition critic, the honourable Member for Minnedosa (Mr. Gilleshammer), have any opening comments?

Mr. Harold Gilleshammer (Minnedosa): Thank you, Madam Chairperson, and let me thank the minister for his comprehensive opening statement, where I think he has covered the waterfront, and, of course, we would not expect anything less from him.

I would ask if we could have tabled the Supplementary Information for Government Services and the Department of Highways. It puts us at a bit of a disadvantage to discuss the

important work this department is doing without them. I recognize that we were given late notice yesterday to appear today to proceed with this, so if we could have those when we meet again this afternoon, it would be very much appreciated.

Mr. Ashton: On a point of order actually, it is available. I can give the members copies, and we can maybe formally table it later, if this can be treated as an unofficial copy. I know it is not technically the way we normally do it, but if that can be of assistance.

Mr. Gilleshammer: I thank the minister for that. It will give us an opportunity to peruse those for our discussions later today and before we wrap up this department in terms of looking at the Estimates.

I would also say that, in this department, there is widespread interest with other colleagues who would like to come in, from time to time, to ask questions. I know it has been a practice, in looking at the Estimates of this department, to allow some other members who have interest in their roads within their constituency and across the province. I know that probably later today some of those members will be in.

The minister started by saying that this was a significant department, that there are significant expenditures in Transportation and Government Services. I know it is often difficult within Government and within the Treasury Board process to have significant allocations added, particularly for the construction budget, and I am reminded of a *Winnipeg Free Press* editorial I saw. I looked for it this morning, but I was not able to find it. It was pre-Budget, where it talked about the pressures on all governments to add substantial monies for health and education and social services. I am just paraphrasing, but I think the editorial said, in the end when you get into that process of comparing new expenditures, the Department of Transportation often does not count.

I think that is very unfortunate, but it maybe does reflect a historical pattern within government that it is always the feeling that roads could be left to another year.

Mr. Doug Martindale, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

I know when Albert Driedger was Minister of Highways and Transportation, he used to say that you were able to address one project out of ten that needed doing. Then I heard Glen Findlay say it was one out of fifteen. I am not sure what it is now.

An Honourable Member: One in twenty.

* (11:40)

Mr. Gilleshammer: The minister says now one in twenty. All of us talk about long-term planning and vision. Unfortunately our highway system is battered from all sides with more traffic, fewer rails. We are now doing fewer of the jobs that need to be done out there. I think all governments have been guilty of probably underfunding the Highways Department over the years because of the pressing priorities that face government. I am not sure whether this minister sees a light at the end of the tunnel where all of these things will be addressed. He now says it is one project in twenty that gets attended to. If we continue along this vein, one cannot even guess where we are going to end up.

I travel the provincial highways every week, and it strikes me that even our major highways, the minister referenced the national highways, Highway 75, Highway 16 and Highway 1 within our province, I know they were designated a few years ago to participate in a federal program, but even those major highways, the traffic is increasing. I notice it on a seasonal basis. Now the ammonia tanks are out there and farm machinery is starting to move and highway transports. Probably the best example of that is when you have a highway blockage because of a storm and you see the transports backed up at Headingley right to the perimeter highway in Brandon or other places around the province, it makes you recognize the amount of traffic that is on our highways and it is going to continue to increase.

The minister indicates that he has had about a \$3-million increase in his construction budget this year. I am not sure if there was an increase last year, but I guess I point out for all of us the

Estimates of revenue that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) tabled last year showed that in 1999-2000, and this is an adjusted figure, but he shows revenue at \$5.8 billion, almost \$5.9 billion for the Province. Two years later we are seeing revenue Estimates in this Budget of \$6.8 billion. So there has been a substantial increase in the revenues to this province, depending on how you want to frame it. Some people will say it is \$750 million, 800, I have heard people say a billion dollars, of new revenue over the last two years. So with a substantial increase in revenue, again we are seeing that the social services departments get the bulk of that and that Highways and Transportation, even with a \$3-million increase in construction budget, is sharing that new-found revenue to a very, very minor degree.

The minister mentioned a number of initiatives. I do not want to go into all of them because I expect we are not going to have as much time as we have in past years because of changes that are taking place in the Estimates process, but talked about a number of new initiatives, perhaps a road to Nunavut. I know I met the Premier (Mr. Doer) a couple of years ago, and he was making this pitch at a Finance Minister and Premiers' meeting. Somebody put up their hand and said: How many kilometres of road? He wanted a connection with the rest of Canada. He wanted his province to be joined to the rest of Canada, and somebody said: How many kilometres of roads would you have in Nunavut? Just approximately. I remember very clearly he said: 21; 21 kilometres of roads in that new territory, new province. He was making the pitch, and I daresay to the minister, if there are advantages for Manitoba that need to be explored, certainly the onus has to be on the federal government to come to the table to do that. A province of our size, with the pressures that are out there, the challenges that are out there, surely could not devote the amount of money it would take to make that road connection to Nunavut. It has to be a federal responsibility.

Others have said that doing that will have perhaps a negative impact on Churchill. I have not seen any studies, but I have heard that comment made. I guess you could never make policy saying we are going to keep certain

people disadvantaged because it might hurt other people, but it is something that I would think would have to be looked at. What impact would it have on Churchill? In fact, what pros and cons are there? What negative impact might there be?

The minister talked about safety issues dealing with snowmobiles and school buses and other things. For sure, Manitobans have, I guess, a quiet outrage within them when they see the headlines and the pictures of snowmobile accidents. The one I remember most from this past winter is two snowmobiles meeting on a curve, and I think there was a fatality on both sides of that. Surely law enforcement cannot be put everywhere to protect people from themselves, but I think education and educational programming here in that area is very important, where people have to take their own responsibility. I read a city councillor, in reflecting on some crime, some stabbing in Winnipeg, that he wanted a policeman on every street corner in his end of town. It is probably the Chairman's area of the city. It just is not realistic. Less realistic is that you are going to have RCMP taken off their duties to police snowmobilers and all of the activities that they might be involved in, but, again, I do not have the number of fatalities this year that occur in snowmobile accidents, but the minister says it is 12, in many cases, such a preventable loss of life.

I remember a few years ago, and I think it was in Ontario, where a snowmobile out on a lake went into open water, and, in just a matter of a few days later, another snowmobile followed him in there, again, preventable fatalities. The Government does have a role to play, but it is limited, and I would stress with the minister that education would have to be the route that you will have to go rather than stepping up enforcement.

The minister also referenced, in safety issues, school buses. We recently had a school bus accident at Virden, where on a foggy day a school bus full of children was rear-ended by some sort of tanker truck, and just from all reports, I have seen people saying that this could have been so much more serious. It was amazing that there were not fatalities, and I did note that there were remedies being put forward by safety

proponents just as a few years ago when we had a fatality in the St. Norbert area involving a school bus. Now you have an arm extending from the front of the bus so that students have to walk well in front of the bus and the driver can see them. I noted here that one of the remedies mentioned was strobe lights on school buses when they were in situations, whether that works effectively or not but certainly something that the department needs to take a look at.

The minister mentioned Winnipeg and Manitoba as a transportation centre and exciting initiatives in that area that could be worked on with the Transport Institute. I recall going through the Loewen Windows factory in Steinbach a few years ago and very impressed with their facility, and they were talking about just-in-time delivery to Japan with doors and windows. They were loading containers that day to be trucked, I presume, either to Winnipeg or Vancouver, to be taken to Japan. That is how important transportation is, because we have a world now that expects just-in-time delivery, and Transportation Department officials have a role to play here in seeing that we are up to date on all of the innovations in transportation. I think it is GM or one of the car manufacturers that have these on-star buttons now, where people can be located no matter where they are, and their car is unlocked in remote places simply by contacting this on-star. There is a lot of technology that is coming into play here. I think Manitoba's history as a transportation centre within this country is at stake if we do not keep current on a lot of the innovations that are taking place.

* (11:50)

The Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk), of course, has joined us this morning. There is concern in rural Manitoba about getting product to market with the new high-put elevators, and it has taken a devastating toll on our roads, the trucking that goes on. I would urge the minister to be more involved at the front end of some of the planning that goes into these facilities so that, as you look at future construction or rebuilding of roads, you have a good idea of where feed mills are going to be located. I recognize that they have some responsibility to use existing infrastructure rather than locate in new locations where the pressure

comes on government to solve their problem, but I say that a good open dialogue with those developers would be important.

The minister mentioned ethanol. I have a special interest in this as we have a plant in one of my communities that has been producing ethanol for a number of years. I know the Finance Minister has continued the tax advantage to ethanol producers, and I think it is important. There is certainly a lot of talk about more ethanol production coming on stream in places like Killarney and Russell, and if we are serious about the greenhouse effect and the Kyoto targets that have been put in place, part of the solution can well be ethanol. I know, from talking with principals, with Mohawk and Husky, they see increasing sales of their product. I know they have indicated they do not necessarily have to be the manufacturer, but they want to access more of it. I think their sales line about being nature's gas station is probably one of the better ones that I have heard. It does catch on, but they do need more product. They need to be encouraged to develop more product.

The minister also mentioned the mid-continent corridor. Again, Manitoba is well situated. The minister references the weather stability. It is a corridor I have travelled often to visit with family that live in the United States, and I think this has to be pursued with all levels of government and with others involved with the free trade initiatives that are going on, that transportation through Manitoba, from Manitoba is an important part of the economics of Manitoba. Whatever has to be done to enhance that, I think, is very important for our future. We know that other jurisdictions are promoting their locations. I think there are some natural advantages in Manitoba that certainly could be looked at and be promoted.

I am interested in the Grain Roads Program that the federal government is participating in and would ask questions on that later to understand their contribution. Of course, we agree totally that the federal government has a responsibility to be more involved in our transportation programs and our roads, our transportation within the province. It, again, is one of those areas that I think the federal government has used probably politically more

than feeling that they have some obligation, two national roads within this country.

I know in tours that I have been on in the Maritimes, often-noted road construction co-sponsored by the federal and provincial governments, it just seems to me a large amount of resources going into that, there needs to be a national policy on that. I do not understand why governments throughout the year at the federal level have not been more open in saying: This is our policy. These are our responsibilities. That \$150 million that they take out in gasoline tax every year needs to be redirected in some form back into our province to partner. The fact that we are able to do one out of 20 projects now is of grave concern to all Manitobans.

Madam Chairperson in the Chair

It is scary that so little of what needs to be done is being done. That will only grow without a federal involvement. The federal government, of course, is in an enviable position these days. I read in the paper this morning that they are looking at probably a \$17-billion surplus for the last year. Some of that is going to be plowed into debt.

I would commend them for that, but I know that they are also spending old-year money very quickly. I do not know where the half a billion dollars that went into the arts, and I do not dispute that there is some worthiness there, but that, in all likelihood, came out of old-year money too. They must, in coming years, see the need and the priority of being a bigger player within the provinces, in terms of roads.

The minister referenced his fondness for the American policy, their national vision on roads. Certainly, we all marvel at the major highways that run east and west and north and south in the U.S., that provide great avenues of transportation to visitors and Americans alike. Our Government must be made to see that they have a role to play in it, that there is such a need out there. I expect that need manifests itself in all provinces of Canada.

So those are some of the things that we will be looking at. I would like to start with some questions on the graduated driver's licence

initiative. I see we are five minutes from closing. The minister made that offer today and we need a better understanding of it. We will use the Estimates, and we will have other colleagues coming in to ask questions. Perhaps my colleague from Gimli might want a little time to talk about Government Services. I am sorry I have left you so little time this morning.

Mr. Edward Helwer (Gimli): I do not have too much of an opening statement. I think my colleague covered most of the Highways programs and projects. I just do want to say a few things about some of the Government Services initiatives. I guess one is the ongoing work here at the Manitoba Legislative Building. I think this is an important building to Manitoba. It is, as most of our visitors tell us when they tour the building, one of the nicest legislative buildings in Canada. I am certainly pleased that we can maintain it and try to continue maintaining it.

There are some things in the work being done that I will have some questions on. I guess some of the work is being done out of province. I will bring that up a little later. I understand the work is a little behind schedule. I think it is important, though, not to inconvenience some of the tourism business. Some of the tourists that come to Manitoba come to tour the Legislature during the summer months, especially July and August, which, I think, are very busy months in the Legislature here. It is a very popular spot for tourists to visit, so I would hope that they would take all of that into consideration. I realise they are a little behind schedule and want to probably catch up, depending on the weather conditions, but I would hope that they do take that into consideration. I will have some questions on that.

Just a couple of other initiatives that I know Government Services has that I will have some questions on. One is the courtroom that you have in south Winnipeg that we will have some discussion on. Airport improvement. I think the airport improvement program is very important, I think, to making some of the municipal airports that we have in Manitoba, to bring them up to standard that are, and keep and maintain them, to help the municipalities, and especially the northern airports, to keep them maintained and

to make them capable in some adverse weather conditions also.

We talked a little bit about the mould in buildings. I know that after the flooding of '97, of course, it was quite a major issue with some of the buildings that were flooded and wet. I know even today, even now three years after the flood, some of this mould is showing up in some of the buildings. I know that the disaster assistance program is dealing with these, but I will have some questions on that a little later on in our Estimates.

One of the things also that the minister mentioned in his opening statement is that the Brandon Mental Health Centre is sold to the city of Brandon. I think this is a step in the right direction. I am glad to see that the city of Brandon has some input there. I think this will be a good project for them.

He talked a little bit about ambulances. This is also important, that they be renewed on a timely basis, and I am pleased that the Government has taken some initiative there to help municipalities and Regional Health Authorities in replacing some of these ambulances. I think there are a number of questions that I will have on that issue also.

Also your recycling. You talked about that you want to make a Manitoba 100 percent recycling effort. I think that is a step in the right direction. I think recycling is very important. One project that is going on in the Interlake is the eastern Interlake recycling committee, which I know has been talking to the Government.

Ms. Chairperson: Excuse me. I would just like to take a moment to correct an oversight. I would first like to thank the critic from the Official Opposition for his remarks, but I would also like to remind that we will need leave for the second critic to make his remarks before we resume again after lunch.

Is there leave? *[Agreed]*

The time being 12 noon, I am interrupting the proceedings. The Committee of Supply will resume sitting this afternoon following inclusion of routine proceedings.

INDUSTRY, TRADE AND MINES

* (10:40)

Mr. Chairperson (Conrad Santos): Will the Committee of Supply come to order please. This section of the Committee of Supply has been dealing with the Estimates of the Department of Industry, Trade and Mines.

We are on page 104 of the Estimates book, item 10.5. Manitoba Research, Innovation and Technology (a) Manitoba Research, Innovation and Technology (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$1,449,600—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$705,500—pass; (3) Manitoba Innovations Fund \$7,000,000—pass; (4) Research and Innovation Fund \$1,250,000—pass; (5) Health Research Initiative \$3,000,000—pass; (6) Manitoba Centres of Excellence Fund \$410,000—pass; (7) Science Fairs/Education Grants \$11,900—pass.

5.(b) Access Manitoba (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$291,700—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$377,600—pass; (3) Grants \$45,000—pass; (4) Less: Recoverable from Urban and Rural Economic Development Initiatives (\$198,200)—pass.

5.(c) Industrial Technology Centre \$750,000—pass.

Resolution 10.5.: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$15,093,100 for Industry, Trade and Mines, Manitoba Research, Innovation and Technology, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2002.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 10.6.: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$526,700 for Industry, Trade and Mines, Amortization of Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2002.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of the Department of Industry, Trade

and Mines is item 10.1.(a) Minister's Salary. Shall the item pass?

Mr. Mervin Tweed (Turtle Mountain): Just a couple of questions for the minister. Can the minister tell the House whether her Estimates from last year will be on budget or over budget?

Hon. MaryAnn Mihychuk (Minister of Industry, Trade and Mines): It is my personal goal to always be within budget and where possible to see net savings for the people of Manitoba. I believe with a great deal of confidence last year's Budget will be within the Estimates as published last year.

Mr. Chairperson: Item 10.1(a) Minister's Salary \$28,100—pass.

Resolution 10.1.: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,009,500 for Industry, Trade and Mines, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2002.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Industry, Trade and Mines. The next Estimates that will be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply are the Estimates of the Department of Advanced Education.

Shall we briefly recess to allow the minister and the critics of the Opposition to prepare for the commencement of the next set of Estimates?
[Agreed]

The Committee recessed at 10:50 a.m.

The Committee resumed at 10:56 a.m.

ADVANCED EDUCATION

Mr. Chairperson (Conrad Santos): 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 Advanced Education. Does the honourable

Minister of Advanced Education have an opening statement?

Hon. Diane McGifford (Minister of Advanced Education): Yes, Mr. Chairman, I do. Would you like me to proceed?

Mr. Chairman, it is my privilege to place the 2001-2002 Estimates for the Department of Advanced Education before this committee for review. I would like to make some opening comments about the importance of this new department and provide some highlights of our accomplishments over the year, and to suggest some priorities for the future.

The creation of the Department of Advanced Education was announced in January 2001. I am honoured to be the minister of this important new department and wish to acknowledge the tremendous work of my colleague the Minister of Education, Training and Youth whose responsibilities included advanced education prior to the creation of this new department. His efforts have given me a very positive foundation with which to work, especially when I consider the challenges that faced this sector when our Government came to office.

Creating a Department of Advanced Education, with a minister responsible, will enable our Government to give the attention and focus to post-secondary education which is indeed warranted. Given the interconnections across the education and training sector, the two departments, Advanced Education and Education, Training and Youth will continue to undertake a high degree of common work and have a single set of common services. To provide guidance to our activities we have developed the following set of goals: (1) improve success rates in all programs and institutions; (2) expand the range of people we serve; (3) better integrate and support knowledge and skills development within economic and social priorities; (4) build capacity of institutions and the community to support learning; and (5) build a learning continuum in the province.

Our Government reflected the priority placed on advanced education last year by increasing operating grants to universities and colleges by \$8.8 million. This year we continue

our progress by again increasing grants to colleges and universities. For 2001-2002, our Government will be providing the system with an operating grant increase of 2.8 percent or \$8.2 million and has asked institutions to keep tuition fees at the 2000-2001 level. However, as an offset to an increase, we will be providing a 3.1% increase or \$3 million in the tuition revenue over last year; (3) is adding \$5.8 million to the College Expansion Initiative, that is in addition to last year's \$4.9 million; (4) is providing the University of Manitoba with the first grant of \$690,000, that is the first instalment of a committed \$2.1 million over five years for the implementation of the six-year Rural Physician Action Plan; (5) is providing a 3.9% or \$197,600 increase to the institutional access grants, the first increase in this grant in 10 years; (6) is providing an additional \$1.8 million for the tuition fee rebate.

* (11:00)

Taken together, these investments to the operating grants of the institutions amount to a 5.8% increase or \$19.5 million over the previous year, the largest such increase in the last 12 years. By adding the \$6.5 million in capital, the increase in total resources to the post-secondary education sector is 7.9 percent or \$26 million.

Mr. Chairman, I want to highlight the College Expansion Initiative. You will recall that this initiative was announced in early 2000. The College Expansion Initiative represents the most significant investment in the college system since its inception some 30 years ago. It is a critical step towards redressing the chronic underdevelopment of this sector. The initiative is working with the colleges to develop multiyear expansion plans.

In its first year, the initiative invested \$5 million in areas of importance to this province. Funding has enabled colleges to respond to needs in the health sector with nursing and health care aid programs. It has also supported innovations such as distance delivery and workplace models, learner retention efforts and inter-college collaboration. We continue to build on these accomplishments and will increase the investment to \$10.9 million this year for college expansion.

In terms of capital, we have recently announced an unprecedented amount of capital support to the post-secondary education sector, namely, a five-year \$50-million commitment to the University of Manitoba capital campaign, a \$31.5-million downtown campus for Red River College and a \$20-million grant divided among the University of Winnipeg, Brandon University and St. Boniface College. That is over \$100 million in capital.

It is important to note that over the last two years the total of resources to the post-secondary education sector have increased by 17 percent. I would also like to mention that my colleague, the Minister of Education, Training and Youth (Mr. Caldwell), and I had the opportunity on March 22, 2001 to consult with a cross-section of stakeholders regarding both the College Expansion Initiative and the training strategy which has been developed. Both of these are very important responses to the feedback we received through the Premier's economic summit in March of 2000.

Early in our mandate we announced a 10% tuition reduction to ease the burden on students of the cost of their education. In addition, Mr. Chair, we announced the \$6-million Manitoba Bursary to assist students with debt reduction. It is the first time since 1992 that the Government has played that role in terms of a bursary program. This Budget again includes funding for universities and colleges in order to provide students with a 10% tuition fee reduction from 1999, 2000 levels. This and the continuation for the Manitoba Bursary are two ways in which our Government continues to work to keep post-secondary education affordable for Manitobans.

The \$6-million Manitoba Bursary, together with the \$11-million Canada Millennium Scholarship and Bursary, provides annual loan remission to over 5000 Manitoba students. These bursaries are helping high-need students by reducing their debt loads to approximately \$6,000 per year for most students. This combined \$17 million loan remission also reduces the approximately \$30 million in annual total loans issued to \$13 million, or by 57 percent.

Our Government has also improved services to students applying for student financial assistance. Using cutting-edge technology we have recently launched an interactive, smart, on-line application in both official languages through the student financial assistance web site. Within minutes of submitting an application, students will receive an estimate of their award, and this is followed up within a week with their actual results. This compares favourably with the six weeks currently needed for the assessment of a paper application. Such are the wonders of technology.

I am pleased to state that for a second year in a row, following many years of reductions, our Government has increased funding support for ACCESS students. New and existing high-need ACCESS students will have an additional \$219,800 to provide them with the opportunity to obtain a post-secondary education that they would not otherwise have had. The success of this program is recognized nationally and internationally, and our Government is proud to begin to restore it and encourage more Aboriginal students and other traditionally excluded Manitobans to attend our post-secondary institutions. I might add parenthetically, Mr. Chair, that recently the ACCESS Program in Manitoba won a national award, and there was a member's statement, I believe, on that topic. So of course we are very proud.

There are, of course, challenges ahead and our Government will continue to work with the post-secondary sector in support of our common goals. We will support articulation, credit transfer and dual credit arrangements including stronger links between secondary and post-secondary institutions. The establishment of program-funded adult learning centres through the Department of Education Training and Youth will be an important opportunity for the post-secondary system to collaborate with secondary schools to meet the needs of adult learners. We will work with institutions to strengthen data and information on the advanced education sector in order to improve our collective understanding of issues such as affordability, accessibility, retention and transition.

As we move forward with plans for the Department of Advanced Education I know that I will benefit from the creative input of the Council on Post-Secondary Education, the institutions themselves, departmental staff and a wide range of stakeholders such as business, labour, community groups and of course students. I now look forward to reviewing my department Estimates with the committee.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the minister for those comments. Does the Official Opposition critic, the honourable Member for Russell, have any opening comments?

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Yes, I do, Mr. Chair. I begin by first of all congratulating the Minister of Advanced Education on being appointed to the portfolio as the first minister in our province of advanced education. It was certainly, in my view, a positive announcement, one that I think was welcome by the post-secondary institutions and the community of Manitoba. I have to tell the minister that back in 1990 when I was still Minister of Education and Training, having responsibilities for both divisions, I had proposed at that time to Executive Council that in my view the day had come when we needed two separate ministries because of the magnitude of the whole area of education and the complexity of the issues that are involved in dealing with the two large areas of education. So I welcome this change, and I think it is going to be positive for the province as a whole.

* (11:10)

I also have to say that many of the initiatives that have been undertaken by this Government in advancing more dollars to post-secondary education, more dollars to bursaries in the loans program, are areas that I am not going to criticize, in terms of the amount of money that has been invested. I feel that this is an area that we must continue to invest in. It is an area that is extremely important to the advancement of our province and also to the future of this great province. I do believe that we have a tremendous opportunity here in our province to not only retain, but to ensure that the brain drain, if I can use that term, does not continue in our province,

as we have seen it over the past numbers of years.

There are questions that I have, and I will be asking of the minister, with regard to the areas that she now has responsibility for. I do believe that there are still issues that have to be addressed. I did not expect her to address those in the short time that she has been minister, but, indeed, those are areas that I hope that we have some intelligent debate about. Not necessarily does it have to be adversarial, but indeed we will be seeking some answers and some clarification in some of these areas.

With regard to the expansion of colleges in our province, I certainly support the expansion of Red River College to a downtown campus. The minister will know that in the last years of our administration there was a fair bit of work, an extensive amount of work, that was done to move in that direction, and certainly I respect the fact that the new Government has continued in that vein and has now begun the construction of the campus. There are certainly questions about some of the construction costs, which I will be addressing; because as the minister knows full well, if these are not looked at carefully, sometimes they tend to run away and we have significant cost overruns if it is not looked at carefully.

The other area that I have some interest in is northern education. During my time as Minister of Rural Development, I was in charge of the trade relations between our province and the new territory of Nunavut, and the Northwest Territories, before Nunavut was formed. One of the areas that was of concern to people in northern Manitoba and in the Nunavut area was access to post-secondary education. At that time, students from the Nunavut area would travel, or the Kivalliq region, would travel to Edmonton to receive post-secondary education. I think that they still do that now. There were some students who were coming to Manitoba, but not in large numbers. In addition to that, students in northern Manitoba were not having access to the full range of programming that other students in our province had.

Therefore, I think there is some need to address access to post-secondary education for

students in northern Manitoba, and indeed at least opening up the opportunities for people from the Nunavut region.

I will have some questions in that regard, because I know there has been some talk about a college in the north. I know the Minister of Highways, the Member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton), has for many years pushed the idea of post-secondary education in the north; however, there is some tussle as to where that centre should be located. Is The Pas the area that it should be? Is Thompson the area? Where is the best advantage for a location of a college or a post-secondary institution?

Today, Mr. Chair, the minister talked about technology, and the wonders of technology need to be harnessed so that ordinary citizens can have access to the use of this technology. We talked about the information highway. We talked about the backbone that would connect communities of Manitoba to each other and to the technology that is available today. I think we need to move more quickly in that regard. We do not need to build bricks and mortar anymore. I believe that there are examples in Canada and in the United States where, in fact, programs are delivered to students in all remote regions without necessarily having those students be physically present on a campus.

I did travel to the distance-education model in British Columbia and in Athabasca and certainly those were examples of where institutions have moved beyond the traditional approach of providing education to students. When you look at the demographics and the geography of our province it, to me, makes a lot of sense to be able to invest in technology rather than simply investing in bricks and mortar. I think we can accomplish so much more by providing that type of access to education to students who are not necessarily in our cities but live in remote parts of our province. Certainly I will be asking some questions in that regard.

The minister talked about the ACCESS Program, Mr. Chair. This is a program that has benefited many students who perhaps do not have the means and do not have the ability to access post-secondary education in the normal way and do need the special assistance programs

to be able to get a quality education and then become productive citizens in our society.

Mr. Chair, I have to say there were problems when I became Minister of Education and Training, there were huge problems with the ACCESS Program. I think those are behind us today. I think we have learned some things as time has gone on. We do not have to re-invent the wheel every time we change government. We simply have to improve on some of the things that have been happening. Indeed, I think that we can improve programs constantly. It is not a matter of one philosophy of a government having a better idea and a better approach than another.

In terms of articulation, Mr. Chair, this is another area we need to move ahead on very, very rapidly. If you compare us to other jurisdictions, and I will just pick one, not because of the particular government; but I would have to say British Columbia and Alberta, who have moved far beyond where we are in articulating programs between colleges and universities. I will go back to the days when I was Minister of Education and Training and this was one area that I was very strong in trying to promote; but there was such huge resistance from our universities, and some from our colleges, to try and articulate programs that it was beyond understanding.

Today I have to tell you, personally I have two sons who are, unfortunately, getting their education out of province in a jurisdiction where there is a lot of articulation between college and university programs. One of them has moved from the—he started his first year in a business administration program in a college and then moved into a business commerce program at a university. We are still struggling with those issues, Mr. Chair. This is an area that certainly I want to hear from the minister what her thrust is in this regard because I think this is another area that needs immediate attention.

You know, improving education is not simply about throwing gobs of money at it. Yes, we do have to invest. I will not deny that. But that has to be matched with a move in changing how we do things and how we better address the

needs of people and the needs to accessing education by people from around the province.

* (11:20)

The minister also spoke in her opening remarks about the bursary and student assistance programs. For some reason, we still approach student loans and student bursaries in an archaic way. I do not know if that term is correct or not. I have students who come to me almost constantly. I am sure I receive several per month who have been denied access to a student loan, because they have access to a vehicle. It is not necessarily a new vehicle, but it is counted as an asset. In some instances, these are rented vehicles, which are necessary for these students to be able to travel from rural Manitoba to either Brandon or to Winnipeg to receive their education. These students are at a considerable disadvantage to students who live in the cities, and I put these students in the same categories as students in northern Manitoba. I see denial after denial on student applications for loans simply because the vehicle has not been addressed in the whole area of the Student Loan program.

I have one student who went so far as to sell his vehicle. He did not own it to begin with; it was a rented vehicle. He turned the vehicle back at some cost so that he would be able to finish this year of education. We appealed his case at Christmastime to the appeal board. To date, we have not heard. I have not heard. The student has not heard. He has finished his year by getting some income tax money back, borrowing money from an institution to finish his year, and he has not heard yet from the manager of the student appeal program whether or not his case was considered, whether it was thrown out, and that is for a student loan for last year's program, for the program that just finished.

So, Mr. Chair, there is a need for us to manage the programs better, and although we can now have access through the Internet to the Student Loan program, when you are denied it seems that you get caught up into an area where it is difficult to get any response or difficult, at least, to get a positive response to an application.

In terms of our universities, our universities play an important part in our society. The

University of Manitoba has been, for a long time, known as our research facility in this province. I think we need to continue to invest in research at our universities not only to provide our citizens with better products, better information, better technology in the future, but indeed to ensure that our university, especially the University of Manitoba, maintains its position as a world-class university where we can attract researchers, high quality people from around the world, because I think that is key to ensuring that our citizenry has opportunities in the best possible way at our universities.

I also have a high regard for one of our smallest universities and that is the university at Brandon. I was recently in discussion with the president of the university there. He is not a Manitoban, he is someone who has moved into our province. I am very encouraged by his optimistic view. He has travelled extensively and has worked extensively in other jurisdictions, and his comment to me was that we simply do not understand, as Manitobans, what a jewel we have in this university at Brandon. Certainly, that is an institution that I support very, very much and would hope that the minister sees this university as being very important to rural Manitoba, at least western rural Manitoba and also northern Manitoba, because this university has done a lot of work in northern Manitoba as well.

So Mr. Chair, I look forward to the discussions in examining the Estimates of the minister of post-secondary education. I have to tell her that I am not simply going to oppose initiatives because I am in Opposition. We do have a role as Opposition to ensure that the Government is held accountable and my role is to ensure that her department and her ministry are accountable to the people of our province. I am going to support some of the initiatives, of course, and certainly I do support investment in education.

Mr. Chair, this Government is living in a different age than we did when we were in government. I have to tell her that in times when the federal government was reducing transfer payment to this province, it was extremely difficult for any stripe of government to try to maintain the increases in grants to our post-

secondary institutions. So, therefore, I believe we are living in a time when revenues to this province have been growing. The federal government has loosened its purse strings in terms of the transfers. This year the Government received an amendment, or an additional sum of monies, that was a correction in the accounting that goes back to when we were in government. I only wish we had had that opportunity, but indeed it does give this Government the ability to invest in areas, and certainly I support the investment in post-secondary education.

So, with that, Mr. Chair, I will conclude my opening remarks, and I look forward to some discussion on the Estimates. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the critic for the Official Opposition for those remarks. I would remind the members of the committee that debate on the Minister's Salary, item number 1.(a) is deferred until all other items in the Estimates of this department are passed. At this time I would like to invite the ministerial staff to take their places in the Chamber, if there is any.

Ms. McGifford: Thank you Mr. Chair. I wonder if I could, before staff join me, just respond very briefly to the member's remarks.

Mr. Chairperson: Unless there is agreement between the Government and the Opposition, that cannot be done without the consent of the other.

Ms. McGifford: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will have an opportunity to thank the member for his sweet-temperedness and felicitous presentation, I am sure, at another opportunity. I am not used to him in this incarnation.

Mr. Chairperson: Would the minister be kind to introduce the members of her staff.

Ms. McGifford: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Beside me here, is Leo Le Tourneau, who is the Director of the Council on Post-Secondary Education, and sitting beside him is Ben Levin, Deputy Minister of Advanced Education, and Education, Training and Youth.

Across from Mr. Levin—Doctor Levin, I should say—is Dr. Curtis Nordman, who is in charge of the College Expansion Initiative, and sitting beside Mr. Nordman is Tom Thompson, who is from the Finance and Administrative Branch of Education and Training, and he is the Director there.

Mr. Chairperson: The item before this committee, we will start with item 1.(b) Executive Support (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$519,100, the honourable Minister of Advanced Education. Are there any questions?

* (11:30)

An Honourable Member: Absolutely.

Mr. Chairperson: Then you have to signify that we will pass this item.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Chair, I am sorry. I heard you call for the Minister of Advanced Education. I was waiting, but I am sorry. I will continue.

Mr. Chairperson: You have the floor or the minister has the floor, whoever wants to.

Mr. Derkach: My light is on. First of all, I would like to welcome the staff. As the critic for Advanced Education, I am familiar with the staff, and certainly welcome them to this session.

My questions, Mr. Chair, are going to be general in nature so that I get a better understanding of how the department has been reorganized. I note that we have a Minister of Advanced Education, but I would simply like the minister, if she could, to perhaps outline the structure as it relates to the administrative staff in the department and how they relate both to the Advanced Education Department and to the Department of Education, Training and Youth.

Ms. McGifford: To respond to the Member for Russell, I have an office staff, as I am sure the Member for Russell knows, considered to be executive support. My office people include: Linda Kuhn, Rosalie Prawdzik, Doreen Wilson and Judith Baldwin. I do also want to mention Christiane Cahill, who works in my office. I do not know whether that answers the member's question.

Mr. Derkach: No, I am not asking about her office staff, Mr. Chair. I am more interested in knowing, for example, at the professional staff level, the ADMs, the deputy minister, and how they interrelate between the Department of Education, Training and Youth and the Department of Advanced Education.

Ms. McGifford: Perhaps I could refer the member to page 11, where we have an organization chart. If the member looks at that chart, he will see that there are two ministers, and I am sure he knows that, obviously. There is one deputy minister. The deputy minister obviously is with us today.

If the member looks under the Minister of Advanced Education, he will see that there is the Council on Post-Secondary Education, chaired by Don Robertson, and of course the director there is Leo LeTourneau. The executive support has already been cited. He can also see that there is a College Expansion Initiative function, which reports to the deputy minister. There is Student Financial Assistance, with Executive Director Robert Gorchynski, which reports to Deputy Minister Levin, who in turn reports to me.

Of course, the printed main Estimates also show the units that report directly to me.

Mr. Derkach: I noticed the organizational chart. I guess my question has to do with we have a deputy minister, who now serves, I would guess, both the Minister of Advanced Education and the Minister of Education, Training and Youth (Mr. Caldwell).

I go back to the former administration, where we had one minister, two deputies. I am wondering whether or not the future of this department is one where we are going to have also a separate deputy minister for Advanced Education. Is this an evolving process, or has the Government now decided that they will continue with one deputy minister and two ministers?

Ms. McGifford: I could remark on the tremendous abilities of the deputy minister, who can serve two ministers, but I know that the member opposite is quite well aware of the singular attributes of this deputy minister. The

real answer to the question is that it is under review. I do want to take the opportunity to thank the member opposite for congratulating me on becoming the minister, and also I appreciate his recognition of the importance of Advanced Education. So excuse me that little sidebar. The answer to the question is it is evolving.

We are assessing our needs as we proceed. We are not ruling it out and we are not ruling it in at this point. Of course I should make the point, and I think it was part of my introductory remarks, that there are many synergies between our two departments. We would not want to lose these synergies. Perhaps having a single deputy minister is one way of maintaining those.

Mr. Derkach: I too would have to acknowledge the abilities of Doctor Levin, certainly somebody that I had the pleasure to work with. I know that he is capable of managing the areas that he has responsibility for.

I guess my question has been partially answered in that the minister does acknowledge that this is an evolving issue and in fact that there could be changes in this regard in the future. I guess my support for that would be that I know the complexities and the workload that is incurred by the professional staff because of the size of the department and I guess the emphasis on training and education. Certainly I believe personally that in the future it would be received positively if in fact there were more emphasis placed on the post-secondary side in terms of having staff dedicated to that area in itself. However, that is not an issue that I want to dwell on for a long period of time.

I do want to ask the minister though, in terms of her executive support, she named the people that she had in her office. I know that some of them are secretarial help, because I recognize the names. Could she tell me what she has in terms of administrative support in her office, i.e., special assistants, advisors, legislative assistants? Can she just identify them for me, please?

Ms. McGifford: I thank the member for his question. I did indicate the secretarial support. I have a special assistant and I have an executive

assistant. I have no advisors attached to my office.

Mr. Derkach: Can the minister, for clarification, just indicate to me access to her deputy minister as it relates to her portfolio vis-à-vis the access of the Minister of Training and Youth to the deputy minister. I know that there must be some juggling of times to be able to gain access to this individual. Is the individual dedicated to both areas on a 50-50 basis, or how are the mechanics of this sorted out?

* (11:40)

Ms. McGifford: Well, just to respond to the minister, I have never had any trouble in gaining access to the deputy minister when I needed to speak to him. He always seems to me to be around. As to whether it is a 50-50 designation, perhaps some days the deputy minister spends more time with me and perhaps another day he would spend more time with the other minister. It really depends on need, and we work very cooperatively together.

But I should also point out to the member opposite that I work with other people in addition to the deputy minister. For example, Mr. Le Tourneau is very frequently in my office and meets with community groups along with me, as is Doctor Nordman. Actually, we are all doctors at this table, I think, so I had better be careful so that everyone gets his proper title. Anyway, to sum up my answer, I work with the deputy minister as needed, and I am sure that is also true of my colleague the Member for Brandon East (Mr. Caldwell). You could certainly speak to him in his Estimates, but it seems to be working really well.

Mr. Derkach: I would like to talk a little bit about the College Expansion program. I know Doctor Nordman has been given the task of the College Expansion program and specifically with the Red River program. Could the minister just indicate to me the progress that has been made to date on the expansion of Red River and how the project is proceeding to date?

Ms. McGifford: I wonder, Mr. Chair, before proceeding to answering questions on the

college expansion initiative, if we might pass subappropriation 1.(b).

Mr. Chairperson: Do you want to engage in global debates, or do you want to do it itemized?

Mr. Derkach: With the minister's approval, I would prefer to do it on a global basis and then go back and pass the items. I do not intend to spend days on these Estimates, but I would like a global discussion if that is, with the minister's approval, appropriate.

Ms. McGifford: I appreciate that the member opposite would like to proceed in the global fashion. I know that, when he responded to my remarks, he responded by making remarks about the CEI, northern education, access to post-secondary education, access period, articulation, student aid, University of Manitoba research. I do not know whether that is a reflection of the agenda that the member opposite has.

I just want him to appreciate, although we are willing to proceed globally, there is a problem with staff, and we do not want to keep a lot of staff away from their offices for days on end while we make sure there is somebody in to respond to a question that could have been asked at another point. So I do ask then if we agree to proceeding globally that the member, and I am sure he will do so, respect the lives and work of staff.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Chair, I always do. I just indicated to the member I do not intend to keep her here for days. This is her first attempt as minister at these Estimates of this department. It is a new department, and there are still organization matters, I am sure, that have to be taken care of in the next year or so. Next year we will have a better comparative basis to go on. I do not intend to keep her here for days on end. We have concurrence that we can deal with if I have questions that arise after going through this briefly, but she need not worry about the fact that staff are going to be kept from their regular jobs for days on end.

Ms. McGifford: Mr. Chair, perhaps we could proceed then to the questions on the College Expansion Initiative.

Mr. Chairperson: So I take it that there is agreement that there will be global discussions and if technical information is needed the critic would probably be willing to wait. Is that agreed? *[Agreed]* So we proceed that way, global discussions. The question has been put. What was your question, honourable member?

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Chair, I will repeat it. I was asking the minister whether she could give me some information as to the progress on the expansion of Red River College, specifically the downtown campus.

Ms. McGifford: I thank the member for that question. I understand that we are currently proceeding on course for an opening in September 2002. I am sure that the member is aware that there is a case before the courts and we really do not want to speculate on the outcome of this case or whether there is any possible impact on the College Expansion Initiative on the Princess Street campus. However, I think it is fair to say that Government would be remiss if we did not begin considering alternatives. I can assure you that we have considered contingency plans. They are being developed.

As I indicated to the member, I hesitate to say anything more on the matter at this time. As the member knows, there are some legal processes currently underway. I think it is important that those legal processes proceed without interference.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Chair, I am not at all relating to what was in the paper today or to the legal issues. I am more interested in knowing whether, in fact, the project is proceeding on budget, whether in fact the project is proceeding on a time schedule where in fact it will be open when it was reported that they would be ready to receive students and in general just asking for a progress report from the minister.

Ms. McGifford: The answer to the member's two questions are yes and yes. The College Expansion Initiative at Princess Street is on budget and it is on time, and our current plan is that we will open in the fall of 2002. We hope to have a healthy cadre of students down there, and we are very proud of this work. I am sure that

the member agrees with me it will be extremely important in the regeneration of downtown Winnipeg; something to which I am sure the member is as dedicated as all of us are. Of course, I should make the point that this is a phased in project and the first phase is 2002, phase 1, and I think phase 2 is 2003, both in September.

* (11:50)

Mr. Derkach: I think the budget for the project is \$30 million. Is that correct?

Ms. McGifford: Just a slight correction. It is \$31.5 million, the budget.

Mr. Derkach: I thank the minister for that correction. My question relates to cost overruns. Just having been involved in some projects, I know at times things happen which cause some cost overruns, and if indeed the project is not managed well we could see significant cost overruns. This is a large project. It is not small. I just want to know from the minister whether or not she is confident that indeed the project will be completed on budget, and whether she is anticipating any cost overruns in any of the areas of the project at all.

Ms. McGifford: As a home renovator, I am very familiar with cost overruns. However, in this particular project, I am not a home renovator and responsible to the people of Manitoba. We said \$31.5 million, and that is what we meant. There are no cost overruns to date. Any problems could be dealt with within contingency.

Mr. Derkach: May I ask the minister what specific programs are going to be housed at the downtown campus?

Ms. McGifford: As the member can imagine, everything is not thoroughly complete in this matter, and there is ongoing discussion; but what I can do is give him a flavour of what is being considered. First of all, an e-commerce option, a business administration diploma. Secondly, information systems technology diploma. Third, introduction to computer-assisted programming certificate, broadcast arts diploma, digital multimedia diploma, network technology diploma,

technology communications diploma, technology management advanced diploma.

Mr. Derkach: Could the minister table that information?

Ms. McGifford: Yes, Mr. Chair, we could do that for the member.

Mr. Derkach: I want to ask the minister whether or not there is any thought, or perhaps whether the component of distance delivery is going to be built in to the downtown campus and whether in fact the campus will be able to deliver by distance some of the programming that is going to be offered at the downtown campus to areas like Portage or other regions in Manitoba and southern Manitoba.

Ms. McGifford: I really appreciate the member's interest in distance education and I know he brought this to my attention in his introductory remarks. We are, of course, in all our colleges and universities, very interested in distance education. I was going to mention to the member that recently I attended the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada conference in Toronto, when we had quite a lively discussion about e-learning and alternate kinds of learning. As the member knows, this is something that is being discussed across the nation and, of course, internationally. The short answer to his question is, yes.

Red River College will receive about .8 to \$1 million for distance education and it can emanate from any campus.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Chair, I guess I want to get a little more specific with respect to the distance learning. I know Doctor Nordman is familiar with some of the other jurisdictions that offer these types of programmings. I guess I refer the minister to the University of Northern British Columbia, who basically have a small campus, but deliver a large number of programs to students anywhere in British Columbia from a distant delivery theatre centre located almost on the entire second floor of their university. I want to ask whether or not—I know a million dollars does not go very far with distance delivery—I am wondering whether any thought has been given by the college expansion team to looking

seriously at a process where some of this very important programming and education can be delivered to regions of this province where access is a problem.

Ms. McGifford: I noticed that the member alluded to the University of Northern British Columbia. I wanted to tell him that I have had the opportunity to meet with officials from the University of Northern British Columbia, and certainly, they did talk about some of the work they are doing in distance education and various kinds of distance education, and I enjoyed those meetings and found them very useful.

One of the things I want to bring to the attention of the member, it is something that he already knows, and that is, there are a number of distance education and new kinds of programming already being offered in all our public institutions. For example, Assiniboine Community College has distance education and a new instructional media centre. There are a number of things that emanate from Assiniboine Community College. Keewatin Community College—and I know that the member was very interested in northern education and undoubtedly, we will talk about it as our discussions proceed. For example, Keewatin Community College has many community-based programs, and when I was there, I heard first-hand from the students why they thought other forms of learning were extremely important. I have long lists of those programs, but I will not read them into the record at this point. I did want to say that with regard to distance education, it is going to be integrated into Campus Manitoba.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Chair, I am familiar with Campus Manitoba, but I guess I am going to press this issue a little because I am somewhat familiar with what is available in our province. I am also a little bit familiar with what is available in other jurisdictions. In the age of the Internet and high-speed Internet and laser-speed Internet, we seem as a province to be somewhat lagging in this area. Now I know we have distance delivery, and I am not going to blame the minister for this at all. All I am asking is that the College Expansion group, led by Doctor Nordman, would look very seriously at this area and put an emphasis in this area because I truly believe that instead of bricks and mortar we

could be investing in other ways where we could have far more effect. I know we still have to invest in bricks and mortar in areas such as Winnipeg where we have a concentration of students, but we have to look at the geography of our province and the people who live in our remote communities who do not have access to this type of education and sometimes do not have the money. The minister knows what a depressed economy we have in rural Manitoba right now. Many of these students do not have the financial means to be able to come in to a centre like this, pay living costs and attend college or university. For that reason, I will be pressing this issue.

I want to ask the minister whether or not she has any plans through the College Expansion program to put some emphasis on the distance learning programs.

Ms. McGifford: Well, rather than pressing the issue, it sounds to me like the member opposite is supporting our initiatives. He certainly made that remark in his introductory piece, and I do

appreciate it. You know, I think we would certainly acknowledge that, overall, Manitoba has room to improve with regard to distance education, but we are taking steps. I can assure the member of our serious intention to continue with those steps, and we do acknowledge that the previous government also took steps. We are working very arduously to do everything we can.

I alluded earlier to the Canadian ministers of Education, and the work that was presented to the Canadian ministers of Education with regard to on-line learning and that initiative. The initiative is looking at co-operative arrangements between the provinces, and I think that will also be important. As well, Campus Manitoba is looking at Canadian virtual university.

Mr. Chairperson: The hour being 12 noon, pursuant to the rules, I am interrupting the proceedings of the Committee of Supply, with the understanding that the Speaker will resume the Chair at 1:30 p.m. today, and that after routine proceedings, Committee of Supply will resume consideration of Estimates.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 3, 2001

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