

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 5, 2009

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONS

Winnipeg Regional Health Authority

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by G. Lorrain, D. Lee, J. Cannles and many, many other fine Manitobans. Thank you.

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

Ring Dike Road–Ste. Rose du Lac

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

The Ring Dike Road is a well-used gravel municipal road that is used as a secondary road in and out of the community of Ste. Rose du Lac.

Given this heavy pattern of use, there is strong interest in the community in seeing the Ring Dike Road upgraded to a paved provincial road.

It would be most cost-effective to upgrade the Ring Dike Road to a provincial road at the same time that upgrades are being undertaken at the junction of Highway 68 and Highway 5.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) to consider upgrading the Ring Dike Road at Ste. Rose du Lac into a provincial road; and

To request the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation to consider upgrading the Ring Dike Road at the same time that work is being done at the junction of Highway 68 and Highway 5.

This petition is signed by Dennis Mulesa, Julie Windsor, David Chomm and many, many other fine Manitobans.

Long-Term Care Facility–Morden

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

The background for this petition is as follows:

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This is signed by Garry Gross, Barry Kraeke, George Klassen and many, many others.

PTH 15

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

These are the reasons for this petition.

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

Mr. Speaker, injuries resulting from collisions on PTH 15 continue to rise and have doubled from 2007 to 2008.

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

The current plan to replace the floodway bridge on PTH 15 does not include twinning and, therefore, does not fulfil the current or future traffic demands cited by the Minister of Transportation.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

Signed by Chuck Reynolds, Darlene Moyse, Doug Moyse and many, many other Manitobans. Thank you.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Standing Committee on Crown Corporations Second Report

Mr. Daryl Reid (Chairperson): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the Second Report of the Standing Committee on Crown Corporations.

Madam Clerk (Patricia Chaychuk): Your Standing Committee on Crown Corporations—

Mr. Speaker: Dispense?

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on CROWN CORPORATIONS presents the following as its Second Report.

Meetings

Your Committee met on the following occasions in the Legislative Building:

- *Monday, October 17, 2005 (3rd Session – 38th Legislature)*
- *Wednesday, December 5, 2007 (2nd Session – 39th Legislature)*
- *Monday, May 4, 2009*

Matters under Consideration

- *The Annual Report of the Manitoba Liquor Control Commission for the year ended March 31, 2005*
- *The Annual Report of the Manitoba Liquor Control Commission for the year ended March 31, 2006*
- *The Annual Report of the Manitoba Liquor Control Commission for the year ended March 31, 2007*
- *The Annual Report of the Manitoba Liquor Control Commission for the year ended March 31, 2008*

Committee Membership

Committee Membership for the October 17, 2005 meeting:

- *Mr. AGLUGUB*
- *Ms. BRICK (Chairperson)*
- *Mr. CULLEN*
- *Mr. DEWAR*
- *Mr. FAURSCHOU*
- *Ms. IRVIN-ROSS (Vice-Chairperson)*
- *Mr. MAGUIRE*
- *Mr. MALOWAY*
- *Mr. SCHELLENBERG*
- *Mr. SCHULER*
- *Hon. Mr. SMITH*

Committee Membership for the December 5, 2007 meeting:

- *Mr. BOROTSIK*
- *Ms. BRICK*
- *Mr. DEWAR*
- *Mr. GRAYDON*
- *Ms. HOWARD*
- *Mr. MAGUIRE*
- *Ms. MARCELINO (Vice-Chairperson)*

- *Mr. REID (Chairperson)*
- *Mr. SARAN*
- *Hon. Mr. SELINGER*
- *Mrs. TAILLIEU*

Committee Membership for the May 4, 2009 meeting:

- *Mr. BOROTSIK*
- *Ms. BRICK*
- *Mr. CULLEN*
- *Mr. DEWAR*
- *Mr. GRAYDON*
- *Mr. JHA*
- *Ms. MARCELINO*
- *Mr. REID (Chairperson)*
- *Hon. Mr. SWAN*
- *Hon. Ms. WOWCHUK*
- *Mrs. TAILLIEU*

Your Committee elected Mr. JHA as the Vice-Chairperson.

Officials Speaking on Record at the October 17, 2005 meeting:

- *Don Lussier, President & CEO*
- *Carmen Neufeld, Chair, MLCC Board of Commissioners*

Officials Speaking on Record at the December 5, 2007 meeting:

- *Don Lussier, President & CEO*
- *Carmen Neufeld, Chair, MLCC Board of Commissioners*

Officials Speaking on Record at the May 4, 2009 meeting:

- *Don Lussier, President & CEO*
- *Carmen Neufeld, Chair, MLCC Board of Commissioners*

Report Considered and Passed

Your Committee considered and passed the following report as presented:

- *The Annual Report of the Manitoba Liquor Control Commission for the year ended March 31, 2005*

Reports Considered but not Passed

Your Committee considered the following reports but did not pass them:

- *The Annual Report of the Manitoba Liquor Control Commission for the year ended March 31, 2006*
- *The Annual Report of the Manitoba Liquor Control Commission for the year ended March 31, 2007*
- *The Annual Report of the Manitoba Liquor Control Commission for the year ended March 31, 2008*

Mr. Reid: Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Member for Radisson (Mr. Jha), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Healthy Living): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table the 2009-2010 Departmental Expenditure Estimates for Healthy Child Manitoba, as well as the 2009-2010 Expenditure for Manitoba Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat.

ORAL QUESTIONS

Provincial Debt Repayment

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, when the Premier was campaigning in 1999, he promised the people of Manitoba that he would be different from the Howard Pawley New Democrats. He went so far as to rebrand his party the new New Democrats in order to send a message, in order to send a message to Manitobans that they would never go back to the days of deficit financing and that they would never saddle the next generation of Manitobans with debt.

I want to ask the Premier now: Why has he broken his promise to the people of Manitoba?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I don't know whether the member opposite noticed, but there was an election in 2003 and then there was an election in 2007, and, in fact, there were by-elections in 2009.

The extreme rhetoric of the member opposite is not the way the people of Manitoba want to go. We're accountable not to the wild extreme claims of members opposite. We're accountable to the average folks of Manitoba, whether it's the folks in Swan River or The Pas or Elmwood or Transcona or Rupertsland.

We're accountable to the people. We were in 2003. We were in 2007. We were accountable in 2009, and we'll be accountable again in 2011, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, he made a promise to the people of Manitoba not to do anything radical or extreme but to do what they do every day, which is balance the budget, and to do what they're doing today, which is to take advantage of low interest rates to pay down debt, not run it up.

With most economists projecting interest rates to go up in the coming years, why is he piling on the debt, creating a situation where that debt is going to have to be repaid with higher interest rates when he could be doing what Manitobans are doing today, being prudent by balancing their budgets and sticking to their debt repayment plans?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, I would point out that there was a vision in the 1990s, and that vision was put forward by the members opposite, and there's a vision in dealing with tough economic times that we're putting forward. The members opposite cut the number of doctors' spots. They cut the number of nursing spots. They fired nurses. They delayed, deferred and cancelled capital at the Health Sciences Centre, at Brandon General Hospital. They had less RCMP officers than we have in our positions. They had less prosecutors. They chose a route—they even raised the gasoline tax and didn't re-invest it in highways.

Now, they still ran a deficit according to Harold Neufeld, the former Member for Rossmere, of \$872 million. That was their vision. That was their vision in '92-'93. Our vision is to invest in more doctors, to invest in more nurses, to invest in schools, to invest in universities, to invest in apprenticeship training, to invest in the future of Manitoba, and we're still running a surplus under GAAP financial planning.

One vision is to build and still run a surplus. The other vision is to cut, cut, cut and run a deficit. I think the people of Manitoba will choose our vision any day of the week, Mr. Speaker.

*(13:40)

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, with all of that rhetoric, what we're talking about is the minimum payment on the credit card bill. It's one-half of 1 percent of the total budget, and they still can't figure out how to make the minimum payment on the credit card bill. That's not the way Manitobans

manage their finances, and it's not the way the government should manage its finances either.

Mr. Speaker, the government of Nova Scotia was defeated by the NDP in that province who were fighting against their decision to not make a minimum payment on their debt. The NDP in Nova Scotia get it. Regular Manitobans understand that if you don't pay your bills and you don't pay down your debt, you're creating a crisis that's going to have to be dealt with down the road.

Now, the Premier talks about financial challenges today. On the one hand, he says Manitoba is weathering the storm. On the other hand, he says we have such a crisis that we can't make the minimum payment on the credit card bill. Which is it?

Mr. Doer: I would point out to the member opposite, you know, he might want to do a little research about the retroactivity provision in the proposed budget in Nova Scotia. But we'll let—again, you know, we're democrats. The people of Nova Scotia will decide. The people in Nova Scotia will make the decision. The people in Nova Scotia will—it's a democracy. It's not extremism. It's not jargon, extreme ideological jargon. It's not these extreme radical positions put forward.

You know, they're talking on the one hand about how terrible it is, and then it's one-half of 1 percent of the whole budget. What about all the money for nurses? What about all the money for doctors? What about all the money for police? What about all the money for Crowns? What about all the money for highways? What about all the money for water inspectors? What about all the money for tax reductions? What about all the money for infrastructure?

They vote against the whole budget, Mr. Speaker, and then they want to talk about a little part of it. *[interjection]* You know, this is what they are. They're nitpickers. They go after one-half of 1 percent.

They lose the big picture every day. We get the big picture, Mr. Speaker.

Provincial Debt Repayment

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, what the Premier forgets is all of that money he's spending comes from equalization. It comes from the rest of the country of Canada.

Mr. Speaker, isn't it rather ironic that the NDP's Nova Scotia brethren have brought down the government because of their refusal to pay down the debt? The NDP in Nova Scotia said they could not support a bill that allows the government to divert funding from debt reduction to give the appearance of a balanced budget.

Does that sound similar, Mr. Speaker? Will the NDP government follow their Nova Scotia lead and amend Bill 30 and make a debt payment?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance):

Mr. Speaker, there's \$417 million of debt management in this budget: \$20 million on the general purpose debt; \$135 million on the pension liabilities, never paid before by the members opposite; another \$135 million on amortization; over \$120 million on principal repayment: \$417 million of fiscal prudence in this budget.

No wonder the people in Nova Scotia, the opposition party there, want to have a change. They like what we do in Manitoba. They want to implement it in Nova Scotia.

Mr. Borotsik: What they want to implement in Nova Scotia is debt repayment, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Finance Minister spins his wasteful spending by borrowing new debt, in this budget \$1.7 billion—"b", billion dollars—of new debt. He has never admitted that capital projects could be paid out of cash flow.

Last night in committee, the MLCC confirmed they paid for their new distribution centre out of cash flow. They didn't borrow the money. What a novel idea. Why doesn't the minister follow the lead of his own Crown corporation, spend from cash flow and not borrow \$1.78 billion?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, our debt as a proportion of the economy has shrunk by about 30 percent since we've been in office. Our cost of servicing the debt has reduced by 54 percent, from 13.2 cents on the dollar to 6 cents on the dollar.

I'm glad the member opposite acknowledges that the Liquor Control Commission, a Crown corporation, is doing a good job. Will he now commit to not privatizing it?

Mr. Borotsik: I don't ever recall that privatization of the Manitoba Liquor Control Commission was in our policy, but I would like a private wine store in the city of Brandon.

Mr. Speaker, six months ago, this NDP government committed to a debt repayment of \$110 million. Last month, in his budget, the Finance Minister promised a debt reduction of \$20 million. Today, in Bill 30, he's reduced that debt repayment to zero.

The minister can waste \$240,000 in advertising. The minister can waste \$13 million on foolish enhanced driver's licences. The minister can waste \$650 million on a daffy detour, but he can't pay down his credit card debt.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP in Nova Scotia would not stand for this. Will the minister amend Bill 30?

Mr. Selinger: The member wants to put \$20 billion of export revenues at risk so that he can have his policy implemented. He wants to make sure Manitobans do not have the ability to cross the border, which would seriously hamper the growth in the economy by not being able to cross the border. That's the kind of approach he wants to take. He wants to vote against a budget which has \$417 million of fiscal discipline and tax reductions, the smallest small-business tax rate in the country and key investments in infrastructure, including in his own home community.

He wants to vote against all of those things and at the same time have a private wine store. We know what your priorities are, more Crown Royal through a private wine store. We'll look after the public interest; you look after the private interest.

Manitoba Hydro Bipole III West-Side Cost

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, it is encouraging to hear the Premier (Mr. Doer) talk about democracy this afternoon as Manitobans are lining up against this government's plan to spend an extra \$640 million on a west-side line.

One such Manitoban, Brian Schwartz, is a University of Manitoba law professor, the author of seven books and over 60 academic articles. Last week he stated: Putting bipole on the wrong side of the lake is environmentally unsound as well as a colossal waste of money, and we're not just talking \$200 million. Some estimates are \$1.5 billion.

Mr. Speaker, how can the Minister of Finance and the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro justify running up our credit card even higher when he can't even meet his current debt obligations?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act):

I thank the member for the question because it allows me once again to put the record straight. The west-side line will save 76 megawatts of line loss. That's what it'll save over the base case, over what we have now.

Let's remember, Mr. Speaker, after the '97 debacle with respect to hydro lines almost going down, they had the opportunity to increase reliability. They refused to do it. This reliability project will save 76 megawatts of line loss worth about \$427 million and allow for the development of another 2,000 megawatts of power at Keeyask and Conawapa in Manitoba.

Those are all sound business decisions that the members opposite will vote against every single time because they do not believe in developing Manitoba hydro. They believe in mothballing it.

Mr. Cullen: Well, Mr. Speaker, with logic like that there's no wonder this government can't balance their budget.

Mr. Schwartz is very clear on his view of Bipole III. He goes on to say: The west-side route makes no sense environmentally; you're just going through more boreal forest. You're wasting a lot of renewable energy, and it's wasting a lot of money that could be used for a lot of social purposes. It could be used on the east side. It could be used for hospitals and other social services in the city. It does not make sense.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 30 does not make sense either. Why is this government intent on wasting taxpayers' money instead of paying down the debt?

* (13:50)

Mr. Selinger: If we followed the advice of the person the member quoted, he's suggesting that money borrowed by Hydro should be used for schools and hospitals. You know what? Crown corporations can't borrow money to fund government programs. Not only is it illegal; it's impractical. So the member's suggestions—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Selinger: He should take a little time to understand how they finance things in Manitoba. Manitoba Hydro finances reliability, transmission

and generation projects for Manitoba hydro on a business-case basis.

In this case, the business case is strong: less risk to export revenues, greater efficiency, more revenue and the potential to build another 2,000 megawatts, all of which are sound financial decisions made by the Crown corporation.

Mr. Cullen: Well, Mr. Speaker, was it a sound financial decision when this government took \$203 million out of Manitoba Hydro not too long ago?

Mr. Speaker, we're simply asking this government to take a sober second look at their spending decisions. Prudent Manitobans are looking to avoid wasteful spending. Most Manitobans are saying that spending hundreds-of-million dollars on a west-side line is irresponsible, and that's especially true when we don't have that money to spend.

Bill 30 clearly shows that we don't have money to meet our current obligations. Mr. Speaker, how can this minister justify running up the credit when he can't even meet his current debt obligations?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the debt-equity ratio in Manitoba Hydro, at 75-25, is the best it's been in 30 years. It was at 86-14 when the members opposite were in office.

All the financial indicators at Manitoba Hydro are in the best shape they've been in, in over three decades. I know the members can't handle that, but that's the reality. Manitoba Hydro is a very solidly run corporation with a very solid plan to build another 2,000 megawatts of power in this province.

And, by the way, they're going to do it in a business-like manner, just like we're doing in the budget. We balanced the budget, \$48-million surplus, another \$625 million of stimulus for 10,000 person years of employment.

The members opposite would like to cut the debt, put Manitobans on the unemployment rolls and drive the province into the ground. We prefer to build it, and Manitobans support us.

Provincial Debt Repayment

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Again, this minister and this government are misleading Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker, the Spirited Energy campaign cost Manitobans nearly \$3 million. The failed campaign

was shrouded in secrecy. The government stonewalled, misled and contradicted itself, both in the cost associated with the campaign and the level of support for this failed campaign.

Mr. Speaker, it appears that the focus of Bill 30 is to fleece Manitoba taxpayers. These taxpayers are expected to make at least the minimum payment on their credit card debt. So why is this government not paying down its debt instead of wasting Manitoba taxpayer dollars?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): At the risk of repeating myself, Mr. Speaker: \$136 million for pension liability. Members opposite used to keep it completely off the books. It grew from \$1.9 billion to \$3 billion while they were in office.

What they do is they picked a symbolic—they picked a symbol. Let's pay down this debt over here; let's leave this one off the books and forget about it.

By the way, they borrowed money to build casinos illegally. They borrowed that off the books as well. So they left money off the books for the pension liability. They took money outside legal authority to build casinos, and, when it came to Manitoba Hydro, they had half-a-billion dollars that they didn't put on the books.

Everything's on the books now. Everything's managed. Everything's transparent and everything has a sound business case to back it up.

Mrs. Rowat: It appears everything's rosy. Well, I think the NDP misled, misled—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Speaker, that's spin. The NDP misled Manitobans into believing the Spirited Energy campaign was a huge success with the private sector.

An Honourable Member: I don't think so.

Mrs. Rowat: I don't think so is right, when, in accountability, the primary contributions came from the publicly owned Crown corporation.

In Estimates last week, Mr. Speaker, I asked the Tourism Minister what the taxpayers will gain for the many campaigns presently under way by this government. He came up empty-handed.

So how can this NDP government ensure that Manitoba taxpayers will not be left empty-handed as a result of Bill 30 when they have no accountability

to the taxpayers' dollars that they spend now, Mr. Speaker?

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade): You know, I'm disappointed but I suppose not surprised at the member attacking the government's involvement in promoting this province. I'm also not surprised to hear the member attacking perhaps the labour representatives for assisting, but it is truly surprising to hear the Member for Minnedosa get up and publicly, in this House, put down the efforts of Manitoba's business community, including representatives of the Chambers of Commerce, some of the top employers and companies in this province who came to us as government with their plan to promote Manitoba within its borders and outside of its borders.

It's quite amazing if the Conservatives clearly, now, don't even speak for business. I'm not even sure who in this province they could possibly speak for, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Rowat: It's interesting that this member actually is supporting the Spirited Energy campaign. With a total debt greater than British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan combined, Mr. Speaker, combined, I find it rather interesting that they can actually support and bring in a bill such as Bill 30. When it comes to spending accountability, this government has a failing grade.

Given its poor track record with questionable spending, how can this government go to the taxpayers and ask for a blank cheque, such as being asked for in Bill 30?

Mr. Selinger: The six credit-rating upgrades that we've received—I know they've gone up two since yesterday, but we just want the record to be straight. The six credit-rating upgrades are all in the A ranking now. They're A, AA, A or A-plus. All of those are among the second best in the world. Those are not failing grades under any criteria. Under any criteria, an A rating is considered to be a pretty good grade. I hope the member takes that into account in her new calculations.

Midwifery Training Program Government Strategy

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): The Tories brought midwifery into Manitoba, passed midwifery legislation and had an education program developed

and ready to go. When the NDP got into power, they refused to fund that education program for midwifery. Today it sits and collects dust. Because of that, Mr. Speaker, we only have 39 midwives in Manitoba when we need 300 at this stage and time.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask this Minister of Health: When is she going to fix this big mess that she has started and develop a training program for midwives in southern Manitoba?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): In the name of correcting the record, I will remind the members opposite that in 1999 there were zero funded positions for midwives in Manitoba. Today there are 45. I can also let members opposite know that, in fact, it took the NDP government to proclaim The Midwifery Act that members opposite let sit on the shelf since 1997. It's an interesting point for her to raise.

Further, and perhaps most importantly, I can inform the House that, according to the Public Health Agency of Canada's report of March 2009, Manitoba has the highest proportion of births attended by a midwife in the nation.

Mrs. Driedger: This government dragged their heels on proclaiming that legislation. Had they done it, we'd have been in a better position right now in Manitoba with having midwives.

Mr. Speaker, when the Minister of Health announced a northern midwife training program, she promised to enrol 10 students in the first year and five students in each subsequent year. Now, almost three years later, I found out at noon today by a midwife that there are only five students in total in that program and there is no more intake until 2010.

So I'd like to ask the Minister of Health: What has gone wrong here? Was it poor planning on her part or is this just another broken promise?

Ms. Oswald: The midwifery program at the University College of the North, something the members opposite voted against, might I add, has been an internationally recognized program. We have students in that program from Norway House and The Pas that are going to be serving vulnerable populations.

We also know that we announced in this budget that we're going to expand training into southern Manitoba. We made that commitment and our record is clear, zero positions funded in 1999, 45 today; zero educational programs in '99, we have one today

and we're expanding it. I can say that the Public Health Agency of Canada also reports that Manitoba had the lowest proportion of mothers who had to travel to give birth at 22.2 percent, well below the national average.

We're going to keep working, Mr. Speaker, but our record is clear.

* (14:00)

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health just put some very, very false, misleading statements on the record.

An Honourable Member: Again.

Mrs. Driedger: Again. That legislation was never voted against by us. There are only 39 midwives in Manitoba today, not 45. Again, as she did with Brian Sinclair, she continues to mislead this House.

Mr. Speaker, this Minister of Health keeps talking and talking and talking and talking about a birthing centre in south Winnipeg. Right now we don't have enough midwives in Manitoba to staff a birthing centre, but we would like to ask her, because she's promised this many times—we suspect she'll probably leave it till the next election again—when will the shovels go into the ground for a birthing centre in Winnipeg?

Ms. Oswald: To be clear, I was suggesting that the members opposite have never supported the University College of the North. That's on the record.

I can also say to members opposite that we have committed to work in partnership with the Women's Health Clinic and the regional health authority to come up with a plan for the south-end birthing centre. We're on track to do that. The work continues.

We know, Mr. Speaker, that we have families in Manitoba that want to access a midwife. That access needs to be increased. That's why we have every year committed to increase the number of midwives, and I think for nine questions they were saying to spend money on debt, not midwives. Which is it?

Photo Radar Tickets Construction Zones

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, for months we've been calling on this government to drop the appeal where photo radar tickets were given to drivers in construction zones where there were actually no construction workers working.

Despite the Minister of Justice's overheated rhetoric last Thursday, they did drop the appeal on Friday, but the NDP and the Minister of Justice only got it half right because the Minister of Justice is saying that anyone who paid for their ticket is out of luck. He's keeping their money.

Can the Minister of Justice tell Manitobans, who paid for their tickets, how much money was collected from these tickets and how much money he's holding back that should go back to Manitobans?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Unfortunately, and not surprising, the member is factually wrong in his statements, Mr. Speaker.

On Friday the Crown prosecutors dropped the appeal based on evidentiary issues, Mr. Speaker, in relation to the ethical duty of Prosecutions. We do not interfere in prosecutions. The member opposite has often asked us to interfere in prosecutions. That is not only against parliamentary tradition but inappropriate.

You would not want a politician involved in doing prosecutions. That only leads to extremist and totalitarian government, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice stated today that the people who paid those tickets, who were driving in construction zones where there were no construction workers present, said that they had pleaded guilty.

Has the minister considered that the people who paid may not have had the money to launch an appeal? Has he considered that they may not have known how to launch an appeal? Has he considered that maybe they were just too busy in their life supporting their families day to day to try to fight the government on these tickets? Yet he's saying that they're going to be punished because they did what probably almost any Manitoban would have done.

This is simply nothing but a cash grab. Why won't the minister give that money back?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, we put in very strict provisions for the City of Winnipeg to utilize photo radar. Let me quote what the Conservative Member for Lac du Bonnet (Mr. Hawranik) said about that bill: I support this bill and I would support it for obvious reasons, the use of photo radar red light cameras across the province, and not just for limited purposes as proposed in this bill.

Mr. Speaker, we put it in for safety purposes. The City of Winnipeg utilized it for different provisions. We had provisions in the act. The City of Winnipeg appeared to not follow the strict provisions of the regulations. When we found out, we told the City of Winnipeg we would no longer prosecute.

We stayed those prosecutions, Mr. Speaker, and on a going-forward basis we added additional policies, that is, to not use photo radar where workers are not present and in—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Goertzen: The Minister of Justice has the responsibility to not only uphold the letter of the law but to uphold the integrity of the law.

These tickets were struck down because the law was wrong, but it's just as wrong to tell those individuals who did pay, who didn't understand the law, who didn't have the money to fight the government, who didn't have the time to fight the government because they're working for their families day in and day out, to tell them, oh, too bad; you already paid so we're going to consider you guilty.

If the law was wrong, if the policy is wrong, then, Mr. Minister, you are wrong. Give back the money.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, in fact, the member clearly does not understand there are several provisions of The Highway Traffic Act dealing with construction. Safety was the reason that bill was put in place to allow the City of Winnipeg to use photo radar only in limited circumstances. When we found out that the City of Winnipeg was using it and, in fact, evidentiary-wise, it was inappropriate ethically, the Crown said, we're not proceeding to prosecute because there are evidentiary issues.

Notwithstanding there were still speeding infractions, on evidence, the Crown said, we're not going to proceed. We've now clarified that with the City, and we've asked the City to put in additional provisions.

Mr. Speaker, the life of one or two or three Manitobans protected and saved on the highways by virtue of this is worth the provisions, of providing this within our act.

Hog Industry Prevention of Influenza A (H1N1)

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Agriculture: When the government had the opportunity to have the OlyWest hog plant, the proponents were directed to a site inside Winnipeg which provoked tremendous opposition. Next, the government imposed Bill 17 to put the hog industry in a straitjacket, to reduce the equity in the industry and limit its ability to innovate, both in terms of the environment and in terms of animal welfare.

When the H1N1 flu arrived, the government refused to support my call for people coming from Mexico to avoid going into hog barns for five days, a measure that would prevent what happened in Alberta from happening here. I also called on the government to do everything it can to guarantee hogs in Manitoba will not get the H1N1 virus, and the minister said no.

I ask the Minister of Agriculture: When is she going to stand up and help the hog industry in this province?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): I would ask the Member for River Heights to just think about what he is saying. The federal government has the responsibility of screening people that are coming in, and there is a very strict protocol of how workers come to Manitoba. There are steps that have to be taken, and I believe those are being followed very closely, Mr. Speaker.

The member opposite is looking for a guarantee that we will not get swine flu or H1N1 in our livestock industry. I would hope not, Mr. Speaker, because we have very strict protocols, and I believe our producers are following those protocols very closely.

But if he thinks someone in this House or in this country can guarantee that, he's wrong.

Mr. Gerrard: The minister has said she won't even work with the Manitoba Pork Council to do what can be done to guarantee our hogs don't get the H1N1 flu virus. The minister's not doing enough. Indeed, she's done so little to help the industry and so much to harm it that it's being badly affected by the government's actions.

I completely disagree with the actions of the Chinese government, which I believe are

inappropriate, but I hope everyone can agree that we need to do everything we can to keep the H1N1 virus out of hogs in Manitoba, because we sure don't want any other countries having any excuse to impose trade barriers on Manitoba hogs.

When will the minister stand up and really be effective in her job in making sure the H1N1 virus doesn't get into hogs in Manitoba?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, everybody in Canada is taking this issue very seriously. The ministers of Agriculture, the ministers of Health, the CVOs are meeting on a regular basis. CFIA is involved. There are very strict protocols that are in place. From day one, when we heard about the H1N1 virus, our CVO put out the information and worked very closely with Manitoba Pork.

For the member's information, I've spoken to Manitoba Pork on a regular basis. In fact, I spoke to them this morning, and I was on a federal-provincial conference call with all ministers across the country looking at what other steps we can take, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that the world knows that pork is safe. That's what the member opposite should be talking about.

* (14:10)

Winnipeg Regional Health Authority Attendance at Standing Committee

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, Winnipeg Regional Health Authority is a bureaucracy that has gone out of control, and the government has no sense in terms of what is actually happening within that organization.

We've been calling for WRHA to come before a standing committee. Yesterday, when I asked a question to the Minister of Health, this is what the Minister of Health said in response to me: "Are there parts of me that wouldn't mind witnessing a conversation between Brian Postl and the Member for Inkster? Yes, I would not mind that."

Well, Mr. Speaker, I now have the support of the Minister of Health to be able to have the opportunity to pose questions to Brian Postl. I'm asking if the Premier (Mr. Doer) would show leadership on this issue and acknowledge the benefits of Winnipeg Regional Health Authority coming before a standing committee, thereby ensuring more accountability in health care in the province of Manitoba.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Well, Mr. Speaker, he did quote me exactly. I will give him that. Second of all—[*interjection*—]first time.

I will say that I also said to the member that decisions concerning standing committees and who appears at committees, as I understand it, are done through negotiations with the House leaders. I believe that that should continue. I believe that's also on the record and the member didn't mention that.

Further, and perhaps most importantly, I did invite the member to a meeting to get more information on the issue of Seven Oaks Hospital. I told him that Dr. Postl would come. At one point, he said he wouldn't come. At another point, he said he would. At one point, he said, please don't invite Dr. Postl.

I don't really know where the member is on most issues most of the time, but I can tell him that we're going to continue to work with our regions to provide the best health care for Manitobans.

Farmland School Tax Rebates Statistics

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff (Interlake): Mr. Speaker, the Tory opposition is now down to 19 seats, and pretty soon they'll be down to two rows in this Chamber if they continue to keep their heads in the sand as regards the finances of this province.

In terms of rural Manitoba, Mr. Speaker—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

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

Mr. Nevakshonoff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In terms of rural Manitoba, this NDP government has stepped up to the plate and nowhere is this more evident than on the issue of property taxation.

I ask the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives if she could provide the House with an update on Manitoba's Farmland School Tax Rebate and the positive impact this has had on the disposable income of our farm families. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): I'm certainly pleased to talk about the issue of the farmland school tax initiative, an issue that we brought forward in 2004 when we were rebating 33 percent.

Mr. Speaker, we are now up to 70 percent. In 2008, 31,000 farmers applied for their rebate, and they will receive a total of more than \$30 million; \$30 million in school tax rebate will be going back into farmers' pockets so they can spend it in the rural economy.

Mr. Speaker, just keep waiting. There will be further increases.

Hog Industry Economic Challenges

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): It's too bad the Member for Interlake can't walk down and talk to the minister on a daily basis. He has to get in question period to get an answer.

Mr. Speaker, my question is in regard to H1N1. Even though there's no human health risk from eating pork, at times some of our trading partners will restrict imports of Canadian pork. The loss of export markets would be devastating to Manitoba producers. It is critical that the provincial government be working with the pork industry right now on an action plan should trade be disrupted.

Mr. Speaker, will the Minister of Agriculture provide Manitoba pork producers with a short-term action plan if there is a disruption in exports? How will she help this key industry, a provincial economic driver, weather such a storm in today's economic situation?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): I can assure the member that we are working very closely with them, and that's why in one step we have put a suite of programs into place to help producers when there is a downturn in the economy, Mr. Speaker.

But, Mr. Speaker, the most important thing we can be doing right now, and we are doing, is working with the industry to ensure that all the protocols, the biosecuritys are followed so that we do not have another incident of this disease coming into the livestock industry.

That's why our chief veterinarians across the province are working together. That's why Health ministers, that's why Agriculture ministers are working together.

We recognize the importance of this industry, but I would say to the member the most important message we have to get out, that this is not a food safety concern. We have to get that message to other countries, that this is not a food safety concern.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

TABLING OF REPORTS (Continued)

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): I'd like to ask leave to table Supplementary Estimates, under tabling of reports.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House to revert to tabling of reports? Is there agreement? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Ashton: Thanks to the House. Mr. Speaker, I would like to table the Supplementary Estimates for Intergovernmental Affairs.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, now we will move on to members' statements.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

MS Awareness Month

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, the Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada again marks the month of May this year as MS Awareness Month, as it has done since the 1970s.

This debilitating and unpredictable disease affects thousands of Canadians and is in fact the most common neurological disease affecting young adults in Canada today.

We are wearing red carnations today as part of the MS carnation campaign in recognition of MS Awareness Month, and we'll be joined by countless others across the nation throughout the month of May as we show our support for this worthy cause.

Other fundraising events such as the MS Walk will continue to take place in cities across Canada. The MS Walk is the society's largest event fundraiser and involves over 60,000 participants and volunteers every year in Canada alone.

Manitobans should be very proud to know that more people participated in Winnipeg's MS Walk on April 27 of this year than in any other Canadian city. More than 3,000 people walked for the fundraiser in Winnipeg and nearly 5,000 participated province-wide.

I would like to thank the MS Society of Canada, Manitoba Division, for providing invaluable programs and services for Manitobans living with MS, their family members, caregivers and health-care professionals. I would also like to recognize their hard work in advocating for the improvement of government policies in public

education so that people with MS might have the opportunity to participate more easily in their communities.

Moreover, it is vitally important to acknowledge and thank the countless volunteers who spend their valuable time contributing to increasing the awareness of and helping raise funds for MS.

The MS Society hopes to raise \$1 million in Manitoba this year. Let us all support this goal and contribute to raising awareness for MS and funding research so that this disease can be eradicated. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

* (14:20)

Western Canada Aviation Museum Hawk One Event

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski (St. James): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to highlight an exciting event that is taking place this Thursday at the Western Canada Aviation Museum. This event is the only chance for Winnipeggers to see one of the most famous aircraft to have served in the Royal Canadian Air Force. The refurbishment of a classic RCAF F-86 Sabre 5 in the colours of the legendary Golden Hawks aerobatic team is touring across the country. This aircraft event, Hawk One of the Centennial Heritage Flight, is a highly visible tribute to the commemoration of 100 years of powered flight in Canada. The Canadair F-86 Sabre, a swept-wing, single seat air superiority fighter is long recognized as one of the finest classic fighter aircrafts. It was chosen by the RCAF as front line day fighter in August 1949, and it served in western Europe from the early days of the Cold War as a deterrent to the Warsaw Pact.

At the height of the fighter's operational service as part of Canada's collective defence contribution to NATO, over 300 RCAF Sabres were based in Europe. Spread throughout 12 squadrons on four wings, all four operational variants of the aircraft saw service in three countries in the interceptor day fighter role.

I was thrilled to be on the tarmac at 17 Wing this morning to meet Retired Lieutenant-Colonel Dan Dempsey as he arrived. He is an accomplished pilot with many experiences to share, including his time as commander of the famous Snowbirds military aerobatic squadron.

I can assure that this week's event will be worth coming out for. This Thursday at the Western Canada Aviation Museum promises to be an exciting opportunity to watch Hawk One taxi and to speak with pilot, Retired Lieutenant-Colonel Dempsey.

I congratulate all the volunteers, board and staff for their hard work and dedication in co-ordinating this event as well as several others. Through their efforts, we gratefully celebrate 100 years of powered flight here in Manitoba. I encourage all Manitobans to take part in commemorating our aerial history by visiting the Western Canada Aviation Museum. I ask all honourable members to join me in welcoming Hawk One to Manitoba and wishing them the best on their cross-country tour. Thank you Mr. Speaker.

Vanessa Rigaux

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): I'm pleased to rise in the House today to recognize an outstanding teacher in my constituency. Vanessa Rigaux, of Holland Elementary School, has won this year's Outstanding New Teacher Award. Six awards were given to teachers in Manitoba who encourage their students to, in the words of Mahatma Gandhi, be the change you want to see in the world.

After Holland Elementary School found itself suddenly without one of its teachers, Vanessa Rigaux was asked to fill in as a permanent teacher three days following the end of her student teaching. For many people, this would have been an extremely difficult task. However, Ms. Rigaux took on the responsibility of completing another teacher's curriculum without much preparation.

Ms. Rigaux can be considered a true inspiration to her students, as she always makes sure to pay attention to the needs of individual students. She has encouraged her students to enter writing contests and gives each student the opportunity to reach their full potential. Ms. Rigaux has also organized fundraisers that students take part in for charities, including the Christmas Cheer Board and the Salvation Army.

In order to teach students in the most effective way possible, Ms. Rigaux has worked extremely hard to find different ways of teaching that are both interesting and educational for students. She uses a wide variety of activities and learning styles in her classroom to ensure that students respond to her curriculum.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate Vanessa Rigaux for receiving the 2009 Outstanding New Teacher Award. I'm extremely glad to see that

Ms. Rigaux is committed to the best education possible to her students and wanting them to make a difference in the world. The fact that she has become such a recognized teacher so early on in her career means that many students will have the pleasure of learning under her direction in the future and her skills as a teacher will only improve. Thank you.

Doug O'Brien and Fred Salter

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise and share with members of this House the accomplishment of two members of my constituency, Doug O'Brien and Fred Salter.

Doug and Fred were among those honoured at the 26th Annual Volunteer Awards Dinner on April 22. I had the privilege of attending this event along with the Premier (Mr. Doer) and many other colleagues from the Legislature.

Doug received the Lieutenant-Governor's Make a Difference Community Award for the Norman region. He has been an active volunteer in Flin Flon for over 35 years. A leader in his community, he is currently chair of Greenstone Training Inc., and the Northern Pregnancy Crisis Centre. He is also the director of Operation Red Nose in Flin Flon and the HudBay 80th Anniversary Fund, an organization that funds community projects in the Flin Flon-Creighton area. He has been involved with the Knights of Columbus, the Salvation Army and the Rotary Club. He is also a founding member of Greenstone Community Futures, an organization that provides economic and development assistance for new and expanding small businesses. Doug and his wife, Dona, continue to be very active and valued members of their church and community.

Fred received the Premier's Volunteer Service Award in recognition of the volunteer work he has done in the community of Lynn Lake for over 20 years. As only one example, when the mine closed in 2000, many families were suffering so Fred decided to bring some holiday cheer. Every year since, he has collected toys and donations for families in need, even sifting through landfills for beer cans and bottles to recycle for funds.

When there isn't quite enough money for the gifts, he donates directly from his own pension to ensure all children get something special at Christmas. On top of this, Fred is a volunteer with the ambulance and fire department, the Lynn Lake Beautification Committee, Kiddies Camp and the

Canadian Junior Rangers. Fred was also a valued member of the Lynn Lake Hospital Board and the Burntwood Regional Health Authority.

I have known Fred for many years and have always appreciated his friendly outgoing nature and common-sense advice.

Mr. Speaker, Doug and Fred are examples for all of us who seek to make our communities better places to live. Thank you.

Carberry Municipal Excellence Award

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to announce that the town of Carberry is a co-winner of the fifth annual Municipal Excellence Award. Each year the Association of Manitoba Municipalities presents the Excellence Award. This year, Carberry will be sharing the award with the town of Altona and the town of Plum Coulee, who submitted a joint nomination.

Carberry was chosen to receive the award because of its Main Street Heritage Conservation District project. The president of AMM, Doug Dobrowolski, said it was the uniqueness of the project that stood out in the selection committee's mind.

Both of the winners of the Municipal Excellence Award created something new that can now be used as a model in other municipalities. The town of Carberry has worked hard to preserve and revitalize their historic buildings through the Commercial Heritage Conservation District. It is expected that this will provide a sense of pride and place among residents, and it will also create a marketable tourism attraction.

In early 2006, the town council first started to look at the possibility of establishing a Heritage Conservation District over two blocks of their Main Street. The council recognized the importance in preserving the town's collection of unique and irreplaceable century-old buildings. Some of the historic buildings had fallen into disrepair and others were covered in modern materials such as tin and vinyl siding. Therefore, the town council seriously looked into the economic and social implications of redeveloping the downtown area to bring these buildings back to their original beauty.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to congratulate the town of Carberry in receiving the 2009 Municipal Excellence Award. The town should be extremely proud of this accomplishment, as the downtown area of Carberry

will benefit immensely from this project and other municipalities will consider this project to be a model for future developments.

I invite all members to Main Street Carberry, just south of the junctions of No. 1 and No. 5 highways. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

ORDERS OF THE DAY (Continued)

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to rule 31(8), I am announcing that the private member's resolution to be considered next Tuesday will be put forward by the honourable Member for Transcona (Mr. Reid). The title of the resolution is Public Housing.

Mr. Speaker: Pursuant to rule 31(8), it's been announced that the private member's resolution to be considered next Tuesday will be one put forward by the honourable Member for Transcona. The title of the resolution is Public Housing.

Mr. Chomiak: I wonder if you might resolve the House into Committee of Supply.

Mr. Speaker: Okay. We will now resolve into Committee of Supply.

Would the Chairs please go to the respective rooms where they will be chairing. In the Chamber will be Competitiveness, Training and Trade; Room 255 will be Water Stewardship; and Room 254 will be Health and Healthy Living.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

HEALTH AND HEALTHY LIVING

* (14:40)

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

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I would like to ask the minister if it would be possible related to Healthy Child Manitoba, I am wondering if the minister could provide me with some information

related to Healthy Child Manitoba. I believe she's the chair of that committee, and if she would be able to—

Madam Chairperson: Order. I'm sorry to interrupt the honourable member, but Healthy Child Manitoba is a separate department and it is going to be considered in a separate Estimates.

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Healthy Living): There are some items that overlap between Healthy Living and Healthy Child Manitoba, so if you want to just tell me the broad topic, maybe I could answer them.

Mrs. Driedger: If the minister is okay with that, that would be great, because I understand we may not be getting into Estimates on Healthy Child. So, unless we want to extend Estimates and take up that time, whatever we could accomplish in this, as the minister is in charge of that committee, would be great.

So I'm wondering if the minister could provide me a list of all the staff and their job titles for those that work in Healthy Child Manitoba—

Madam Chairperson: Order. Once again, I just want to remind the member that we can do broad discussions, but we can't have specific questions that are detail oriented.

Mrs. Driedger: All right. I'll leave it until concurrence because the requests will be more specific.

Can the minister tell us what is happening with the Sharon Home right now, and where that has evolved to? I understand that the Sharon Home was to have been turned over to Manitoba Health and it will be turned into an addictions site program. I wonder if the minister could give us an update on where all of that is at.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I certainly will be happy to put some information and inform the member how we have proceeded with Magnus Centre. We've now renamed it Magnus Centre. It is operated by a board of directors. There are ongoing negotiations to make this facility a mental health and addictions facility. We are working with, well, about four agencies specifically about relocating their services into the facility. The goal is to provide a continuum of care, right from education and prevention to ongoing assessment, detox services, in-patient and out-patient services, and then, aftercare. As well, there will be integration of mental health services throughout, so we can become a really well-respected CODI facility. We're right now in the process of—we have

an executive director that's been hired, and ongoing negotiations with the community are happening, and we're working towards zoning right now.

Mrs. Driedger: Is the executive director Rich Toews [*phonetic*]?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: No. Ian Krochak.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister had indicated that there were four groups that were going to be, or are associated with this facility. My questions are: Who are those four groups, and whether or not their facilities will transfer themselves into this new centre, or do they still stay where they are and have additional space here at Magnus Centre?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We are right now in negotiations, nothing is finalized yet, but we're working with Addictions Foundation of Manitoba, Tamarack, Behavioural Health Foundation, Main Street Project. That's our four.

The initiative is that services will be moving from existing locations into the Magnus Centre location. There was a commitment that was made for the expansion of 60 new beds along with the Magnus Centre, and that will happen as well.

Mrs. Driedger: I understand, and the minister has indicated too, that a zoning variance is needed. Can she give us some time frame around when that might occur and, then, when the rest of the development will progress?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The public consultations will be beginning this month and will proceed.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate why it was determined to have co-occurring disorders part and parcel of this whole facility, that if you're addicted you're assumed to have a mental health issue. What was the thinking behind making that sort of a caveat to the whole thing?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: It's the research. The research talks about the co-occurring of mental health and addictions, and that's the philosophy that we've adopted in Manitoba. To be quite honest, it's been adopted in North America around co-occurring disorders.

What was happening in the past is that individuals would present themselves at a mental health addiction—at a mental health service—and they would identify addictions, and then they would be told to go to the addiction services, but addiction services said, well, you have a mental health issue.

We ended up with people not acquiring the services that they needed. We have a philosophy of providing CODI and also No Wrong Door and ensuring that we can have those services.

We're really excited because with the mental health ER coming on line around the same time as Magnus Centre that we will really be able to serve both populations very well and will have that strong continuum of care that will truly make a difference and help people on the road to recovery.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister touched on it, and so I would like to ask her, what is the progress of the mental health ER, and where will it be placed, and at exactly what stage of the process is it at?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Planning is proceeding. We have not officially announced the location yet. I can tell you it will be around the Health Sciences Centre facility, and we have just finalized the functional plan. We are now at the process of reviewing that functional plan.

Mrs. Driedger: When does the minister think that the doors of that facility would open? What is the time frame or their goal?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I'm informed that as we go through the process of finalizing the functional plan and the design, it will take us the next couple of years to complete it.

Mrs. Driedger: So would it be fair to say that probably right at the time of the next election you'll be having a ribbon cutting?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I will not predict that. The doors of that facility will be opening in the next couple years.

Mrs. Driedger: That's probably fair to say that it will coincide with an election, so the minister would get a bigger bang for the buck. *[interjection]* Some member is saying I'm cynical. No, actually I've come to expect it from the NDP, because that seems to be how capital projects are announced by the NDP. They're all related to an election year.

With Magnus Centre, can the minister indicate whether it's a detox centre or a treatment centre or both?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I just want to respond to the member's comments about ribbon cuttings. It certainly is important to celebrate the success of the many people that will contribute to the development of the mental health ER as well as the Magnus Centre, but, you know, it's about the people of

Manitoba and providing them with the quality of service that they deserve and supporting them and their families on that road to recovery.

Now I forgot your question. Magnus Centre. Yes, will include both detox and treatment. It will be a continuum. We will start with the prevention and education and community outreach component. Then there will be assessment, an ongoing assessment will be provided, with transition beds, as well as there will be detox services, if that's what's required, non-medical detox. Then from the detox there'll be in-patient and out-patient services, as well as after-care services will be provided. There also will be a unit, or one of the floors will have an education component. Community members and service providers in the community will be able to access that and do some training with the staff at Magnus Centre.

Mrs. Driedger: Will youth services be offered here or is this just an adult program?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: It will be an adult program.

Mrs. Driedger: Now, I have heard from a number of people over many years of the difficulties they have—and I've largely spoken with parents—and the difficulties they've had getting their child, teenager, into addiction treatment. There is no simple way that a lot of phone calls, a lot of research, a lot of running around in circles—and I've heard it from numerous people. I've also heard it from colleagues that have found the same type of circumstance.

* (14:50)

I'd like to ask the minister what kind of focus we have in the province, and strengths and weaknesses, just in terms of youth addiction. I think that we see a significant need for it, and I know of a number of kids that are out of province because they couldn't get the type of intensive treatment they need in Manitoba.

So I guess part of my question, too, would be: Do we have intensive support services here, as patients, to be in a facility for a certain period of time, to help kids get through their addiction problem?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I know when we talk about youth, the definition of youth goes from 11 to 35 now, I understand. So, it would encompass a number of our programs that we have.

When we talk about youth services specifically, under previous ministers, I think Minister Mackintosh and Minister Chomiak and—oh, sorry—

Madam Chairperson: Just to remind all members, we use constituencies or titles.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Previous ministers of Justice and ministers of Health and Healthy Living worked very comprehensively with many community members and emergency workers and developed the crystal meth strategy, which we saw was extremely effective at dealing with that issue. It was a strategy that included training for staff, public education for parents and youth, as well as in the development of a centralized intake for youth, which is one phone number, where Manitobans can phone and get the supports that they need or information.

We also have the stabilization beds. We have 10 stabilization beds that are available in the city of Winnipeg, and we have stabilization beds that will be coming on-line in Thompson in the next year or so. These stabilization beds provide a safe place for people to get the information that they need to stabilize. It's not a detox facility; it's the beginning of treatment. There are addiction specialists that participate and work with the youth and their families and develop a treatment plan.

The treatment plan can include out-patient and in-patient services. We have a variety, for youths specifically, 18 and younger. There are services that are available in-patient at the Behavioural Health Foundation, as well as there are out-patient services available with Addictions Foundation of Manitoba.

When we're talking about services for 18-plus, we have a number of agencies that do provide these services. I often speak about the strength of our addictions agencies, which is their independence and how they got the grass roots started. Many AA members came together and started the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba.

That's a strength, but it's also a piece that we've been working on really hard at the Department of Health and Healthy Living of bringing these agencies together and starting to ensure that there's ongoing communication and collaboration so it's easy to access for parents, for youth themselves, for adults, that there is no wrong door.

So that's why we came up with our five-point plan for addictions, and I'm going to try my best and remember all five points. They'll remember and tell me.

We talked about developing a one-stop or a facility that would provide the continuum of care, and that would be the Magnus Centre.

We talked about building a better system, and that talks about looking at governance models, that talks about training for staff, that talks about standards of care.

We talked about improving the research capacity, so it was a system-wide research initiative.

We also talked about dealing with hard-to-reach populations which include individuals diagnosed with FASD, women addiction services, and older adults as well.

There's a fifth one, and it's slipping my mind right now at this moment. I don't want to take up time. I'll come up with the fifth one in a few minutes.

So we came up with that plan and have started to implement those initiatives.

Oh, the fifth one was improving the legislation of the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba, modernizing it.

With those as our guiding principles and working with our partners, the not-for-profit organizations, the self-help groups, really looking at what do we need to do to improve addictions and mental health services in Manitoba, we've started on this journey of the Magnus Centre, but also looking at how do we ensure that the facilities we have now are meeting the needs.

So there are a number of supports that happen. For men, there's the James Toal Centre. There are also beds available at the Behavioural Health Foundation for inpatient services for men and women. There is second-stage housing through Tamarack. There has been new funding provided to Tamarack to give them supports for individuals who are on social assistance so they can access their services. At that time, we also announced funding for the St. Raphael Wellness Centre, which provides outpatient services and family supports and then as well as a facility that provides second-stage housing called Two Ten.

So we've increased the funding. We've increased funding for mental health clinicians out in the RHAs and will continue to fund them. AFM is the agency that provides services outside the Perimeter and provides good quality services in rural and northern Manitoba as well.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister mentioned a centralized intake. I wonder if she could explain a little bit more about what that is and if it's a 1-800 number that anybody can call.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: This is a 1-800 number that is operated by MATC, Manitoba Adolescent Treatment Centre, but within the centralized intake there are addictions specialists which operate it. So it's a number that adults, parents, can call and get support for the involuntary placements in the stabilization beds. There's a process that has to happen, and they are very helpful in helping to arrange those as well as just providing general information about addictions treatment services.

Mrs. Driedger: Is that a 24-hour line?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell me if kids that are in trouble, or young people that want help with addictions, can they pick up that line and call in for help?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Can youth themselves call in? Yes, youth can call in themselves, and we have other supports for youth too. The Kids Help Line and Clinic also provide these supports. But, yes, they can ask for help.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister then indicate how that line is advertised? Is it out there in the schools or how would kids know this line is available?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I cannot give you the specifics about the marketing strategy, but the number is out there. It's widely disseminated throughout the province to people, but I can get you the actual strategy that we've used.

Mrs. Driedger: Actually, that would be helpful just because in a conversation I have had with somebody, they indicated it isn't advertised far and wide because the agency wouldn't be able to handle all of the calls they got if it was advertised as fully as it should be.

There may be an opportunity here maybe for government to, if in fact that is true, provide more supports to that if we really, truly want to get kids help that they need. Certainly, I'm no expert in addictions, but I do know that, when somebody's calling for help, that window's open for a very, very short period of time, and if we aren't able to help a teenager or an adult at the time, they're calling for

help, that window may be closed and we could lose them.

Certainly, in the place of addictions, when there's a call for help, it's something that needs to happen fairly quickly, and waiting lists are certainly not something that is very healthy for those involved in addictions.

Before I go further, maybe the minister wants to add a comment.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I just want to clarify with the member. You were talking about the youth centralized intake and youth accessing it, so I just want to assure you that we do not set up programs and 1-800 lines and not advertise them because we don't want people to access them. We certainly want people to access them. We know the price of addictions on individuals, families and communities, and we are only too familiar with that window of opportunity and that ability to provide that service at that time.

* (15:00)

I can assure the member that we are constantly evaluating the statistics that are coming from that centralized intake, as well as the number of stays in the voluntary and involuntary beds and continue to monitor that and make sure that the system is well supported.

Mrs. Driedger: Just to reiterate, too, for the minister that the people that were giving me that information are actually people that work in the system, in the field with addicted people. That's a comment that came from them. So I don't have any expertise. I'm posing a question based on what front-line workers are telling me, so it probably would be something that is worth having a look at.

Going back to treatment beds for kids, I didn't have a good sense of that. Is there a total number of beds that we have actually specifically earmarked for 18 and under?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, there are beds, but I do not have the exact number. I know that there are beds that are in Portage la Prairie that provide services. I know that there are beds in Behavioural Health Foundation and then we have the stabilization beds, the 10 here in Winnipeg and then we have some beds that will be coming. I think five beds in Thompson will be established. We can take that upon us to get you that information as soon as possible of the exact number of beds.

Mrs. Driedger: I thank the minister for that. I would be very interested in seeing that.

When we talk about centralized intake, I wonder if the minister could explain just a little bit more what exactly that entails. I understand that it was supposed to be an assessment unit that limits the number of stops a parent has to go to so they're not running all over the place or phoning all over the place to try to find help. This centralized intake was supposed to help people, I guess, access the system. I wonder if she could explain to me how it works and where it is and sort of how it functions?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The specific location is not coming to me. I can only think of Chinatown. It's on Princess Street, around that area. They just moved into that facility about a year and a half ago.

So what happens is a parent can call this number, express their concern, their fears, and the phone is answered by an addictions specialist that will help direct them to the appropriate services, help them figure out what their options are, and then lead them and support them through the process.

Mrs. Driedger: Where would a parent find those numbers?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The numbers for the centralized intake, they are around with our addictions material, they are around on our crystal meth brochures, they are around our Web site. I can get you the exact—the social marketing strategy, can get it for you.

Mrs. Driedger: I'm assuming, then, that it will also be listed in the phone book. I would ask, if I were to go to the phone book and look under addictions or youth addictions, would it be a number that readily jumps out at me?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I haven't looked in the telephone book myself for this number, so I'm not going to suggest where a person could find it, but we will certainly look into that, where it can be found.

Mrs. Driedger: When we look at all of these facilities, is there a specific place for an FASD client focus program?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: At this time we do not have a specific program only for FASD clients. They do receive services though through our other facilities, AFM, Behavioural Health Foundation. That is one in our Building a Better System. One of our outcomes that we are looking at is the development of a specific program as well as other training

opportunities for clinicians that are in the field of mental health and addictions on the issue of FASD.

Mrs. Driedger: Maybe when the minister is looking up the number for treatment beds and where they might be for addicted youth, is there a really nice sort of a rural facility where youth can work with, you know, animals, pets, look after pets, where they can be outdoors and have chores and have an environment that takes them right away from the challenges that they would be facing probably if they're still close to a city or in a city? I'm just wondering if there is a nice rural kind of a facility in Manitoba where—that might just be a great gold standard for addicted youth.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I'm not sure if we have a facility in the way that you paint this serene picture. The facility in Portage la Prairie—and the name, for some reason, is slipping my mind, and I'm sure we'll be able to find that in the next few minutes for you—but it is a rural facility that is run by AFM and does really phenomenal work. I'm not sure about the specifics about what other kinds of services that they have, but they are very well respected and have worked very well with a number of youth and families. Behavioural Health Foundation, as well, has services that they provide in Selkirk.

Mrs. Driedger: And where do they specifically provide them in Selkirk? Do they have a facility there?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, there's a facility that's north of Selkirk that they own.

Mrs. Driedger: And could the minister explain what kind of a facility it is and how many people would be treated there and for what?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I'll have to get back on the member about the specifics about the details of the Behavioural Health Foundation's services that are offered in Selkirk. I certainly don't want to put any incorrect information on the record and make sure that I provide you with the most accurate and up-to-date information. I will promise to do that within the next couple days.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate if all of these organizations out there for addictions provide follow-up services?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I'd probably have to—I quite confidently can say that most of those organizations and facilities do provide after-care services. Often in addictions, though, after-care is sought by some

members through Alcoholics Anonymous where they are provided with that ongoing 12-step program. I do know that AFM have people that are on staff as well as Tamarack and Behavioural Health Foundation, too, have those services that provide ongoing support.

Mrs. Driedger: Would the minister's department collect data to indicate how well these programs work? Because if we are keeping statistics through follow-up with clients and there is a very formalized structure for that, we would certainly be able to track whether or not the addictions services are working or whether, you know, a client goes through a few days of treatment or few weeks of treatment, how well that treatment is working or not working. Does the department keep that kind of information?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Each organization, agency, that we fund signs a service purchase agreement with us where we outline specific outcomes and there are monthly statistics that they do provide to us. I think, though, what we are working on right now with the agencies and with the department is a more robust strategy on gathering that data and doing the surveillance and the analysis of that and that would be improving the research capacity across the addictions field in Manitoba. We know that information will ensure that we're providing the best quality of service and making the best investment for the road to recovery for the alcoholics and addicts in the community.

* (15:10)

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister give us an update in terms of the Youth Addictions Stabilization Unit? I understand that Macdonald Youth Services now has it. I know there's supposed to be a certain number of beds associated with that. Can the minister give us an update as to how that program is working and whether or not there are mandatory beds and voluntary beds, and how often those beds are actually utilized?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: All right. Since it was implemented in November '06, we have seen that there's been 317 youth admitted as involuntary stabilization to December 30, '08. Since then, 145 of them have been referred to community-based or residential treatment, and that's for the involuntary beds, the five beds at Macdonald Youth Services. The voluntary beds are at the Behavioural Health Foundation in Selkirk and that is since November 1, '07, and their statistics are, between November '07 and December '08, there were 49 youth that accessed the services, and 40 of those

youth have been referred on to community-based or residential treatment.

So right now we are continuing to work with our partners. Marymount is the operator of the five involuntary stabilization beds here housed at MYS. Now we are working towards bringing all 10 beds together under one roof and we'll be going through some community consultations in the very near future to see that become a reality.

Mrs. Driedger: Has a site been determined for where that would be or is it still within the same building it would now be in and just enlarged?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: A site has been chosen at Macdonald Youth Services, but we are waiting to finalize zoning and community consultation processes.

Mrs. Driedger: When the government, in the last election, made the announcement for a mental health ER, I'm told it caught a lot of people at Manitoba—sorry, at the WRHA off guard, and that, in fact, psychiatrists had never been consulted about this. There was some significant concern at the WRHA about this announcement that it came out of the blue with no consultation with them at all. Would that be an accurate comment that had been passed on to me?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: This was an announcement that was made with a lot of thought and planning going into it and because of the identification of the need by professionals and consumers throughout the province, I can tell the member now that we are fully working together through the Health and Healthy Living departments and the WRHA in implementing this initiative. I was just briefed by some of the leads on this file the last couple of weeks and there's an enthusiasm and a desire to see this project develop as soon as possible. We realize how it will support our overall health-care system, and provide a quality of service for our mental health and our addicted clients, and make a difference by going to one-stop shop where you will be provided clinical services as well as basic-need services.

Mrs. Driedger: Had the WRHA been caught off guard when that announcement came?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There had been discussion with our consumers, with the professionals and with the WRHA as we went forward with this plan.

Mrs. Driedger: Could the minister then explain why psychiatrists have indicated that there was no consultation with their profession?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I'm not sure on which psychiatrists you speak of, so I cannot talk to the specifics of it. I think the psychiatrists that I speak to frequently are extremely excited about the opportunity to have the first ever, in North America, mental health ER. The ones that I've spoken to are totally onboard, looking forward to this opportunity, and see the benefit for their clients.

Mrs. Driedger: I know the mental health community constantly has to struggle with stigmatization, and there are a lot of hurdles because of that.

I had a psych nurse phone me extremely upset that there would be a psych ER, because that would entrench the stigmatization, that's the word, of psych patients. Everybody would know then, as soon as you walked into this place, that everybody is there for mental health issues, whereas if you went into an ordinary ER right now, you would be there with people that have all kinds of problems and you wouldn't necessarily feel like you were standing out as somebody with a mental health issue. This nurse that called me was really, really distressed that, in fact, having a separate place would further entrench the stigmatization of patients.

Can the minister share what kind of discussions she and others have had about what this will do for patients?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There's been a lot of thought and a lot of discussion in this. I don't know if the member is aware of this, but I'm a psychiatric nurse myself and am quite familiar with the issues of mental health and addictions. You know the health-care system and you know the ERs. The statistics are overwhelming when you think about the number of people who are sitting in ERs with identified mental health issues. I would say that that would cause a greater stigma for them, than going to a facility that has open door, that's what they deal with, is mental health and addictions. They're all mental health and addiction experts and are there to provide that continuum of service, right from crisis intervention to supports.

The people that I've been speaking to are extremely supportive, whether they're consumers, whether they're parents, whether they're advocates or professionals within the health-care system now. I feel that it's really going to—and the priority has to be the service for that client. I'm confident that we're going to be able to provide those services in a way that doesn't create a stigma, that is supportive and

helps those individuals integrate back into the community.

Mrs. Driedger: Consider that there could be a lot of people that are not comfortable going to a mental health ER, some of them, in fact, could be doctors, nurses, or whoever. Is there an option for people that choose not to go to that ER? Could they still attend another ER in the city?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Absolutely.

Mrs. Driedger: I think that clarification is certainly helpful, because I know that with mental health there are a lot of things that we need to improve on. There are a lot of challenges with people who have mental health issues. I think the last stats were one in four of every Manitoban. So there's a big challenge out there. Certainly, any service that is going to help improve the situation is going to be much valued, I am sure.

Can the minister indicate whether there are any other provinces that are looking at going down this same road of setting up a separate ER, and is it actually going to be called an ER or is it going to be called something else?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We are not aware of any other jurisdictions that are following our suit, but that's not the first time in Manitoba that we've been leaders and will continue to be leaders around health care and other initiatives across the province.

The other question that you'd asked was the name of the facility. It will be called the Crisis Response Centre.

* (15:20)

Mrs. Driedger: If a patient comes into that centre and needs to go to a hospital, how will that happen?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The facility will be located very close to the Health Sciences Centre so there will be ongoing relationships between the Crisis Response Centre and the in-patient unit at the Health Sciences Centre. So they will be familiar with the clients. They will be able to provide that access. I'm not sure as far as processes yet because that's yet to be determined but I'm confident that it will be a seamless access that individuals will have.

Mrs. Driedger: Is this the facility that might be currently going up on Portage Avenue right now? I was told that there was some kind of a crisis facility that is being constructed on Portage Avenue.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: That building that you refer to on Portage is not our Crisis Response Centre. It is the St. James WRHA facility and in that facility there will be crisis stabilization beds that will be amalgamated from Sara Riel and another agency. We'll get back to you.

Mrs. Driedger: So the site ER is totally separate from that. Is that correct?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes. There won't be any beds, necessarily. Well, there won't be any beds in the Crisis Response Centre. What will be provided there will be mobile crisis services, brief treatments, counselling. There'll be medical and nursing assessments and this will be provided 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Mrs. Driedger: Might that facility end up being part of the Health Sciences Centre, like right within the Health Sciences Centre itself?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We haven't finalized the site yet so I can't really probably answer that question for you. We do value the importance of it being around the vicinity of the Health Sciences Centre so if emergency medical care needs to be accessed, it can be, as well as the in-patient unit.

Mrs. Driedger: There are so many questions I would like to ask about that but I may have to leave that for concurrence, I guess, and move on to asking a few other questions in some other areas.

Related to the eating disorder announcement that was made today, I know that earlier on there was some concern expressed that the government was wanting to scale back a proposal that had been put forward, I believe, last year by an advisory committee, provincial eating disorder advisory group, and that, in fact, that proposal had gone to government, had gone to Treasury Board, and then it was asked to be scaled back. It has now seemed to have hit a front burner today with the announcement.

Can the minister indicate whether or not that program is still going to look like what the advisory committee recommended, or has it indeed been scaled back?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: The advisory committee did—their No. 1 recommendation was a community-based facility and that's what we've been able to do. What we have done is today we announced \$238,000 to the development of a community-based service that will include a multidisciplinary team, will also have child-care supports provided to it. There will be

individual group and family counselling as well as a commitment to be looking over the next year to develop a program called the Host Family. So this service will be accessible to people that live outside Winnipeg.

Another part of this announcement was the training opportunities for clinicians around the province to help them with early identification, diagnosis, and then a treatment plan, so we will be using our technology and our multidisciplinary team to provide those supports.

Mrs. Driedger: Where will that multidisciplinary committee function out of currently?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: That is yet to be determined. There will be an RFP that will be established in May this year.

Mrs. Driedger: That multidisciplinary group, are they functioning now, or they do not kick into action until later on?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: After the RFP has been finalized and negotiated, that's when whoever the successful agency is will help support them develop that multidisciplinary team.

Mrs. Driedger: And beyond that, is there actually going to be a specific building set up that would house this program, or will this program be housed in another organization?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: That's yet to be determined once we get the RFPs in.

Mrs. Driedger: And is there still a program operating out of Psych Health that deals with eating disorders?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes, there are two programs. There's the child and adolescent program, which provides in-patient and out-patient services, as well as the adult program that is operated out of Psych Health that provides in-patient services.

I have the information that you asked about, the youth beds that we have available, if I just may take a few minutes. We have the five voluntary, YASU, and the five involuntary. There are 14 youth beds, and the agency that I couldn't remember the name of was Compass, in Southport, and there are 27 youth beds at Behavioural Health Foundation for a total of 51 beds.

Mrs. Driedger: My next question is related to Rosaire House, which is a 20-bed addictions treatment facility run by NOR-MAN in the Pas and

we recently received a freedom of information document that showed there were 90 people on the waiting list, with an average wait of eight weeks, which certainly seems troublesome. I think the minister and I have both agreed that people having to wait for addiction treatments isn't in the best interest of the person who's seeking help. How is this being addressed so that those waits can be shortened or eliminated?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Well, I can tell the member that Rosaire House has one program, and the average wait as of January 1, '09 was eight weeks. We are continuing to work with them and with all of our partners across the province to address those issues and make sure that people can have access as soon as possible, and we have made investments every year as far as mental health and addiction services and we will continue to do that.

Mrs. Driedger: I'd like to ask the minister a couple of questions on breast screening, and the first one is whether or not there is a cut-off age still in place in terms of women on the screening list. It used to go up to, I think, 69, and I'm wondering if they've changed that age criteria so that if women wanted to be on the screening program can women over the age of 69 be put on there.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Yes.

Mrs. Driedger: Thank you. That takes care of that one.

The next question is related to a mental health strategy in Manitoba, and I'm wondering if we have a current mental health strategy generally and if we have one for youth.

* (15:30)

Ms. Irvin-Ross: As we speak now, I can assure the member that we've had mental health strategies in the province, and right now we are working with our community partners and developing a mental health renewal strategy which will include youth as well.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate what is being done to address teen pregnancies in Manitoba?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There's a multiple of initiatives that are happening, that are happening across departments in initiatives. I guess what I can speak most confidently about is the teen clinics that we have around the province of Manitoba. I can get you a list of where they are.

We have teen clinics that are operating provincially: an Elmwood Teen Clinic; St. John's Teen Clinic; at the Interlake, NOR-MAN; Klinik with a K; Women's Health Clinic; Mount Carmel Clinic; Nor'West Co-op; Tec-Voc High school; Vincent Massey high school; R.B. Russell high school, Ndinawe, Gilbert housing co-op; Adolescent Parent Centre; Youville St. Vital and the Children's Hospital.

So that's one initiative in which we're using to address teen pregnancies, but also we have our healthy sexuality strategy, which we are using lots of different innovative ways to get the message to youth, whether it's a comic book or the *Little Black Book*. We know that human sexuality education is part of the physical and health curriculum as well.

We have primary health care, our access centres provide that information to youth as well.

Mrs. Driedger: I actually do want to give credit to the government for these teen clinics because I think they probably are a really good idea for reaching out to young people. They sound good. Can I ask the minister if they are being well utilized by youth?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: We don't have any specific data, but we do have some qualitative information that is shared with us that they are being well used. They are where the teens are and they've been able to address the one issue that was always raised was the issue of confidentiality. So there are some facilities that have a back door and what have you, and the individuals that are working are very youth focussed and are able to develop those important relationships. So at this time we do not have that data.

Mrs. Driedger: Related to the *Little Black Book*, can the minister indicate how many black books have actually been distributed? Somebody had told me that most of them are sitting in store rooms in schools. Would that be accurate or have, in fact, the black books been distributed?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I used to have the number; I don't have the number on me, but we actually did the one print, and it went out very, very quickly across the province. We did a second print and that has gone as well. So I'm not familiar about books in a storeroom at all. It was very well received by parents, by youth and by educators across the province.

Mrs. Driedger: I'm probably going to have to leave almost all the rest of them. I still have a number of questions on diabetes, but that'll probably have to wait for another time.

I'll end my questions here on a question related to gambling and considering the chaos that it can cause for some families. Has the minister at all been pushing for an independent study of the social and economic costs of gambling and specifically how it affects kids and women?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Could you repeat that question? Somebody else was talking to me. I'm very sorry.

Mrs. Driedger: Just knowing the chaos that gambling has caused a number of families, is the minister, or has she been pushing at all for an independent study of the social and economic costs of gambling specifically related to women and kids?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Since I've had the privilege of sitting in this chair, one of my pushes and interests have been providing quality addiction services and building on that foundation that we have in Manitoba. So we have one of the best social, responsible gaming initiatives here in Manitoba with the work that we do with AFM and the services that they provide. We are very familiar of the cost of addictions across the board on families and communities and individuals, and we'll continue to use the data that we receive to give us direction as far as implementation of programming.

Mrs. Driedger: I don't have any further questions of the minister. I just want to thank her for her speedy responses to all of them. I think we got through a lot.

I'm wondering if we might be able to take a five-minute break.

Madam Chairperson: Is there agreement to have a five-minute recess? *[Agreed]*

So we'll be back at 20 to 4. Thank you very much.

The committee recessed at 3:36 p.m.

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The committee resumed at 3:41 p.m.

Madam Chairperson: Will the committee please come to order. The floor is open for questions.

Mrs. Driedger: I don't think I remember exactly where we left off yesterday, but probably around the issue of nursing vacancies and the province having a current vacancy rate of almost 1,300.

Then, when we're looking at retirements and the number of nurses that are coming into the system each year, my fear is that right now, our net gains are

not enough to keep up with retirements nor to keep up with filling these vacancies. I'm wondering if the minister could tell us if she happens to have a more aggressive training and recruitment and retention strategy that might be being put into place to address this, or is she comfortable with the programs they have in place now, that these numbers will all just straighten themselves out in due course?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): We, of course, continue to work toward our commitment to bring 700 nurses to Manitoba and to increase our training seats by 100. We have shown over time though to be amending plans as appropriate as evidenced by the Filipino nurse recruitment journey. We are going to stay open to other international recruitment exercises. Certainly, I have had communications with the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and the Manitoba Métis Federation who have a genuine interest in providing opportunities for Aboriginal nurses and for positions across the health-care system, which I think is an area where Manitoba, indeed, many jurisdictions, if not all in Canada, could do better.

We're looking very aggressively with our partners in Advanced Education in how we may be able to advance those numbers. We know that we do need to keep a judicious view of retirements, of migration where necessary, and we are confident that our current plan, which includes in it keeping our options open for additional programming to bring more nurses to Manitoba, is certainly on the right track. Having said that, when it comes to health care, I have learned no plan should ever be complete. We should always be as dynamic as the issues that we face in health care. So we're going to do just that.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister has indicated that she wants to add 700 more nurses to the system. My question, I guess, is that over a four-year period?

Ms. Oswald: Yes, that was our commitment during the election was to bring 700 more nurses to the system. That would be our minimum target, but that would be a target that we set for ourselves, yes.

Mrs. Driedger: That one almost seems to be a no-brainer, I guess if we didn't have retirements and nursing vacancies because the projected graduates for every year '09 to 2010, 2011, 2012 is all over 700 a year. So, I mean, that's a really safe, in many ways, a safe promise to make because you're graduating over that number a year anyway.

I guess the problem is going to arise in that you could be seeing more retirements, I guess, and just more vacancies. But, according to a Freedom of Information we have, it certainly looks like we're graduating at least 700 every year. So, unless the minister wants to comment, I just wanted to point that out.

Ms. Oswald: Well, certainly we have discussed over the last, you know, total hours in Estimates a number of issues concerning ebb and flow of nursing supply. The member has raised issues of retirement numbers, of age of our nursing work force and, of course, these issues were taken into account as we made a commitment to bring as our bottom line 700 nurses, net new nurses, to the complement.

While the member does, I think, use the term "no-brainer," she said and there are nurses that graduate, there are nurses that are retiring and, you know, we've been having a reasonably civil discourse, I'm hoping it continues, so I want to resist being cheeky. You know, we promised 700. That wasn't really the same as some other promises during the election campaign. Our promises on these issues were different, let's put it that way, minimal cheekiness.

Mrs. Driedger: I guess tit for tat and everything goes downhill, but if I go back to 1999, the government, the NDP at the time, promised to fix the nursing shortage and we wouldn't be having this discussion if that had happened. Also, one of the interesting promises of the day, and the current Premier (Mr. Doer) made it, and that was to decrease the dangerous reliance on overtime. That was the language that he used at the day, that overtime was dangerous.

Now we're seeing a huge, huge amount of overtime being accumulated in this province. I'm told nurses are working double shifts. One nurse in rural Manitoba, I was told worked something like six weeks straight. That came from the Manitoba Nurses' Union, or it was more than that. It was like three months. Significant, significant shortages, major cutbacks at Portage hospital where people there were saying they were just hanging on by their nails, OR-trained nursing shortage caused disruptions in operations.

So, I mean, if we really want to look at some of these issues, I guess we could go down that road. There are a lot of really significant issues here related to a nursing shortage and the results of that. My question to the minister: Is there any other

specific—like, would she, for instance, increase the numbers of nurses that are being trained instead of just the hundred? Is anybody looking at adding more seats there, or increasing the numbers of LPNs that are trained? We're significantly decreasing the numbers of psychiatric nurses and only trained eight last year. Would the minister look at adding more seats in any of those areas?

* (15:50)

Ms. Oswald: Yes, indeed, and we have had conversations concerning the issue of overtime, and we know that according to the 2008 Manitoba Nursing Labour Market Supply, when we combine people coming to the front-line nursing positions and health care aides, we can see that there has been an additional just over 3,400 positions added since year 2000, to be specific. The work that we've been able to do with regional health authorities, the nursing union, the colleges and our educational institutions has resulted in our ability to fill more than 80 percent of them.

I would agree that on the issue of mandatory overtime that the member and I have discussed before, this is not an ideal situation and it's one that we are working to rectify. I know the member is also well aware that in many cases the issue of working overtime for nurses is one of choice of the employee, as well, and that should not be overlooked. According to the individual nature of a nurse's life, they make these decisions in terms of their financial planning, planning with their children, caring for aging parents. They make choices to work overtime, as well.

Interestingly, I think if you were to make a declaration that we're going to increase the work force in such a manner that there will never be overtime, nurses will never have to worry about working overtime, I'm not entirely sure that this would be warmly embraced by the work force. So, there is a balance, unquestionably, that would need to be struck in that respect.

On the issue of increasing nursing education, of course we are open to taking the advice of nurses on the front line and of students, as well—and people from across Manitoba that have an interest in a variety of programs—to look at augmenting our training, and we have a record in doing that. I believe we have virtually tripled the education that's going on.

In September of 2000, the diploma program was introduced at Red River. In '01, the francophone nursing diploma offered at Collège Universitaire de Saint-Boniface was established. In addition to the Fort Garry campus, the U of M offers the Bachelor of Nursing program at Norway House. Nursing education is also offered in Thompson and The Pas as a joint baccalaureate program between U of M and UCN.

In '04, the Premier (Mr. Doer) announced the expansion of nursing education programs at Red River by 74 seats, 20 to the joint B.N. and 30 to the diploma program. In April, '08, we announced the addition of 40 new R.N. seats, 16 at Red River, 16 at U of M, eight at CUSB. In May, '08, Brandon University graduated the first students from its new program that began in '03-04. The LPN to R.N. rural education program will increase from three sites to four sites from a maximum of 24 students to 32.

We also have signalled that we're going to continue with our commitment to those 100 seats, and we do have a nurse training announcement in the coming days, in fact. So more information to come on that.

So we are open to take advice. We are, of course, compelled to manage within the budget that we're allotted in partnership with Advanced Education, and we want to bring more nurses to the bedside, bottom line.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister indicated that—and talked about part-time and full-time. I know there was an effort being made here a while ago to get to, I believe it was a 70-30 mix, of full-time to part-time. I think that was a decision that was also made across Canada, perhaps through the Canadian Nurses Association, that in order to provide optimal care for patients, it would be better to have about a 70 percent mix of full-time to 30 percent part-time.

Looking at the numbers again, Manitoba is still almost the worst in the country for having more part-time nurses than full-time nurses. I note there have been some improvements, but the improvements here don't seem to be happening as quickly as they are in other provinces. Other provinces have seemed to embrace this more fully, and I wondered if the minister could tell us why Manitoba still remains one of the worst in Canada for the numbers of full-time nurses versus part-time.

Ms. Oswald: Yes, there has been an increase in the number of full-time positions, and we do see nurses

taking on these roles. But it has been our plan to really work with the nursing colleges, the nursing unions, in particular, on this issue, and the employers to strike a balance. We want nurses who give us advice all the time about the nature of the jobs that they want to have. We want them to be happy in their jobs. We want them to stay in them, and the word that we get from employers and employees is about striking a balance of having enough part-time positions so that individuals will not make a choice to retire prematurely, is one example, or to stop working altogether should they choose to take an extended time off to raise a family.

We have to listen to the voices of our employees here in Manitoba and work to provide nursing jobs, nursing positions with which they are agreeable and that, of course, work well within the context of how the system is being run.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister, then, explain why other provinces are able to move further ahead? They're in the same boat as we are in Manitoba. Everybody is trying to keep their nurses, so why is it so much more difficult in Manitoba to reach a greater percentage of full-time nurses?

Other provinces are achieving it. What would be the reason in Manitoba that we're not able to do that?

Ms. Oswald: Well, we, again, have seen an increase in the number of full-time positions, and we don't intend to stop working to offer those. Other jurisdictions would have to answer for themselves. I know that as we look at the net gain of nurses in our work force year over year over year that we are doing some things right, clearly, because we've been able to see net gains that not all provinces have been able to see.

I agree that there are some situations, as I'm informed by employers, where more full-time positions would be better, and we're working with them to achieve that. There are situations where they would not. So while we will keep our eye on recommendations that have been made about a theoretically ideal split of 70 to 30, our central goal is bringing more of these individuals to the bedside and keeping them there. If providing them with a 0.6 or a 0.7 rather than a full-time position is the way that it works in Manitoba most successfully, then we're not going to try to cram a square peg into a round hole so that we can match what's going on in B.C., necessarily. There are all kinds of dynamics at play here, including remuneration, including work

environments, and we have to take all of those into account.

I don't disagree that this is one we have to keep our eye on, but it's not one upon which we shall live or die.

Mrs. Driedger: In Ontario and in Saskatchewan, the governments there offered full-time jobs to all new grads. Can the minister indicate whether or not that is something that she's ever contemplated?

* (16:00)

Ms. Oswald: Well, certainly, we're already working with our new graduates and with the regional health authorities to offer full-time jobs wherever we can, in particular to students that want them. We have cases, of course, reported where a nurse is looking for a full-time job in a certain area perhaps, pediatrics or something, and cannot find one in that specific area in a very popular place to work. But we also find that the notion that every single student that graduates from nursing wants a full-time job immediately does not play out to be true.

Whether or not it's a conversation with colleagues working in institutions that advise them that a 0.6 is a better path to go or that they have other life commitments, we have conversations with new grads about why they would be choosing not to be taking a full-time position. I can tell you that there are a range of answers for that. Certainly, we try with the RHAs to provide as many of those full-time jobs for students as we can, and we'll keep trying to do that.

Mrs. Driedger: Again, I don't think other provinces are really much different in terms of the same circumstances. Some new grads perhaps don't want full time, but what I believe those provinces have done is not left it just up in the air. They've actually made a determination that all new grads, if they want full-time work, will get full-time work. That was just something I wanted to draw to the minister's attention.

Related to the Nurses Recruitment and Retention Fund, when we set this up in 1999, it was set up with a figure of—I thought it was \$5 million but actually, through a freedom of information given to me by this government, it actually has a figure here of \$7 million. The intent of this was to bring nurses back to Manitoba and to have other opportunities for ensuring that we can recruit and retain nurses.

The minister has said on a number of occasions that it's been a very good fund, and we certainly thought so at the time when it was brought in, but immediately after forming government, I note that this government slashed that funding in 2000-2001 to \$1.5 million. Then it went to 1.4, then 2.9, 1.6, and basically it stayed relatively low, except for 2008-2009 when they started to ramp it up a little bit.

My question to the minister is, why did they slash the amount of money that was in the Nurses Recruitment and Retention Fund? Considering that we have a nursing shortage of almost 1,300 nurses right now—that's not even counting the over 700 health-care aides, the highest we've seen in the last 10 years; a significant shortage of health-care aides who provide the supports for the nurses—why would this government slash the money so significantly in the Nurses Recruitment and Retention Fund when we've got such shortages out there?

Ms. Oswald: First of all, I can let the member know that the Nurses Recruitment and Retention Fund has been a good tool and continues to be a good tool. I can let the member know that it is funded according to the projects that the committee on the Nurses Recruitment and Retention Fund—and that's comprised of members from the union, employers and so forth—it's funded according to the projects that the committee puts forward. We've been able to see over a thousand nurses relocated to Manitoba—over a thousand nurses—as a result of that which contributes to the net increase of nurses that we've seen every year. It is but one tool, of course. It is not the magic bullet.

We know that being able to forge good working relationships with nurses, being able to be competitive with remuneration which, of course, is another important part of the fund, broadly in investing in nurses. That's a very significant way of enticing nurses into the work force and staying in the work force. We know that while maintaining the fund and maintaining the projects that the committee brings forward, we're continuing to invest in retaining nurses in many other ways, including our capital infrastructure, making more pleasant environments, making more safe environments in which nurses can work. So we have not abandoned the nurses recruitment fund in any way. It has taken different forms at different times based on these projects, but our financial investment in growing nurses, in bringing them home has been considerable.

Mrs. Driedger: We've been able to track overtime costs with the various RHAs, and they've gone up significantly. In 1999, they were \$3 million. Today, they're \$7 million, and the total amount spent in the last eight years is \$43 million. Now, we've been able to compare apples to apples and now, for the first time, the WRHA is indicating they will no longer provide, through freedom of information, dollar amounts. They've now decided that they're going to basically bury that dollar figure for overtime and put it into just hours. I guess I'd like to ask the minister whether or not she's in support of that or whether or not, like they did with admin costs for corporate admin offices, they buried those and one can no longer track them.

It looks like the same thing is happening here in overtime as well as in private duty nursing. They're not going to put a dollar figure to that any longer. Then again, it buries information and doesn't give us an accurate picture year after year from what we've been tracking. Is the minister prepared at all to ask them to go back to providing the information on a dollar figure?

Ms. Oswald: Again, I'm not actually trying to be cheeky here. I'm quite serious when I ask this question: Can you specify for me the apples that you're referring to? What you got before versus what you say that you're not able to get now.

Mrs. Driedger: In the future, the WRHA has indicated they will no longer provide the amount of dollars spent on overtime or the amount of dollars spent on the use of private duty nurses. In the future now, they have indicated that they will only tell us the number of hours that are spent in overtime and the number of hours that are worked by private duty nurses, and they're not putting a dollar figure to it anymore. At the time when all of this has hit a crunch and they become the highest numbers ever, we will now no longer have that same kind of information, which, to me, sounds like burying information again.

Ms. Oswald: What I'm wondering is if the presentation of hours that are being worked in overtime, let's say this year versus in 2005 or in 1999, isn't arguably—and I'm just asking this question—a more accurate way of saying whether overtime is going up or not when we consider how substantially the nurses' salaries and payment for overtime has increased over time. By comparing perhaps only the dollar figure maybe we're, in fact, comparing apples and watermelons. By just looking

chiefly at the hours then versus hours now, I'm just asking, might that not be a more accurate measure of what's going on?

Mrs. Driedger: Perhaps a solution would be providing both those numbers, the dollar figure that is attached to the hours, and then you do get a much—maybe perhaps even better information because you get both of them. Keeping in mind that salaries do go up year after year, but in order that we don't lose historic information, I think it would be certainly better to then have both and not eliminate one altogether.

Ms. Oswald: Again, I had heard the member making reference to this situation the other day that was causing concern about numbers, and I said the other day that, you know, I would endeavour to look into how regions were reporting this information, why they were reporting it in this way versus years past, how such information is reported in other jurisdictions, for example, what kind of information is being captured. I'll say to the member again, as I did the other day when we were both speaking with the media, that I'll endeavour to pursue this further and speak with her about it.

* (16:10)

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate whether or not there is tracking of sick time? Again, through trying to obtain this information through the WRHA, we have basically been unable to do that because we were told that the estimated costs in order to compile this information would be \$420 at one point in time and not having those kinds of dollars to be able to apply for freedom of information we just let it go. But I would think tracking the amount of sick time claimed by nurses at all RHA sites would be a pretty significant number. I'm wondering if the minister tracks this herself and is able to provide that information to us.

Ms. Oswald: Yes, in the same vein as the last answer, I'll have a look at how this is or isn't being reported. I know that there are times when, whether it's opposition members or media, feel cross that every answer isn't provided immediately and in graphic detail. I know that our regional health authorities do work very hard in conjunction with Manitoba Health and Healthy Living to answer as much information as possible. From time to time, the sheer volume in hours just really does need to be noted. So I can say quite confidently this is not a deliberate attempt to conceal information, it just becomes a workload management issue to which

costs are attached. They do take massive amounts of staff time. So I just want to put that on the record that lots of information is given out freely and willingly, and that this happens some times, that is the reality of that.

We are going to review these questions concerning how hours, dollars, sick time and so forth has been recorded in the past, and I'll commit to get back to the member on it.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate, while she has added to R.N. training in the province, why there has never been any addition of LPN seats?

Ms. Oswald: Just as a point of clarification. In 2000 the number of seats for practical nursing offered by the Assiniboine Community College was increased from 90 to 190. ACC offers LPN training in Winnipeg and Brandon, along with two rural rotating sites. From '01 to '06, training programs with support from the feds were provided in seven First Nations and Métis communities with 25 students per site. In '07, a 25-seat LPN training program was delivered at Ste. Theresa Point by ACC in collaboration with University College of the North. So I think that is actually an increase.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate whether or not there are any discussions to change the certificate—the LPN certificate program to a diploma program? I understand that Manitoba and British Columbia might be the only two provinces that still call them certificates. Is there a movement here in Manitoba to move to changing the name to diploma?

Ms. Oswald: I can inform the member that we have certainly met with the LPNs; we've spoken with the nursing colleges and, in concert with Advanced Education, we are, of course, examining the complexion of our nursing programs, certificate diploma, B.N. and so forth, and we'll be coming forward with more information in the coming days.

Mrs. Driedger: Contrary to the minister's comments in the House all the time that we never supported the University College of the North, she's wrong on that one. In fact we've been quite supportive of it, and I'd like to ask her whether or not she's given any thought to offering a diploma LPN program in the north through University College of the North.

Ms. Oswald: Certainly, you know, it would connect with my previous answer in working in partnership with Advanced Education and working in partnership with communities in the north. We certainly wouldn't be against it. It's part of ongoing

conversations, as I referenced earlier, to bring as many opportunities for people in the north as possible and also to increase our work force, as we've been talking about for what seems like a long time now.

Mrs. Driedger: Would the minister consider putting another rotating site in place and going from the current number to add one more to that?

Ms. Oswald: Yes, I believe we would. It's all part of the master conversation, and timing of such things and funding of such things you know, of course, need to be taken into consideration, but we're not closing the door on possibilities, particularly when it comes to offering opportunities in the north.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us what a triage aide is? Certainly, when I was working, I don't ever recall with all my years in the ER seeing triage aides, and I wonder if the minister could define what a triage aide is.

Ms. Oswald: I can inform the member that the function of a triage aide is to assist a triage nurse in gathering information from people who may present at an emergency room and will provide preliminary information to a triage nurse prior to a triage nurse being able to see that person.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us what the current capital debt is for health care in Manitoba?

Ms. Oswald: It'll take a few minutes or, depending on how much time we have, I may need to get back to the member with the number.

Mrs. Driedger: With the all the concern being raised about hip and knee surgeries, I think what seems to have happened is other surgeries have suffered because of the public pressure to increase hips and knees, and what we then saw is a movement to add more hips and knees because of public pressure, but probably done at the sacrifice of shoulder surgery. And now we're hearing from people that have been waiting for considerable amounts of time for shoulder surgery, and I understand that these waits are not tracked. Would it be a consideration this government would have, to track shoulder surgeries now?

* (16:20)

Ms. Oswald: We are, of course, reporting wait-time information as has never been reported before for quality of life surgeries and, of course, life-saving surgeries and we indeed look to expand our wait-time information for the people of Manitoba.

The member, of course, is well aware that when the federal government came forward with its wait time initiatives with the goal of working towards wait time guarantees, as they promised in their election campaign, they worked with jurisdictions across Canada but, also, made some decisions about what the big five would be for those wait times.

So the issues of hip and knees, of course, were not exclusive to the Manitoba context. They were national in nature, and I do want to commend the federal government because the infusion of money under the wait time initiative has helped all jurisdictions, and indeed Manitoba, make very significant strides in those areas. I know that we have had an issue with recruitment of surgeons, in particular, for shoulders. We have, very recently, recruited another shoulder specialist to Manitoba who is already seeing patients, for which we are glad, not as glad as those people, I'm sure, and I know that we have two more specialists on their way, not immediately, but they're coming.

So we're very interested in bringing down the non-hip and knee wait times, and as far as expanding the reporting of wait times, it's our intention to do that with as many wait times and areas that we can.

Mrs. Driedger: I'd like to ask the minister if she would undertake to look into a situation in The Pas. There's a personal care home there where there are a lot of nurses leaving. They no longer want to work there. In meeting with some nurses from that facility, there is some serious concern about the woman that is in charge of the facility. My information is that she's not qualified for the job, that she is a health-care aide, which would not give her the expertise to be in charge of a personal care home.

I do not have a lot more data than that. In fact, she may have other qualifications that I am unfamiliar with, but according to these front-line nurses, their knowledge about this woman is that she's a health-care aide. She does not have the qualifications for the job. She is not making the kinds of decisions that best represent patients and staff in that facility and, in fact, that she was hired just because of somebody that knows her. I'd be concerned if this didn't go through a proper hiring process so that the best candidates were interviewed. I am told by these front-line nurses that—and they are fleeing from this personal care home, according to them, and their numbers are high.

I would just ask if the minister could look into this particular situation, because if it's as bad as the

nurses are painting it, then I don't think the problems there are over.

Ms. Oswald: Yes, I will.

Mrs. Driedger: I have no further questions.

Madam Chairperson: Resolution 21.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$19,988,000 for Health and Healthy Living, Corporate and Provincial Program Support, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.3: BE IT RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$11,360,000 for Health and Healthy Living, Health Workforce, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.4: BE IT RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$64,876,000 for Health and Healthy Living, Primary Care and Healthy Living, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.5: BE IT RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$11,570,000 for Health and Healthy Living, Regional Affairs, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.6: BE IT RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$45,779,000 for Health and Healthy Living, Public Health, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.7: BE IT RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,094,852,000 for Health and Healthy Living, Health Services Insurance Fund, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.8: BE IT RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$16,949,000 for Health and Healthy Living, Addictions Foundation of Manitoba, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.9: BE IT RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$79,490,000 for Health and Healthy Living, Capital Funding, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.10: BE IT RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$6,011,000 for Health and Healthy Living, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 21.11: BE IT RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,122,000 for Health and Healthy Living, capital investment, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of this department is item 21.1.(a) Minister's Salary, contained in Resolution 21.1.

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

The floor is open for questions.

Mrs. Driedger: Part of this is reluctant for me and part of it is, I think, something that is not always an easy thing to do, but when we see a breach of ministerial accountability in any department, and in this case with health care, it becomes a very, very serious issue. Ministerial accountability is nothing to be taken lightly and in the case of Brian Sinclair's tragedy, we saw a breach in a minister carrying out her duty and her role as a minister of the Crown.

So, for those reasons, I am going to address that issue right now and indicate that, despite the fact I appreciate efforts made by a Minister of Health, any Minister of Health—it is not an easy job. I know there are many, many challenges within that department and I'm sure no one Health Minister will ever, ever get it all right or be perfect because you're never going to please everybody. Certainly, I give credit to ministers that make the best effort and do the best they can in an extremely challenging portfolio, and this minister has certainly had some successes, but it is all overshadowed by her behaviour when it came to the Brian Sinclair tragedy.

* (16:30)

We had a man, a disabled man, who came into an ER seeking help, and right from the very beginning, this Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) had us believe that he never needed help. The minister is saying, well, the staff didn't know he was there and that he needed help. Her statements all along made it look like Brian Sinclair was to blame for whatever happened to Brian Sinclair. I think that is just so incredibly unfortunate.

He came expecting to get lifesaving care. He spoke to a triage aide and today the minister clarified for us that the triage aide, indeed, is somebody that gathers information about the nature of the visit and is supposed to pass that on to the triage nurse. In fact, we had the minister say, right from the very beginning, that he was not triaged. I think what ended up happening then is the minister repeated that on numerous occasions, as did the Premier (Mr. Doer) of the province, both leading the public to believe and leading everybody to believe that Mr. Sinclair was not triaged.

Madam Chair, I think at that point that was when Dr. Balachandra did something unprecedented that I've never seen before. I think he got tired of the spin and he got tired of the misinformation that was out there. He put out a news release indicating that there was a tape, he had seen the tape, and that indeed, Mr. Sinclair did what Mr. Sinclair was supposed to do. He went to the triage line and he was seen by a triage aide and he passed on some information.

The Minister of Health never provided that information. In fact, at the same time she and the Premier were trying to tell everybody in Manitoba that the nursing coverage was fine—in fact, the Premier went on record saying that the nursing coverage was very, very positive and very significant, when we got the Freedom of Information documents back that showed exactly what the nursing numbers were in the ER, then in fact we saw a scenario in front of us that showed that the Premier was not being forthright in what he was saying to Manitobans.

The nursing numbers at the time Mr. Sinclair was in were god-awful. In fact, there were two to two and a half positions unfilled. I was stunned when I saw that because I have never, as a nursing supervisor, I think, left my shift leaving two and a half positions unfilled in an ER, especially at the Health Sciences Centre ER, where I'm sure it's chaotic on a Friday and Saturday. There were two to two and a half nurses positions unfilled. There were

nurses working on forced overtime. There were new grads that were working. There was a new grad on orientation. If you drilled down on those numbers, you did not have an optimum situation at all. In fact, what you had was an incident waiting to happen, and it happened.

Yet the Premier at the time—and I always wondered when I listened to him talk about the situation, he always talked about, oh, the doctor numbers were fine; the doctor numbers were fine and he always evaded talking about the nursing numbers. That's when my red flag went up knowing that, indeed, something was up here. So, once we got the numbers back, we saw what in fact was not very positive nursing numbers at all. In fact, they were bad. So what the Premier was saying was very, very grossly misleading, and the minister, you know, didn't correct any of this information. She'd given indications that there were no problems out there. In fact, she put misinformation on the record saying that there was an 87 percent—

An Honourable Member: No, she didn't.

Mrs. Driedger: Actually she did, in the House, and it's in *Hansard* and the information was not accurate. It was misleading information and the nursing numbers were terrible. When you peel back that onion, staffing was awful for the nurses and for Brian Sinclair. I think this government really misrepresented the situation, and I think that's why Dr. Balachandra could not tolerate any more. So he came out with real information that wasn't misleading.

The media wanted to talk to the minister that day and ministerial accountability would have said that the ministers should have spoken to the media. That's her responsibility as a minister. That's what she's paid to do. Instead, she went AWOL. She went MIA, as did the Premier (Mr. Doer) and that—you can't be a minister just for ribbon cuttings and good news. Being a minister isn't just about spin and propaganda. It is about being accountable in the good times and the bad. Even Paul Thomas and Paul Schafer [*phonetic*], both professors at the university have indicated that. Dr. Schafer went further and indicated that there wasn't honesty on the table.

So, because of this cover-up of information, the minister had an administrative review and never cleared the record when she got the administrative review, and it indicated that, in fact, he had been to triage. The lack of accountability by the minister in handling this and failing to share information and

take responsibility proved that she does not have credibility in managing this portfolio when we don't have a minister that is being forthright with the public. In fact, right after Brian Sinclair died, this minister, within days, said her health-care system was stellar. What a callous news conference to have on the Monday or Tuesday right after Brian Sinclair died.

So for these reasons and as a reminder to the minister that Manitobans expect accountability and leadership from this Minister of Health, I move

THAT line item 21.1.(a) be reduced by \$45,999, reducing the Minister of Health's salary to \$1.

Madam Chairperson: The motion reads,

It has been moved by the honourable Member for Charleswood

THAT line item 21.1.(a) be reduced by \$45,999, reducing the Minister of Health's salary to \$1.

The motion is in order. Are there any questions or comments on the motion?

Ms. Oswald: I listened carefully to the comments by the Member for Charleswood, and, like all Manitobans, she is entitled to her opinion on the issue of the handling of the tragedy of the death of Brian Sinclair. Contrary to what she might think I'm going to say, I respect her right to have that opinion. I truly do and in the end we're all going to be judged by the people of Manitoba on how we conduct ourselves and how we handle ourselves in the good times and in the bad. Manitobans are never wrong when they go to the polls. They get it right every time.

So she is entitled to her opinion as are the members of her caucus and as are all Manitobans. I find it concerning on the issue of, for example, nursing numbers, which, of course, was one of the immediate questions that we asked of the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority and Health Sciences Centre. Then, in subsequent days, when those issues were raised, we asked those questions again and had confirmation of that data that we were originally provided.

* (16:40)

But I find it interesting that the member believes that she has all the information that she needs to have about staffing numbers, about what transpired in that emergency room. Perhaps based on the tone that I'm hearing today over and above what Chief Judge

Wyant at the inquest is going to analyze and provide, I have taken advice from the regional health authority on the numbers that were present that day and will take advice of the Chief Judge during the inquest who is going to examine these issues in full. I welcome those recommendations coming forward. I welcome the details that will come forward to say whether or not I am mistaken when I have said, as has been printed in the materials that you've sent to homes in Winnipeg with taxpayer money, wherein I have said he was not known by the triage nurses as an individual needing care.

We are going to discover if I have made an error there or if I have not. I feel confident that members opposite will be sending out equal mailings apologizing for their error if I am indeed proven not to be mistaken. I'm sure that will happen. What I can say is that the centre of this issue for every Manitoban of any political stripe is getting to the bottom of how this happened. How could a person go to an emergency room and be there for 34 hours—the most vulnerable of persons, might I add—and not get the care that he needed? I do not know the answer to that.

Members opposite in the media, perhaps in some comments today in news releases, have appeared to have all of those answers already. I can tell you as minister I do not, and they are going to come out at the independent judicial inquest by Chief Judge Wyant.

I also note with interest today that the member is putting on the record what I believe would be speculative comments about the motives of the Chief Medical Examiner, Dr. Balachandra. She speaks today as if she knows why he did certain things, why he said certain things. I would personally find that very surprising that a member of the Legislative Assembly would be privy to the inner workings of the minds and the decision of the Chief Medical Examiner for the province of Manitoba.

So, again, we find the member presupposing the outcome of this inquest, which I don't think is prudent. It's a choice that this individual can make and that members of the Conservative caucus can make. I don't believe that it is going to serve the people of Manitoba well to put information on the record that is simply not true. Members have said that I blame Mr. Sinclair for his death. This is not true. From the get-go, I have said that this was a tragedy and I've said it because it is. From the get-go, I've said that I want to understand why such a thing

could happen. From the get-go, I have taken responsibility and accountability because it is my job as the Minister of Health to do that.

The one thing I have not done is apologize to the Sinclair family, and I will say that on the record. I have not done so because my colleague, the Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism (Mr. Robinson), asked me to leave the family in peace at the request of the family. I must respect that above all other things, but if there is a day and if there is a time when I can speak to the loved ones who have unquestionably been so terribly hurt by this tragedy, I will, whether I'm the Minister of Health at that time or not.

There have been other issues presented in the discourse of this event where members opposite have chosen to say things that are not true. I mean, a small example is this issue of stellar. I've searched back into my comments and what I have found is that I said that the work done between the Manitoba Medical Association and Manitoba Health and Healthy Living that had been done over months—and they climbed mountains to deal with issues in the doctors' agreement that hadn't been touched in 30 years. I said that the work that both parties had done on that agreement was stellar. That's true; I found that in print. But this issue is far bigger than fraternity party games where you clip somebody by the half sentence, and you say that they said one thing when in fact they said something else in the name of political game-playing. It's much bigger than that, and in the end we are going to be judged by Manitobans on the choices that we have made.

As far as my responsibilities are concerned, I know very clearly they are to ensure that critical incident reviews are done; they are absolutely clearly to direct RHAs to put systems in place to identify patients waiting for care, the gap that we noticed; to help the WRHA establish immediate new protocols regarding phone calls from doctors' offices to emergency rooms within eight days, ensuring that additional staff were in place. I know that a responsible minister would not make the choice to blame front-line staff as we saw happen in the days that followed that tragedy, putting more hurt on top of a terrible tragedy.

So I respect the member. I've said so today and I will say it again. We don't agree on all issues; in fact there are many on which we don't. I respect her right to make her analysis of my performance on this issue. I believe she would respect mine in having my

own analysis on how the Progressive Conservative caucus portrayed this event, and the most important thing is that we will get recommendations from Chief Justice Wyant as we go forward and make sure that a tragedy like this never happens again in Manitoba. I'm responsible for that.

Madam Chairperson: Is the committee ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Madam Chairperson: Shall the motion pass?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Voice Vote

Madam Chairperson: All those in favour of the motion, please say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Madam Chairperson: All those opposed to the motion, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Madam Chairperson: In my opinion, the Nays have it.

Formal Vote

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, a recorded vote.

Madam Chairperson: A formal vote has been requested. Is there support for the member's motion?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

An Honourable Member: For the request for the vote.

Madam Chairperson: For the request for the vote? Yes.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now recess to allow this matter to be recorded and for members to proceed to the Chamber for the vote. If the bells continue past 5 o'clock, this session will be considered to have risen for the day. Thank you.

WATER STEWARDSHIP

*(14:40)

Mr. Chairperson (Rob Altemeyer): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Water Stewardship.

As had been previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

The minister's staff can certainly join us at the newly refurbished and placed table. *[interjection]* *Hansard* lives for those moments.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): I'm wondering if the minister could update us on what her policy is with respect to quotas on Lake Winnipeg.

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Water Stewardship): We have been working with the fishers of Lake Winnipeg. We are in the process of establishing with them a resource management board. I think this is a very exciting initiative, and I want to thank the fishers of Lake Winnipeg for their support in this endeavour.

We had started the Lake Winnipeg quota review task force some months ago. The resource management board did let us know that they felt it would be helpful to them if they were able to fully constitute their group, fully establish their group, really get it functioning before the quota task review would be finishing up and giving its report.

So, on that request from the Lake Winnipeg fishers, we have asked the quota review task force to suspend their activities for probably a few months while the resource management board really gets established and then begin their work again.

Mrs. Stefanson: Could you explain what the make-up is of the quota review task force, as in who sits on it? I know it's suspended now, she mentioned, but who sits on that as well as who sits on the resource management board?

Ms. Melnick: The membership of the quota review task force is Dr. Burton Ayles as chair; Dr. Darren Gillis is a member; and Dr. Ross Tallman, Dr. Karen Scott, Norman Traverse, and Ken Campbell.

The second part of your question was membership on the resource management board. The board has not been fully constituted yet, so there are no official members right now.

Mrs. Stefanson: Last year the minister said in Estimates that there was a plan to bring all the fishers together from the north basin, the south basin, and from the channel to review the current quota system. Is that what the task force has done?

Ms. Melnick: That is the process they were in.

Mrs. Stefanson: Is there a report from the task force that the minister has received in terms of what has come out of that with respect to the quota system?

Ms. Melnick: No, the work has been suspended until the resource management board is fully constituted.

Mrs. Stefanson: What is the current policy in place with respect to enforcing the quota system as it stands right now then?

Ms. Melnick: The natural resource officers in Conservation are responsible for enforcement. The policies have not changed.

Mrs. Stefanson: Last year there were some deferred quota reductions for overfishing from 2007. Could the minister explain where we're at with those deferrals?

Ms. Melnick: There have been a number of trials of the fishers who had taken part in the protest over the quota. We have been watching the courts as they've been moving through these trials. The probationary order—there were two dates, March 6 and March 18. The courts went over the overages, et cetera. They have issued a probationary order which would defer the overages to be decided upon by the department. We're currently looking at the probationary orders to determine exactly what the instruction from the court is on those.

Mrs. Stefanson: So, sorry. I just wanted to get this clear. So the court has decided that—has sort of put this back in the department's court, to decide what penalty there will be with respect to the overfishing for those individuals?

Ms. Melnick: There were 40 fishers who pled guilty. The decision from the court was probationary service for community service projects as outlined by the court. They have referred the quota deduction to the department and determined that the fishers shall respect that quota deduction. There is one outstanding trial date that, currently, is scheduled for July. We're wanting to see how that will play out. There were three fishers who were not in court that day, so we're also having a look at when they might be going to trial as well.

Mrs. Stefanson: So, in the interim, as it stands, the department is waiting and pending the court decision of the one in July and then, potentially, three more court dates down the road, which are yet to be determined as to decide what the deferred quota decision will be.

Ms. Melnick: We have the commitment to defer overages until after the quota review task force has given its report. We are looking for civil legal advice as to what the probationary order means, in terms of being able to wait until the task force review has completed its report or will we be advised of another time line.

Mrs. Stefanson: But are there not existing policies in place, and you said earlier that existing enforcement will be in place, and so on, for this fishing season. If that is the case, then would this not fall back into that whatever the current policy is in place would apply to these people as well?

Ms. Melnick: The overfishing, the overages that are under discussion right now, were part of a protest around review of the current quota system. We undertook to do a quota review. We established the task force and we said that because the overages were in regard to concerns around the quota review, the current quota system, that we would wait to deal with those overages until the task force had reported.

These charges then moved through the courts. We are reviewing the probationary order, getting legal advice on how to move forward on the overages. Would it be appropriate to move forward on overages in the shorter term or to continue with the agreement that we made to deal with the overages after the task force reports.

* (14:50)

Mrs. Stefanson: I guess, in a way, it just leaves things dangling out there a little bit in terms of what the penalties will be for overfishing, and my concern is we can delay as long as we want on this decision, but the court has come up with one decision on community service, et cetera, the things that you mentioned earlier, but put it back in the court of the minister to decide and the department to decide the reduction from the overage. I just think, in order to be able to ensure that this doesn't happen again and again and again out there and doesn't happen in this fishing season, what is the minister doing to ensure that a message isn't being sent out there that it's okay to overfish?

Ms. Melnick: We were very clear in our communication with the individuals who were charged for overages during the protest, that this, in fact, would be for that fishing season only, and that there would be no more deferrals.

Now, we are at, I think, quite an interesting time when we look at the fishery in Manitoba. This is the

first time there has ever been an attempt on Lake Winnipeg to put together what I would refer to as a co-management board, where the fishers would have representation all year-round, and they would have the opportunity to voice their concerns about any issues to deal in a very open and transparent way with the department at the table, with scientific expertise at the table, and also valuing the traditional knowledge that we know that the fishers have.

So we will be dealing with many, many issues in the next number of years to come. I think it's important that we recognize that a commitment was made to defer dealing with the overages until after the task force had reported. We are also looking very seriously at what the court has determined, and we're working very carefully to make sure that we are taking the right steps at the right time.

Again, I'll stress that the individuals who partook in the fishing protest have had it made very clear to them that any subsequent overfishing would be dealt with as per the current departmental policy.

Mrs. Stefanson: Okay. I thank the minister for that. I think, at this point, I'm going to have to move on, given the time that we have here being limited.

I'm wondering if I could just get an update from the minister. The Clean Environment Commission came out with their review of nitrogen and phosphorus removal from the City of Winnipeg waste-water treatment facilities, and I'm wondering if she could give us an update as to where her department is at with respect to that?

Ms. Melnick: The CEC report confirmed, in fact, that the strategy of the provincial government, a lot of which is being carried out in the Department of Water Stewardship, is, in fact, an appropriate strategy for the issues that we're dealing with, and we will continue to move forward on that.

Mrs. Stefanson: There's obviously been a lot of controversy over this over the last few, couple of years, and there have been a number of very well-respected scientists from across the country who have come out and said that they're concerned about the direction of the department.

Is the minister satisfied that the Clean Environment Commission gave proper time and review, and did they listen, take proper consideration in of these 60 scientists? Does she believe the Clean Environment Commission gave them sort of adequate time?

Ms. Melnick: We as a government, when the issues were raised, looked at information that had come forward. We want to make sure that we are, in fact, moving in the right direction which is why we referred that question to the CEC.

Did they take the right amount of time? I trust the CEC took the time that it felt it needed to, came to what it felt were the right conclusions. We're not questioning the CEC. We're not questioning the recommendations. We thank them very much for the good work that they have done and that they continue to do, and we have received all of their recommendations, accepted their recommendations, and are continuing to move forward on the water strategy that we believe will best meet the needs of Manitoba today and in the future.

Mrs. Stefanson: The government says it's operating a groundwater monitoring network consisting of more than 600 monitoring wells in major and minor aquifers. Can the minister indicate what kind of data is being collected, and do they have sufficient staff to analyze the data? Does she feel that there is sufficient staff there in order to do this, and how is this data being used?

Ms. Melnick: We have throughout the province about 600 monitoring stations dealing with groundwater levels. They deal with water quality, quantity, sustainable yields, temperature which plays a role in determining geothermal capacity.

I think the question was: Did I think there was enough? I think that we have quite good surveillance. It doesn't mean that there can't and won't be, if needs be in the future, improvements and different locations, new locations, et cetera, but with our 600 current monitoring stations, I think we're covering certainly the main areas of Manitoba that would be under consideration.

* (15:00)

Mrs. Stefanson: What does the minister view as, in her opinion, one of the greatest threats to surface water in Manitoba?

Ms. Melnick: If we look at the current environment, it would be concerns around the nutrients, which is why we are being aggressive on our water strategy. I'm sure the member recalls that we're, I believe, the only jurisdiction in North America to have established buffer zones along all waterways in Manitoba. The buffer zones are a minimum of three metres and are extended farther, depending on what the body of water is used for. For example, if it's

used as a drinking water source, we have a 90-metre buffer zone. These are the areas that we feel need particular focus. A lot of our water strategy is focussing on how to protect the ground water.

Mrs. Stefanson: Just back to the nitrogen and phosphorus issue. With respect to the nitrogen on Lake Winnipeg, is there a target that your government department has set in terms of the reduction of nitrogen—and phosphorus, I guess—on the lake?

Ms. Melnick: Upon establishing our water strategy—I believe it was five or six years ago now—we had established interim targets of 10 percent phosphorus and 13 percent nitrogen, which was the pre-1970s level. The CEC has recently recommended in the report they released a few weeks ago that we keep nitrogen and phosphorus in balance on a ratio of 15 to 1, and that's what we are working on now.

Mrs. Stefanson: And what sort of a plan has been put in place to ensure that this target is met and that this ratio is kept?

Ms. Melnick: One of the things that I believe already was in place was the discharge limits from the city of Winnipeg. That had already been set at 15 to 1, so we were very pleased when the CEC made their recommendation of the balance between Ns and Ps 15 to 1 as we had already established that. We will continue to work with our partners around the, for example, application on agricultural lands, the different areas, different zones, and the limits to application of fertilizer. I had mentioned the buffer zones. We, of course, were the first in Canada to bring out phosphorus-free legislation in terms of dishwashing detergent, and we're looking to incorporate other products as we move forward with that legislation. So, again, the steps that we had taken previous to the recent CEC report did confirm that we are moving in the right direction and we will continue to do so.

Mrs. Stefanson: Most of what the minister has mentioned has to do with phosphorus reductions, and I'm certainly not saying that's a bad thing. We certainly know that's where we need to focus, and we have been advocates all along. I'm just wondering what the plan is for the nitrogen removal.

Ms. Melnick: Well, we actually have a number of limits already in place. Again, I was referring to the city of Winnipeg discharge, the limits are 15 to 1. Also, we have in our manure and mortalities management regulation which resides under the

auspices of the Department of Conservation, nitrogen limits already in place and have been for, I believe, maybe five or six years.

We also have industrial limits of nitrogen and, I think, the best example would be the discharge from the Maple Leaf plant in Brandon. They were extremely good partners in working with us and the City of Brandon to determine what the limitations of their discharge would be and have implemented—is it the 15 to 1 ratio, as well. So those are some examples of what has already been done around the removal and limitation of nitrogen in our province.

Mrs. Stefanson: I appreciate that. I mean, the 15 to 1 is what the CEC has stated now. I'm just wondering, how does it work? I mean, where will the testing take place to ensure that we keep within this 15 to 1 ratio in the lake?

Ms. Melnick: Well, I'm glad the member's had a conversion on the road to Estimates around nitrogen and now agrees with our position that the removal of nitrogen is important. A little bit of a different story a while ago here.

We have soil-testing requirements for both nitrogen and phosphorus and there is also the testing of effluent before it is discharged. Certainly, we do the water quality testing and we were talking a few minutes ago about that. We also do testing of Lake Winnipeg itself. So there are lots of different paths to make sure that the 15 to 1 ratio has been established, then, perhaps, even more so in the long run, making sure that it is being maintained.

Mrs. Stefanson: What is the current ratio of nitrogen to phosphorus in Lake Winnipeg?

* (15:10)

Ms. Melnick: The ratio can vary at certain times of the year. In late summer-early fall, the ratio is pretty close to 1 phosphorus to 15 nitrogen. In the early spring, particularly around the run-off there can be a different ratio: 1 phosphorus to 30 nitrogen. So, as to what it is today, I don't know that we actually have a reading today. I think the ice is still quite, quite firmly on the lake.

Mrs. Stefanson: I just want to say to the minister that this by no means is an endorsement of her policies with respect to nitrogen and phosphorus, but it is the policy of her department and her government to remove nitrogen and phosphorus and to ensure the removal and the reduction of nitrogen and phosphorus in Lake Winnipeg. I'm merely asking

questions as to how—what her targets are to achieve her goals, so I just wanted to clarify the record there.

But, again, we're talking about a ratio of 15 to 1, et cetera, and maybe—I'm going to get away from talking about ratios of nitrogen to phosphorus. Is it the goal, the overall goal, of the provincial government and the minister's department to reduce nitrogen and phosphorus in Lake Winnipeg?

Ms. Melnick: I will withdraw my congratulatory remarks on the conversion on the way to Estimates on recognizing that nitrogen has to be removed.

Our goal is to make sure that there's a healthy balance within Lake Winnipeg of Ns and Ps, to make sure that the whole ecosystem, aquatic ecosystem, is balanced, is healthy, that we have the healthy commercial fishery that we know is so important to communities around the lake, the north basin, the channel and the south, to make sure that we continue with the healthy recreational fishery that is also very important to local communities, to make sure that Manitobans are able to enjoy, through all seasons, the tremendous gift that the sixth great lake of Canada has given to Manitoba, and to make sure that we are working with partners in partnership.

I know my colleague from Gimli will be meeting with the consortiums soon and, certainly, we will be continuing on with the kind of financial support that we have been providing for the last number of years for the Lake Winnipeg consortium. We will continue to work with the Conservation districts and communities that are planning initiatives on their own. For example, the community of Dunnottar has shown some quite interesting initiatives.

We will continue to work with all Manitobans, not only around Lake Winnipeg but around all the waterways in Manitoba, understanding what an incredibly blessed province we have that has such an abundance of what is the most precious natural resource.

Mrs. Stefanson: So I take from that answer that the goal is not to reduce phosphorus and nitrogen on the lake, but more to maintain this balance of 15 to 1. What concerns me about that is that the balance of 15 to 1, she's already indicated that at various times throughout the year there already is that balance in the lake. Yet, we continue to see problems of eutrophication and the blue-green algal blooms on the lake—obviously not right now. We understand there is still ice on the lake, but there is a problem there.

If the minister is saying that maintaining the 15 to 1 ratio that it is for most of the time during the year, that that's going to alleviate the problem. If that's her goal, I don't think that that is going to take care of the problem, as we're continuing to see the eutrophication in the lake. Can she indicate what the plan is to ensure that we don't continue to see eutrophication and the blue-green algal blooms? Is this 15 to 1 ratio—is she satisfied that that will take care of this problem?

Ms. Melnick: Well, it's unfortunate that the member doesn't share our vision to restore the health of Lake Winnipeg. I guess it's expected from the party that would remove all the water regs that we have put in place. The member's laughing. She's thinking it's quite funny that there would be this sort of response. It's a little disheartening, but, nonetheless, we will continue on to do the work that we are doing on the water strategy.

Again, our vision is restoring the health of Lake Winnipeg, relying on the science that comes forth, making decisions that we believe will be very helpful, and when we need to, bringing in the legislation that we need to bring in. Again, we were the first in Canada to bring in legislation to remove phosphorus from the dishwashing detergent. We asked her counterparts in Ottawa to bring in national legislation. They refused, which was disheartening, but we carried on in Manitoba. However, we are pleased to see that her colleagues in Ottawa have looked at our legislation and have seen that it is, actually, quite a positive stand to take, and I believe are preparing legislation that basically mirrors that in Manitoba.

It would be refreshing for members opposite to recognize the need for the full water strategy. As the Premier (Mr. Doer) said today, across the way we have the negative nabobs who say no to everything, even when it comes to restoring something as precious as Lake Winnipeg. We will continue, again, to move forward on our strategy. Again, I go back to where our discussion started around the recent report from the CEC which did confirm that we are, in fact, moving in the right direction, and we'll continue to do so.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I think it's very important to correct the record when the minister tends to ramble on and put false information on the record. The fact of the matter is that I love Lake Winnipeg, and I love to go out there and spend time in Gimli. That's right, it's a wonderful community as the Member for Gimli

(Mr. Bjornson) has stated, but, of course, I want to, as the minister said, she wants to restore the health of the lake. Well, I'm glad she's finally realized that there is a problem with Lake Winnipeg, and the health needs to be restored. That's why we're here asking these questions.

I do care about the health of Lake Winnipeg. The problem is that I don't think that the minister really has a plan in place to deal with it. That's what we're getting at here, is that she doesn't have a concrete plan in place to reduce phosphorus which is the main cause of blue-green algal blooms and the eutrophication which causes all sorts of problems on the lake. I won't get into all those. I am not a scientist, but I know the minister has various papers that she can refer to to get all of the information she needs on those. I hope she has taken those into consideration and she will take those into consideration when she is developing a plan to help restore the health of the lake.

Unfortunately, we, on this side of the House don't see an appropriate plan in place right now to help restore the health of the lake. We think that is extremely unfortunate, but I'm certainly not going to sit here and say that the minister doesn't care about the lake. I believe she does. I believe she does care about the health of the lake and she would like to restore it, but, unfortunately, we have yet to hear anything here that will take us in that direction. So I think that that is unfortunate, Mr. Chairperson, but rather than continuing on in a debate that is clearly going to go nowhere, I would like to right now turn the floor over to my colleague the Member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Faurichou) to ask some questions.

* (15:20)

Ms. Melnick: It is nice to hear the member proclaim she loves Lake Winnipeg. I wonder if there's some problem in the caucus around the way, because they do have a leader who would remove all the water regs and very proudly stated that when he was running for leader and was resoundingly elected. So I hope I'm not airing the dirty laundry across the way and please use phosphorus-free cleaner to clean that laundry.

When the member talks about not having a plan, she's wrong again. I'll just read some points from our plan, some of the things that we've done. The Province announced a new wetland protection and restoration initiative. Even the member of the opposition who would remove all water regs is in

support of wetland restoration. In fact, it was the only thing they said on the topic of water during the last campaign, and what they referred to was the ALUS project as being a key pilot, and that, of course, was started with this government in co-operation with Ian Wishart, who is now the president of KAP, and is seen to be a very positive initiative, seen to be one of the three top pilots across Canada. Also the federal government is our partner there, so we are looking at plans to include Netley-Libau Marsh and Delta Marsh.

The WaterSmart program that we've launched to include water conservation: You know, it would only be the members opposite who would have taken such a positive initiative as that and tried to turn it into a negative thing. I mean, we had, in a tough economic time, 120 retailers from across Manitoba who partook in that and, by all estimates, we had over three-and-a-half times the product move in one day as the other jurisdictions who have tried this. Only members opposite would try to turn that into a bad story. Water conservation, supporting small business—you know, what have they got against small business? We know that they vote every year against budgets that reduce the small-business tax rate, and as the minister of CTT said today, now they're not even supporting the business community in Manitoba through their attacks.

A lot of this was, of course, possible through the development of the first and only Department of Water Stewardship in Canada. In 1999, we banned the export of bulk water, and we introduced the first of its kind, The Water Protection Act, in 2004. We've committed \$380 million for waste-water upgrades. Again, members opposite have fought that every way that they could.

We brought in The Drinking Water Safety Act and reinstated the subsidy for well-water tests. Now, this is a very interesting move, Mr. Chair, because the Conservatives, when in power, privatized all the wells that did the well-water testing. We have brought in a subsidy. We encourage people to get their wells tested. The Tories removed that subsidy, on top of privatizing all of the labs. We've brought in a subsidy. We really want Manitobans to make sure that they're drinking water that is good for them. We pay 70 percent of the annual test for well-water testing, and in times, such as we've just experienced, where there has been the possibility of contamination by several well owners in Manitoba, we are paying 100 percent of the subsidy. So that's another way of

encouraging people to make sure they're having safe water.

We have 17 new staff in the office of Drinking Water, and we brought in regulations around drinking-water safety. We passed The Water Protection Act in 2004 and with that came new water protection areas to protect our water and sensitive lands from fertilizers. Golf courses—I know the member was quite concerned about the golf courses—we found that they were very good partners to work with in this. The lawn and garden fertilizers have had a reduction in nitrogen and phosphorus. That's another move that we've taken, and it restricts the application of municipal sludge from waste-water treatment systems. So that's another way that nutrient limits are being placed throughout the province. We brought in again, the strongest regulations restricting phosphorus. We brought in protection through the three regional moratoriums to protect water from expanded hog production.

Again, the Tories were up on all fours in the House opposing that. They were joined by their friends in the Liberals, the Tory-Liberal coalition on the other side of the House. We've increased flood-fighting resources across the province. Again, I take the opportunity to thank the members of the department and—

Point of Order

Mr. Chairperson: Order. The honourable Member for Morris, on a point of order?

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Yes, on a point of order, Mr. Chair. I don't believe that speaking about people in the Chamber and saying that they're up on all fours would be appropriate language in this committee.

Mr. Chairperson: I thank the member for the comment. I don't believe that phrase has any particular history behind, it but it's a good idea for members to keep comments respectful.

I'd also take the opportunity to suggest that if anyone wants to have a conversation across the table, perhaps they could do that somewhere else since it can get a little bit loud in the committee rooms.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable Minister, please continue.

Ms. Melnick: Thank you. We have invested millions for new and ongoing research in and around Lake

Winnipeg, including over a million in new money last year for the Lake Winnipeg Research Consortium and the research ship *Namao*. We are moving forward with restrictions on spreading chemical fertilizers.

So these are some of the initiatives that we've brought in. If that doesn't sound like already a plan that is well under way, Mr. Chair, I could talk again about our partnerships with the water conservation districts. I think during the 1990s there was one new conservation district established in this province. We're up to over a hundred percent increase in conservation districts in the R.M.s that are now covered and certainly in the funding. So in that area we're doing quite well, and again, with them we're working with the Integrated Watershed Management Planning. That's also a very big part in understanding how water moves into and through our province, how it makes it way to the various major lakes that we have. We're also working with partners for the Saskatchewan River basin. We work with the Red River Basin Commission's natural resources framework.

I just met earlier this afternoon with the executive director of the Red River Basin Commission, Mr. Lance Yohe, who is a tremendous partner and really understands the need for protection of water north and south of Winnipeg. We've talked about how we monitor with some 600 monitoring stations throughout the province on ground water.

I could go on. I've got five or six other pages that I could go on to talk about. The member talks about not having a plan. I think the member needs to recognize that lack of a plan happened in the 1990s around water when it was clear that there were problems. No action was taken then, Mr. Chair. We are still cleaning up the mess that was left from then.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Mr. Chair, I will try and weed through that rant and maybe try and bring us back into answering some questions here. The member during her rant went on and on about how she is satisfied with how safe drinking water is in Manitoba. I wonder if she could indicate how many boil water orders there are in our province right now.

* (15:30)

Ms. Melnick: It's a shame that the member opposite looks at the record of what has been done around water in Manitoba. A lot of that work has been done with the people around this table and in co-operation with the conservation districts that she, I guess,

pretends to support, and in support of a lot of the regional communities, a lot of communities that members opposite represent in the House. So, if she's feeling that putting the facts of the good works that have been done in this province in recent years as a rant, I think that's kind of a sad statement on how she values the work that is being done around the province.

When we get onto the issue of boiled water advisories, the first number that I think has to be recognized is that since 1999, 107 advisories have been rescinded, and I think that's a very good number. Again, I thank the folks in the department and in the local communities who have worked around safety of drinking water for their constituents and have taken actions to remove 107 boiled water advisories. The total current number of advisories as it stands today is at 75.

Mrs. Stefanson: I think that's cold comfort to the people that live in those communities where there are those 75 boil water orders. I think it's—at least the minister, what she can say is that there is still a lot of work to do out there to ensure that no Manitoban is left without clean and safe drinking water. I think my problem that I have sometimes with this minister is that she tends to go on and on and take credit for many things that have taken place back in the '90s, many things that have been a result of other people's efforts, and I take exception to that. I think that if she would just stick with the facts in terms of the fact that there are still a significant number of boil water orders out there. Mr. Chairperson, 75 is unacceptable, and I would hope that the minister would think twice before she starts putting things on the record and patting herself on the back as to how wonderful the job is that she has done with respect to safe drinking water.

Ms. Melnick: Well, in fact, if the member had been listening instead of giggling on the other side of the table, she would have heard me say that the good work—

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable Member for Tuxedo.

Mrs. Stefanson: I think the minister and certainly some of her colleagues have been warned in the past about using and referring to members as giggling. I am not giggling. I have not been giggling at all. I take exception to this minister and her way of dealing with things. She gets very personal with people. I think just for the record here, though, the minister should stick to answering the questions at

hand as opposed to trying to get so personal in putting false information on the record and using terminology that I think is derogatory towards women and I would take exception to her using such a term.

Ms. Melnick: The member will recognize that in my last answer, as I'm sure she was listening, that I had said that a lot of the good work that had been done had been done by the department and people in communities around the removal of 107 drinking water advisories. Now the member might take exception to that; we'll just have to wait and see. But she also talked about unsafe drinking water; 99.4 percent of Manitoba's population is not under a boiled water advisory. So I think the member might be pretty careful with her words when she insinuates that it is okay for people to have unsafe drinking water in the province. That is not at all what is happening when we look at the boiled water advisories, and this is a very serious issue.

So, of the boiled water advisories that are currently outstanding, of the 75, a lot of these are residing in areas where there is seasonal use of the water, Mr. Chairperson. There has been discussion in those communities. They are cottage subdivisions, privately owned campgrounds, trailer parks, et cetera. So we take the issue of drinking water very seriously, which is why we established the office of Drinking Water, which is why we have increased the number of drinking water officers throughout the province of Manitoba, which is why there is greater surveillance happening so that we can detect, again, in communication and co-operation, with local communities when there is a problem with drinking water and take the action that is needed to make sure that people, No. 1, are aware that there are problems, and No. 2, that we work with communities to fix those. That is how, since 1999, there have been a total of 107 advisories rescinded.

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): I want to say how appreciative I am of the minister noting some of the organizations that I've been involved with over the years, Whitemud Watershed Conservation District being the first in the province and also, too, the Delta Agricultural Conservation co-op, where the ALUS program was developed and now being promoted by one of our members and current president of the Keystone Agricultural Producers association.

I do want, though, to leave with the minister, and comment is not necessary, but with regulation comes

responsibility. I think very much of the small community of Lavenham, which I know the minister is familiar with. Lavenham was using a small community well for a small number of homes in that community, and even though the minister did come forward with support for water testing on that particular community well, it has now been identified that there's been need for significant investment in that community well. It has been ordered that these improvements be made, otherwise the well is shut down, which is causing for significant concern and dilemma on behalf of the residents of Lavenham because even with the support from the R.M. of South Norfolk there is still going to be significant investment dollars required by each resident.

So I leave it with the minister to make herself more acquainted with Lavenham and even though it's not in my constituency proper, it is in close proximity to Portage la Prairie. So, as I leave it, regulation does require responsibility and, indeed, I look to her department even though she's lost some of that responsibility in the restructuring of departmental branches, work with her colleague in hopefully supporting the small community of Lavenham and the reinvestment in this. I don't think the minister needs comment on it.

Want to ask the minister about the working relationship between the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans and her department. I do know that last Friday the Department of Fisheries and Oceans federally came to her department's aid by offering up a boat to transport those persons attending a seminar up at the University of Manitoba Delta Marsh Field Station with their boat. But how is the working relationship and how many personnel does the federal government now have in that department working out of Manitoba?

Ms. Melnick: Yes, and I want to thank the member for recognizing the work that was done around the event last week in Delta Marsh. I understand it was quite successful, and I thank his support in that and co-operation.

The working relationship between Water Stewardship and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans is very good, very positive. As for the number of personnel, I think, you asked about DFO in the province, I think that question would be better put to DFO.

* (15:40)

Mr. Faurschou: Well, the reason I asked the question was just to gauge as to whether or not the federal government was feeling her department was, you know, doing the job necessary to work with current rules and regulations of government. I know that the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, up until a few years ago, was very active in this province. I still believe though that we, as a Province, should strike an agreement with the federal government and manage our own fisheries. It's something that I think we are most capable of because we are the residents of Manitoba and we pride ourselves in our natural resources and most precious resource, that being water.

So there's concern regarding the declaration of a number of navigable waterways in and around the province. The concern being raised there is when one waterway is declared navigable there is additional pressure on those persons that are irrigating from that waterway, whether it be an intermittent flow or a constant flow waterway, because as soon as it's navigable then we have to do a whole host of other things to make absolutely certain that anyone that might be navigating that waterway is protected, whether it be electrical power driven pumps or diesel generated generators operating.

I'm wondering whether the minister has any concern in that regard and whether she is negotiating with the federal government to bring a little, what I believe, common sense to the whole affair because to my way of thinking, the Assiniboine River Diversion is not a navigable waterway and yet it has been declared as one.

Ms. Melnick: I think what the member might be referring to is the Navigable Waters Protection Act. It's the act currently under review, under review federally. That actually resides under the purview of Transport Canada.

The member may have received concerns as I had received them from groups throughout Manitoba around what these changes might actually mean. There were environmental concerns raised. There were concerns raised by different wildlife groups around certain issues that were being reviewed in this act.

I did write to the federal minister and asked that he make sure that all the groups who were wanting standing before committee, which I think may be taking place this spring, I don't have the exact dates, would certainly be given a lot of time, a lot of

leeway to make sure that they were able to make the presentations that they had wanted to make.

Mr. Faurschou: I'm pleased that the minister is aware, and department staff is aware of it, because once again we've got to be really diligent in knowing how the rubber hits the road in various decisions such as this. The Assiniboine River Diversion is a man-made channel operated by your department, and for the federal government to come in and consider a declaration such as it being a navigable waterway and demanding numerous changes to those of us that use the channel to irrigate our crops, for instance, and also too the operation of the channel has to change as well with that type of declaration.

So I leave it with the minister to represent our own best interests as Manitobans and to use the common sense weather vane, if I will put it that way.

The other is that I'd like to ask the minister about different areas that have become constricted because of siltation. My honourable colleague across the table here is very familiar with the Fairford River waterway there. There has been virtually a hiatus, if you will, on dredging here in the province, and I'm wondering whether the department is identifying areas of constriction and restriction that, effectively, we, as a Province, need to look at for consideration to dredge for the best interests of all Manitobans.

Ms. Melnick: Dredging is a federal responsibility. Unfortunately, the feds did walk away from dredging over a decade ago. I have been in discussion with the federal Minister of DFO, Minister Shea, about this issue, Mr. Chairperson. Certainly, the member for the Selkirk-Interlake region federally, Mr. Bezan, has also been concerned about this. He seemed to be confused for a time as to whose responsibility dredging was. I think he does understand now that it is, in fact, in the federal purview. I understand that he is also very supportive of getting dredging siltation done in the area that he represents.

I would encourage the Member for Portage to speak to his federal counterparts on both these issues, because I think it's important to maintain healthy waterways throughout the province. My understanding is that some dredging and some siltation in the area that he's mentioned, as well as Mr. Bezan, could be very helpful.

Mrs. Stefanson: I wonder if the minister could update us on the wetlands restoration policy. I believe there was a news release not so long ago on this and, as I understand, there has been a reduction

of almost 5 percent per year in wetlands in Manitoba since the NDP came to power.

I'm just wondering if she believes that the policy is working or if there have been some changes now that we can expect this decline to change.

Ms. Melnick: We did announce another pillar in our water strategy, which is the wetland protection and restoration initiative. The amount of wetlands that have been disappearing from Manitoba has been going on for many, many years. If we look at the Ducks Unlimited report, we can see where they hold up a piece of land that had many more wetlands, quite small in size, throughout an entire, I believe, it's a quarter section, and compared to now, the reduction has been tremendous. This is very concerning for us and we want to stop the trend of the disappearing wetlands and restore or, in some instances, rehabilitate.

So what we are doing is working with—again, in partnership—folks such as Gordon Goldsborough around the Delta Marsh area and partners around Netley-Libau Marsh to restore the two largest remaining wetlands in the province. We are also working on an incentive program for landowners to restore or develop wetlands.

So it's not just these two big areas but, really, the health of the waters. We know they're a natural filter. We know that the duck and fowl population rely on these for a lot of their nesting. We know that they serve a great purpose for migration north and south. It is also something that we're looking at for the health of Lake Winnipeg.

Wetlands help to filter out excess nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus, and studies have indicated that restoring the Netley-Libau Marsh could reduce nutrient loading in Lake Winnipeg by 6 percent. Every percent is an important percent and, by working in co-operation here, we believe that we can achieve that goal.

Mrs. Stefanson: I appreciate the update from the minister. We also agree that wetlands play a very important role with respect to the *survakas* [phonetic], the lungs of the lake, so to speak—and we are happy to see that. Hopefully, we will see some changes that will take place with respect to wetlands in a positive direction.

I'd like to also ask the minister what input her department has provided into the proposed changes to the on-site water management systems regulations under The Environment Act?

* (15:50)

Ms. Melnick: The regulation that the member is referring to falls under the purview of the Department of Conservation. They are the ones who are leading the review. We have acted in an advisory capacity through the different stages of the development of the regulation, and we will continue to be working with them throughout the review.

Mrs. Stefanson: Can the minister indicate whether or not the Lake Manitoba Stewardship Board has issued any kind of a report yet?

Ms. Melnick: No report has been presented to me as of yet.

Mrs. Stefanson: When does the minister expect the first report?

Ms. Melnick: I am expecting the report may be ready by the fall. But I would encourage the Lake Manitoba Stewardship Board to take the time they need to make sure that they are submitting as full a report as they feel is appropriate.

Mrs. Stefanson: When was the last time the minister spoke with the people on the board with respect to this and was there a time frame put in place as to when she expects to have a report back?

Ms. Melnick: I spoke to the chair at the AMM dinner, I suppose it was, maybe, a month or a month and a half ago, Dr. Gordon Goldsborough. He assured me that work was going very well. We know that we have had members from the member's caucus tell us that they have attended the open houses that have been held by the board and have felt that they've been very helpful, very informative and a very good way to communicate.

Mrs. Stefanson: Saskatchewan has adopted a new results-based model to improve environmental protection measures. The plan includes streamlining and consolidating legislation, developing an environmental code of the province. I'm wondering if the minister has any comments as to that and if she agrees with their innovative approach to environmental protection.

Ms. Melnick: We do have, co-ordinated through the Department of Finance, a budgeting-for-outcomes criteria, one of which is environmental results, and that report in its entirety is published and released by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger).

Mrs. Stefanson: I know, certainly, I have a whole host of other questions for the minister, but I think, at this point in time, we're prepared to move on.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you, everyone. Seeing as there are no further questions, we will now move to the consideration of resolutions for the Department of Water Stewardship.

Resolution 25.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$16,694,000 for Water Stewardship, Ecological Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 25.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$10,086,000 for Water Stewardship, Regulatory and Operational Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 25.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$5,316,000 for Water Stewardship, Water Stewardship Initiatives, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 25.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$305,000 for Water Stewardship, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 25.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$100,000 for Water Stewardship, capital investment, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of this department is item 25.1.(a) Minister's Salary, contained in Resolution 25.1.

At this point, we'll request that the minister's staff leave the table for consideration of this last item. Thank you very much for your help.

The floor is now open for questions, if any.

Seeing none, we will now move to consideration of this resolution.

Resolution 25.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,475,000 for Water Stewardship, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates for the Department of Water Stewardship.

The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply, I believe, is for the Department of Conservation.

What is the will of the committee? Shall we briefly recess? Maybe I'll repeat the question. I'll try this again. Shall we have a brief recess or just continue right on?

An Honourable Member: Just to keep going.

Mr. Chairperson: All right. Very good.

CONSERVATION

Mr. Chairperson (Rob Altemeyer): Now, continuing, the Committee of Supply is now going to consider the Estimates for the Department of Conservation.

Does the minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Conservation): A very short one.

Mr. Chairperson: Please proceed.

* (16:00)

Mr. Struthers: It's always a pleasure to join my colleagues around this table in Estimates to consider monies to be spent in the upcoming year on some, I think, very worthwhile programs delivered by some very conscientious people in our department that I have always contended really very much reflect the traditions and the values of the people of Manitoba.

I want to start a little bit on actually a topic that I heard the Member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson) raising with my colleague, the Minister of Water Stewardship (Ms. Melnick) and that is on-site waste-water announcements and work that we've been doing.

It is part of our comprehensive water protection plan that we have, that we put in place. It goes in partnership with the work we did on Bill 17. It goes in partnership with the work that we've been doing—and the CEC, I might add—in terms of the City of

Winnipeg and other municipalities with their plans for infrastructure development as pertaining to nutrients, nutrient removal.

This on-site waste-water plan that we have fits in with that, fits in with our view that we need to deal with all the sources of nutrients in our province to deal with that in a fair way and have that level of protection, not only for Lake Winnipeg—I want to say right off the top of the Estimates—but for other lakes and streams in our beautiful province as well. I know in my own constituency on Lake Dauphin, we go through these debates sometimes in terms of water quality and algal blooms we find popping up there from time to time.

I also want to touch a little bit on some work we've done in terms of the forestry act, some amendments we've brought forward. I know I've had an opportunity to discuss with our critic, the Member for Tuxedo and some others in the Tory and Liberal caucuses, The Forest Act. Of course the highlight of The Forest Act amendments is that we removed commercial logging from our provincial parks, 80 of 81 provincial parks and all future provincial parks, I might add. There will not be commercial logging, one exception being the Duck Mountains, which really would have been quite a complicated omelette to try to unscramble when it came to the number of quota holders and legal commitments we have in that particular park.

It also helps us. The changes to The Forest Act make it easier for us to protect the environment. We made some changes to the management and forest renewal. We've updated some offences with some very strong penalties put in place and some powers we have to inspect.

Another area we've been doing a lot of work on since the last time we got together to talk of our Estimates happens on the east side of Lake Winnipeg. We've introduced Bill 6 which is The East Side Traditional Lands Planning and Special Protected Areas Act. Mr. Chairperson, this, I believe, is a very historic act. It's an act that means First Nations, for the first time, will have a seat at the table on the east side of Lake Winnipeg to help in the decision-making process. It, I think, is very necessary to give these communities some security as they develop their community land use plans; some security that we're not going to be making a whole bunch of decisions without them at the table. That's what this is about. It also is a big step forward

in our province's desire, our goal, our commitment to get a designation of a UNESCO World Heritage site.

This World Heritage site would put us in the category of the pyramids in Egypt, the Amazon. This summer, we're, our family's, actually talking about visiting the Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump out south of Calgary. There are World Heritage sites out there that are very much a good thing in terms of protecting area, but also a good thing in terms of providing economic development for First Nations on the east side. I think not only is it a good thing for economic development in terms of First Nations, but I think the whole province will benefit from that.

That leads me briefly into a little bit of a discussion on parks, and, of course, I think everybody understands that for the next two years, entry into our provincial parks will be free. We've suspended the park pass. This is something anybody who I talk to is very positive about. I think we should be doing everything we can to make our very beautiful parks system here in Manitoba accessible to more and more Manitoba families all the time.

This fits into the approach we've taken over the last number of years to make our parks more accessible. Of course, we want our parks to be more safe, as well, as we move along, so we've made some commitments in terms of 911 emergency services, and we've been very successful in a number of parks. We still have a couple of challenges we're working on there, but it is our determination, I think, that's going to see that through and make 911 emergency services available in even more provincial parks.

I do want to brag a little bit about our parks reservation system. It was at risk a number of years ago when we took the old system that was based on an American model and an American reserve system and moved away from that and replaced it with a made-in-Manitoba parks reservation system that every year breaks the record of the year before in terms of the number of parks reservations we do, especially on opening day. Opening day is a little bit, I think it's almost close to being—I think becoming declared like a statutory holiday here in Manitoba. People, I think, look forward so much to that, and they take time off from work to make sure that they can get on their computers and get their campsites booked. We have been very successful in getting that system improved to the point where we just continue to break our records from the year before.

We're also looking in our parks to increase opportunities that have been very—a certain

opportunity that has been very well received is the number of yurts in Manitoba. We've had them in a number of our parks. We're looking to have these in parks like the Whiteshell and Spruce Woods and Asessippi and Clearwater Lake and Bakers Narrows parks. Those, I think, have really been well received by Manitobans, and they remain some of the ones that get booked the most rapidly of all our camp spots that we have.

Members will know that we just recently announced \$1 million immediately for the preservation of the ruins at the Trappist Monastery Provincial Heritage Park. I think that's a very important objective of our department and our provincial government to preserve the history of our province so that the next generations can learn all about what—not just what the province has to offer, but what we have offered in the past. I think that's an important role that any provincial government needs to play.

I also want to point out some recent announcements in terms of protected areas. You may not read a whole lot about this, you know, in report cards that we get, and you may not read a whole lot of it in the media, but we really did actually introduce and make announcements in terms of the Whitemouth Bog Ecological Reserve, the Whitemouth Bog Wildlife Management Area, and the Observation Point Wildlife Management Area.

We brought in 2,200 hectares of protected lands in the Pembina Valley wildlife—sorry, through the Nature Conservancy, and also extended the parks at the Pembina Valley Wildlife and Pinawa Dam Provincial Parks. That was on the same day that we announced a \$7-million commitment with the Nature Conservancy, who is a great partner in getting a hold of private land and bringing it in as part of the protected areas.

I just want to conclude by saying that none of this is ever possible without dedicated staff. Conservation is full of dedicated staff, people who put in a lot of time and a lot of effort and a lot of work. We have conservation officers who may be late at night dealing with issues out on the landscape; emergencies such as the semi trailer accident that happened recently at Deacon's Corner; people that analyze environment licence proposals and do inspections. We have people at Saulteaux Crescent, at 123 Main, and all the regions who deal with a variety of things, and I want to say thanks, and I

know all members of the Legislature join me in saying thanks to those staff who worked so hard.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the minister for that opening statement.

Does the opposition critic have an opening statement?

* (16:10)

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairperson, and I just have—very briefly, I just wanted to put a few things on the record with respect to various things going on right now in the Department of Conservation, and I certainly wanted to echo what the minister said with respect to the staff. I know the staff works very diligently, very hard on a day-to-day basis to ensure that the department programs are carried out on a regular basis. So we know that they work very hard, and we want to thank them for their role in this process.

I just want to mention very briefly, because we do have a whole host of questions that we wanted to ask the minister today and tomorrow with respect to conservation issues in Manitoba. I think we all care about the environment in our province, and we want to ensure that it's clean and that it's safe for our children and grandchildren. What we need to do is ensure that programs are in place to help provide incentives to Manitobans to care for our environment on a regular basis.

I think sometimes that, when we do disagree with the government, it has to do with the philosophy, sometimes of more of a heavy-handed approach—sometimes, not in all cases—but in some cases, where the government feels that it knows best and how to ensure that we maintain a clean environment here in Manitoba.

We, on our side of the House, believe that Manitobans know and want to ensure that we live in a clean and safe environment. Sometimes regulations and so forth are put in place where it prohibits Manitobans from really being able to carry these out. We believe that providing incentives for Manitobans to comply—to help ensure that we maintain a clean environment in our province.

So sometimes there's a different approach about how we get there, but I'm sure that there's no dispute in any party in the House about the fact that we want to ensure that we have and maintain a clean and safe

environment for all Manitobans. So I'll leave my comments at that.

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

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is the last item considered for department and the Committee of Supply. Accordingly we shall now defer consideration of line item 12.1.(a) contained in Resolution 12.1.

At this time we'd invite the minister's staff to join us at that table and ask that once they get settled the minister introduce them to the committee.

Mr. Struthers: I'm joined by several hardworking people. At the far end we have our director of Financial Services, Giselle Martel. We have at the table Lynn Zapshala-Kelln, the chief financial officer. We have Bruce Bremner, who is the assistant deputy minister for regional services; Serge Scrafield, the assistant deputy minister for Environmental Stewardship; Fred Meier, the assistant deputy minister in charge of programming, and my deputy minister, Mr. Don Cook.

Mr. Chairperson: Very good. Does the committee wish to proceed through the Estimates of this department chronologically or have a global discussion?

Mrs. Stefanson: I think it would be helpful, given that I have a number of colleagues that may come in from time to time over the next couple of days to ask questions, if we could go in a global manner.

Mr. Struthers: I think we should. Yes, global sounds good. I was trying to think of something about acting globally locally but I couldn't come up with it, Heather. Something different. Did you read what I said last year?

Mr. Chairperson: Just for the record then it is agreed that the questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner, with all resolutions to be passed once questioning has concluded. The floor is, thankfully, now open for questions.

Mrs. Stefanson: I would like to start off my questioning with respect to the provincial park passes. We know that it was mentioned in the budget that there will be no entrance fees to the provincial parks in the next two years. Just as a point of clarification, does this new free entry policy apply to all visitors to provincial parks, for example, to

visitors from other provinces and the United States, or do they still have to pay an entrance fee? If so, how much is it?

Mr. Struthers: It's open for everyone. The answer to your question is yes.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, we've had a question and an answer, so this is a good start to this session. That's great.

When was the decision made to forgo the sale of the park entry passes?

Mr. Struthers: It was announced in the provincial budget. It was part of the discussions that we had in preparing our Estimates. So it was made shortly before the announcement in the budget.

Mrs. Stefanson: What was the basis for making the decision?

Mr. Struthers: Well, it's part of our overall plan to make parks more accessible to Manitoba families. Part of our approach is to make the entry fee not there for two years, especially given the kind of economic times that we're facing. We think Manitoba families need to have outlets. They need to have areas that they can go and be together in some sort of recreation.

The other part of our approach is that we continually look for more and more money for infrastructure for parks to make sure that we're providing showers, we're providing lagoons, that we're increasing, in some cases, playground equipment, a whole host of things that we're putting funding towards to make our parks even more accessible than they already are.

Mrs. Stefanson: I just ask because I know, last year, we had spoken of the fact that, I believe, there was a slight increase in the fees last year for the entry to the park.

Mr. Struthers: I believe, last year, they went from \$25 to \$28 dollars.

Mrs. Stefanson: I just recall, at the time, the minister had stated that this was necessary in order to pay for various things within the park. I'm wondering if he can indicate—there's obviously been a change in policy and a change in the frame of mind from last year, and if he could indicate what has changed.

Mr. Struthers: I want to make clear too, the change, last year, and maybe I'm helping her argument out here, I don't know, but we included cottagers in that last year. That was the other part of the increase.

What has happened from then to now is that we have seen a huge decrease in the economy. We think that times are getting tougher for people and that it was a good time to make a decision to ease that burden on Manitoba families. So that very much was what changed my thinking on the park passes from last Estimates to this Estimates.

Mrs. Stefanson: I appreciate that. Certainly, from last year, there was an indication of various things within park that needed to be paid for, and that was the reason for extending it to cottage owners as well, and increasing the fees slightly last year. We are into a tough economic position, I guess, where we could be approaching that in our province. What is there to ensure that the park continues to be vibrant? Last year, we needed an increase in revenues and that was a reason for the increase. Now we don't have any revenues as a result of park passes. What will backfill those revenues that used to be there with respect to the fees from the park passes?

* (16:20)

Mr. Struthers: What we have is a commitment to increasing, through general revenue, the amount of money that we're going to be spending on such things as park infrastructure. We want to be able to offer this kind of accessibility to Manitobans. In a lot of ways Manitoba hasn't suffered the kind of economic downturn that other provinces have, but I'm very concerned about things like pensions and those sorts of things that my constituents worry about, that can kind of leak over from other jurisdictions into our province. I know that Manitobans watch the news every night and they see all the bad headlines, and they read the press. I want to be able to offer some hope for Manitobans that they can get through these hard economic times with the knowledge that our park system is there and is accessible for their families to come and have some fun.

I also want to assure my friend from Tuxedo that summer will get here. It doesn't seem like that, but Manitobans know summer will get here. When it does, we're going to be out in the parks a lot. I think a lot of people appreciate the fact that we're not going to be charging at the gate when they come in.

Mrs. Stefanson: Just in going through the process and if the decision was made just prior to the budget—or it must have been made just prior to the budget as it was in there. Normally, and we're approaching the season, the budget wasn't so long ago, at what point in the past were the park passes

printed? Was it—were they—like what was sort of the date in the past or a range of a date that—of dates where the passes would have been printed?

Mr. Struthers: Usually what happens is in and around that Christmas period, or shortly after, those decisions are made on everything from the picture that appears on the park pass that you put on your rearview mirror, all of those kinds of decisions are made then.

Our Estimates process for this department started well before that, so we were able to make sure that those kinds of decisions are made in conjunction with each other. But like I said, the final announcement, sort of, was in the budget that was presented a while ago.

Mrs. Stefanson: So were the passes—if that took place around Christmastime, I think you mentioned, in the past, where those passes would have been printed, were they already printed, then, this year before the decision was made to make them free? Do people still need passes now to get into the park?

Mr. Struthers: We had to be prepared, so we printed—we had to have the park passes printed. We knew that we were going to go through the Estimates procedure and make an announcement at the budget. So more out of sense of caution on my part we made sure that they were printed and that they were available should there be a change in our decision, or should too many people vote against our magnificent budget that we'd be in a position where we had to have those in place, if we actually couldn't get our ideas put through.

So we had them printed but they're not required by anybody at a park this summer.

Mrs. Stefanson: How much was spent on the printing of those passes?

Mr. Struthers: I can get back to the member with a specific number. What we would be doing with these park passes is—what we announced is a two-year lifting of the park pass, suspension of the park pass. If a decision down the road is made to go back into the park passes what we would do is use those park passes down the road if we needed to. So they still may be used but I'll get back to the member with an exact number.

Mrs. Stefanson: I would appreciate getting the figure on that. That would be appreciated.

The Province had private vendors like Canadian Tire and service stations, et cetera, that were selling

the park passes on their behalf. Does the government owe these private vendors any money this year because of a decision to forgo the sale of the passes? How will that affect the businesses in the area?

Mr. Struthers: We communicated early on, as early as we could, with all of the vendors around the province. We did that in writing, informing them of the change and, to our knowledge, we don't owe them any money.

Mrs. Stefanson: So is the department in possession of those passes now? They haven't been destroyed or anything?

Mr. Struthers: We have them. If we need to use them in the future, they're there to be used.

Mrs. Stefanson: How many passes were printed?

Mr. Struthers: Can I get back to the member with an accurate number on that?

Mrs. Stefanson: I would appreciate that, please. Thank you.

Now that there's no admission fees, I assume that people are allowed to come and go in a park as they wish, and I know there's normally staff that are at the park gates watching for passes, et cetera. Will those staff still be there and, if so, what will they be doing?

Mr. Struthers: This won't result in anybody being laid off or anything like that. We bring a whole number of staff on every summer. We still plan to do that. What I want to do is at least at the outset, while people get used to the change in the policy in some of those park gates where we have people set up, I want to have them there. If we find that there are better uses for those people elsewhere within our park system, we can make those kinds of changes to manage this.

I do want to make it very clear that this just deals with the park entry passes. This isn't camping fees or anything like that. There are still rules that govern the campers. There're fees that campers pay. That is separate from the park pass issue that we're dealing with.

Mrs. Stefanson: It was the policy and plan of the government—if we look back at last year at some of the questions and answers that came out of last year—that clearly the government relied on this for a revenue base within the department to cover off various services within the parks, and there's been a very sudden change in policy and the minister is

saying that that won't affect and won't cause any layoffs within his department, within the parks.

What will be the role of those who normally would be at the gate, sort of making sure that people have their passes, et cetera? What will be their role going forward?

* (16:30)

Mr. Struthers: I can give a few examples to the Member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson).

Quite often, what we find is that we have a very good ability to move people around within our park system. Over the course of the summer, there are a number of different realities and different scenarios that play out, and I think we have the kind of staff that we can be confident in moving around to different positions as they're needed throughout the course of the—especially in the summer, when we have as many staff on as what we get.

Campground attendants. We always know that we can put people in place, especially when you look at the May long weekend coming up, the liquor-free May long weekend that we really get busy at. Of course, any of the long weekends, very, very busy in our campgrounds, and we need to be moving people around to make sure that we've got all of those kinds of services covered.

Another area that we get a lot of feedback on—we get very good feedback in terms of our yurts that we brought into Manitoba, and we keep looking at ways that we can get some money from here and there, and assign it to our yurt program and get more yurts in place. Along with those yurts come more services, and what I really want to make sure happens is that people continue to have a positive experience with yurts, and to do that we need to have services available and people there to perform those services. It's different than just having somebody pop their tent up at a regular campsite. These yurts need to be cared for. So we can always shuffle people in and out and around the yurt programs.

We want to make sure that we have recycling opportunities for people in campsites. That is something that we've been targeting and every year moving a little bit forward on. This could give us an opportunity to reassign some people into that kind of a program. And always, always with our beaches, with our provincial parks that have a beach, we always need to be very much aware of the numbers of people that we need to have at the beaches providing a whole range of different services.

A good example of that is Birds Hill Park. The numbers of people at that beach—and then that's separate from even the whole question of beach safety. When you get as many people as I've seen on some of those weekends up at Birds Hill Park, the number of times garbage and recycling need to be removed is quite amazing. The number of times you need to clean out the washrooms and showers and those sorts of things is pretty amazing.

So we will have no shortage of work to do, and we usually have a lot of people that we can move around and assign to those different tasks.

Those are just some of the ones that we can come up with now. There are probably lots of things we can be doing in our parks.

Mrs. Stefanson: Just wanted to go back to the revenues for a moment. I'm wondering if the minister could indicate over the last three years what the—or two years—what the revenues were from the park passes.

Mr. Struthers: From March 1, 2008—[interjection]—oh, I'm sorry. I will get it right yet. From April 1, 2008 to February 28, 2009, it was \$2.4 million in revenue.

Mrs. Stefanson: So, again, the expenditures of the department are going up a little bit, I guess, over last year. We are going to be losing about \$2.4 million, give or take some in terms of revenues to the department. I know I sort of asked this earlier, but where's the money going to come from—in the department or is it coming from Infrastructure or where's the money coming from to replace the \$2.4 million that the department has relied on in the past from the revenues from the park passes?

Mr. Struthers: First of all, our overall budget, year over year in Conservation has gone up by about 1 percent. That will make it so that we make a lot more decisions in terms of how our money is spent. One of the things that we've decided is that the \$2.4 million we can forgo based on the kind of support we get centrally from general revenue.

It's our belief that we can continue our kind of support for park infrastructure, grow and build our parks and, at the same time, provide this kind of relief for Manitoba families.

Mrs. Stefanson: Okay, I appreciate that from the minister. I know in the interest of time, I'm probably going to have to move on here to some other questions, but some of my colleagues may have

some other questions with respect to that area moving forward.

With respect to Lake Dauphin and fishing, I know I've asked a number of questions of your colleague, the Minister of Water Stewardship (Ms. Melnick), and she pointed me in your direction that it may be more appropriate to ask these questions of you.

I'm wondering if the minister can indicate how many natural resource officers are currently watching over the tributaries on Lake Dauphin

*(16:40)

Mr. Struthers: We don't have the figures available for today, but up until yesterday there were six natural resource officers, and they'd logged 543 hours. That is on the two tributaries that were closed. That's the Valley and the Turtle closed to walleye and the other five tributaries which had the six-fish limits.

I want to be sure I put on record that those are officers who are very well trained. They exercise very good judgment, sometimes in confrontational tense moments along the banks of these tributaries. I think we should give them all of the commendation in the world.

They do a very good job, not only of enforcement at the time at the bank of the river, a lot of work has gone into setting up the enforcement, talking to people about why it shouldn't be that people fish during the spawn. A lot of work was done, in terms of the consultation under section 35, that we were obliged as a Province to do, which we did. I think one very good aspect of the enforcement was the provision of pickerel fillets to rights holders who came down to the river, in many cases with their fishing rods in hand—maybe didn't realize there was a closure in place, or maybe thought we weren't going to enforce it—were faced with either going down to the river and facing Conservation officers or turning to the people from Water Stewardship who were handing out pickerel fillets, and they opted to take the pickerel fillets and go home. That made it a lot easier in terms of enforcement along the banks of the river where we wanted to minimize the kind of confrontations that sometimes come along with these situations. So that part of it, I think, was very successful. I think that probably answers it.

Mrs. Stefanson: So there are six natural resource officers just on the Turtle and Valley rivers. How

many Conservation officers are there on the other tributaries?

Mr. Struthers: As I said, that's six natural resource officers. They patrol the two tributaries, the Valley and the—*[interjection]*—Turtle—thank you, that were closed; plus they were also involved in the other five tributaries, if I can do it through memory: Mink Creek, Edwards, Vermillion, Wilson—I'm forgetting one—Ochre River. Those were the other tributaries that had six walleye limits, and these six officers patrolled those as well. I can report to the Member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson) about almost 300 fishers were checked. Six tickets have been issued, a number to rights holders on the Turtle River, even some to non-Aboriginal people along the Valley River, six warnings, and that included Métis, Treaty, non-Aboriginal. I want to make the point very clear that we did a very serious consultation under section 35. We announced a real closure and we really did enforce this.

Mrs. Stefanson: So were these charges issued—so were they just on the Turtle and Valley River closures, or were they also issued in some of the other tributaries for those that were taking over the six fish quota?

Mr. Struthers: There were two charges on the Turtle River, four on the Valley River, and the ones on the other tributaries were warnings. What we found was that we didn't have to be out looking to find people once they'd been warned. Once they received a warning from us, that was generally heeded.

Mrs. Stefanson: What are the current penalties for overfishing or for fishing on the two tributaries that are closed?

Mr. Struthers: The way this works is that our officers write up the tickets, collect whatever evidence needs to be collected. The information is sent to the courts, and the courts then decide on what—they render a decision and it's the courts that come up with the penalties. In these cases, there hasn't been, and there isn't today, a set fine for this. That is up to the determination of the courts.

Mrs. Stefanson: I wonder if the minister—and maybe this is more appropriate to the Minister of Water Stewardship (Ms. Melnick), but I know the minister is from the area and probably talks to many of his constituents on a regular basis and those that are close to this issue. Can he indicate when the spawning actually started because I know it was late

this year, given the weather conditions, et cetera, and that's why the extension came about of the closures and partial closures? Does the minister know when that started?

Mr. Struthers: Yes, this has been a little bit of a different year. I've been the MLA for 14 years, and every spring we've—whether I've been in opposition or in government, been having to deal with this issue. What the pickerel depend on are nice warm temperatures in these tributaries. Our problem this year, more than anything, was getting those temperatures of that water up to 9, 10. That kind of a range so the spawn could take place.

On April 20, on that date, the first day of our closure, I don't think there were any fish going up those tributaries because it was just too cold. Then, much to my and my constituents horror, we end up with snow from there so that didn't help. We had some cold water running off from the Riding Mountains where there is still some snow as well. That cold water didn't help again—[interjection]—and as I'm reminded by my trusted experts, the water levels were higher than normal as well, and that doesn't help pickerel to spawn.

So sometime after the April 20 date we picked, which usually is a pretty reliable date—I know the fish biologists we have consulted with were very confident that, from the 20th to the 3rd would cover that spawn. Mother Nature is smarter than all of us though, and she threw us a bit of a curve on this one so we had to wait for those pickerel to come up to that river, up those tributaries. As a result, we did make the announcement to move from May 3, the end date, to May 8. We're very confident that is going to cover the period of the spawn, especially in the Turtle and the Valley rivers which cover 75 percent of the spawn that is necessary to ensure a fishery succeeding on into the next generations up at Lake Dauphin.

Mr. Chairperson, I do also want to acknowledge, speaking of my constituents, the Member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson) joining us at the Intermountain Sport Fishing Enhancement group dinner along with about nine of her colleagues, I think, which is always good. I appreciate that kind of support from people from outside coming up to our area and dropping a little bit of money in the old fish enhancement fund. It looked to me like the Member for Tuxedo had a good evening, and I want to encourage her to come up again next year and take part. We know how to

have a good time up in Dauphin so any time, come on up.

* (16:50)

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I just want to indicate there were several of my colleagues there. I think there were about 10 of us there, and we all had a wonderful time. It's a great group of people and a great event. I look forward to the one next year as well. It was a fun time and I want to thank all those people that obviously put a lot of hard work and effort into organizing that event. They certainly did a fantastic job.

Getting back to the issue here, another question that I had asked the Minister of Water Stewardship (Ms. Melnick)—and she had mentioned that it would be more appropriate to ask you—so I will ask again here: with respect to the co-management plan, is there a completed one now?

Mr. Struthers: Well, first, I very much appreciate the kind words that the Member for Tuxedo and—who just put on the record about some of my constituents who worked very hard to make that event a success. I also must give credit to her colleagues who basically said the same thing as I spoke to them that evening, on Friday evening.

I want to add to that, those folks don't just do a good job organizing that event. They have actually done a lot of very good work in terms of habitat and—

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please.

A recorded vote has been requested in another section of the Committee of Supply. I'm therefore recessing this section of the Committee of Supply in order for members to proceed to the Chamber for a formal vote.

If the bells continue past 5 o'clock, this section will be considered to have risen for today. Thank you all.

COMPETITIVENESS, TRAINING AND TRADE

* (14:30)

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

Would the minister's staff please enter the Chamber.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade): Yes, thank you, Madam Chair. Discussion with my critic: there are a couple of matters from yesterday's Estimates. I just wanted to go on the record to correct a couple of things where I may have left the wrong impression.

The first item in discussion of the plumbers regulation that we discussed at some length yesterday, I've checked the records and, indeed, that didn't go to Cabinet. I simply signed the regulation as the Minister responsible for Competitiveness, Training and Trade.

The second piece, the Member for Carman (Mr. Pedersen) had asked when the formal newsletter notification had gone out to all members of the plumbing industry in Manitoba. I've reviewed with my staff and, indeed, that notification has not gone out. It's going out very shortly. The letter, which went out from Leonard Harapiak as the chair of the Apprenticeship board, went out to a number of different individuals representing the Construction Labour Relations Association of Manitoba, UA Local 254, Mechanical Contractors Association, the Merit Contractors Association, the Winnipeg Construction Association and Building Trades Council, as well as a few other individual businesses.

So the notification of the decision went out to organizations representing the great majority of employers and apprentices, but just to make it clear, the newsletter, which is what we discussed yesterday, is only now being sent out to all of the groups we discussed yesterday.

One other thing I can provide today. The Member for Carman had asked about the membership of the Plumber Provincial Trade Advisory Committee, when that plumber regulation was passed by the PTAC. There were five members. The chair was Dave Yallits, Y-a-l-l-i-t-s. His nominating organization was the Local Union 254. The four members: Perry Snedden, S-n-e-d-d-e-n, a representative or nominated by the Construction Association of Rural Manitoba; Kris, that's K-r-i-s, Wright, W-r-i-g-h-t, who's described as an individual applicant representing employees; Brad Marr, M-a-r-r, who was nominated by the Mechanical Contractors Association and the Construction Labour Relations Association of Manitoba; and the final member was William Leak, L-e-a-k, who was nominated by the Local Union 254.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Madam Chair, I thank the minister for that information about the

PTAC membership, and we'll just deal with that one then right away. There was obviously government members are also on that PTAC board that you didn't include, government advisory in an advisory capacity.

Mr. Swan: No, that's not correct. The PTAC is comprised solely of representatives of employers and employees.

Mr. Pedersen: There's no one there from the government in an advisory capacity?

Mr. Swan: Yes, depending on the nature of the issue and matters before the PTAC, they may request staff support. So someone from the Apprenticeship branch may attend at their meetings or may provide them assistance, but there are other functions the PTACs carry out where they simply do it on their own.

I'd just add that, generally, staff would take minutes if there are decision items being made.

* (14:40)

Mr. Pedersen: Well, Madam Chair, through you to the minister then, I have minutes from Thursday, May 22, 2008 from the Plumber Provincial Trade Advisory Committee, plumber PTAC, and in attendance there were four people from the construction trade. There were regrets from one person. But there are also staff here, and I can read out the staff: Ihor Cap, Natasha Hohol, Rick Guilbault, Nancy Eller, Sherri Pickering.

Through the minutes, these people are presenting, in particular Ihor Cap, has led the discussion on changes, and they're talking about plumber level chart and units of instruction, 2002, and led discussion on changes.

So these delegated staff in here, are they not always at the plumber PTAC or are they only on invitation?

Mr. Swan: The individuals that the Member for Carman listed are staff of the Apprenticeship branch. Their presence or their absence would depend on what business was being conducted by the PTAC. So, presumably, those employees were there by agreement with or by invitation of the PTAC.

Mr. Pedersen: I'm going to go back. Just one other minutes that we've been able to come across at some unique surfing in order to get to these. This is January 17, 2007, and again it's the plumber PTAC, and remembering now, this is back to 2007, I have a Joe Black presented an alternative training model to

the PTAC. So I really am questioning where the leadership for these changes came from in here.

You've told me that it normally comes from the PTAC which is made up of, in this case, the plumbing contractors and union or labour element of it. It certainly looks, by all accounts to me and from the people that I've talked to, that this initiative for changing from five years to four years came from the government. Am I wrong?

Mr. Swan: The member's wrong. The PTACs are boards that have particular expertise in their trade. There would be employees, whether unionized or non-unionized, that would represent the interests of employees, employers, which, again, may be from union contractors or non-union contractors, representing employers. But everybody on that committee serves a greater purpose of making decisions for the benefit of that trade.

I can tell the member that there had been some discussion in the plumbing trade about what to do. I'm advised that before the regulation was changed apprentice plumbers in Manitoba actually had the lowest wages in Canada.

As the member knows, there has been a lot of talk over the last couple of years about skill shortages, especially in skilled trades, and as I understand it, there were concerns being expressed about recruitment and retention issues within that trade. So the plumber PTAC passed the regulation they did to try and address those concerns, as well as addressing the matters we went over yesterday, that the fifth level of the plumbing apprenticeship program didn't really seem to be adding much, if anything, to the training of those apprentices.

It would not be surprising that there would be government Apprenticeship branch support for the PTAC in making decisions of this type. That is offered to PTACs. In this case, if they were looking at making a substantial review to regulations, I suppose it's not surprising that there would be staff in attendance to assist that PTAC.

Mr. Pedersen: Can the minister confirm that the steamfitters PTAC was also approached to change from five years to four years in their apprenticeship program and the steamfitter PTAC refused to consider it, changing from five years to four years?

Mr. Swan: Yes, I understand there have been discussions between the Apprenticeship branch and the steamfitter's PTAC about where that trade is going to be going. As I understand it, the PTAC will

be making its own decision on what's appropriate. As I think I said yesterday, there's a bigger meeting being planned of representatives of all the various piping trades in Manitoba to talk about these issues, to see what the various trades want to do to address some of these recruitment issues to ensure what the training that apprentices receive is appropriate and continue to build those trades within Manitoba.

Mr. Pedersen: So will the minister confirm that the steamfitter's PTAC was approached prior to changes being drawn up by the plumber's PTAC?

Mr. Swan: I don't believe there's been—there were formal discussions between the Apprenticeship branch and the steamfitter's PTAC before the plumber's PTAC passed their regulation. I don't believe that's the case.

Mr. Pedersen: We know that there was a relatively quick change in this. We're talking less than six months from when discussions started about changing the plumber PTAC or the plumber PTAC talked about changing the rules from—or the apprenticeship from five to four years. Is that a normal time frame or what is the normal time frame for developing changes in regulations, particularly the plumbers—in the apprenticeship trades, what would be a normal time range for changes to come out?

Mr. Swan: Let me first say I think we discussed this yesterday, but the process to change this regulation is actually longer than the six months that's suggested. I'm advised that these discussions actually began for the plumber trade back in 2007, about the possibility of changing the plan from a five-level apprenticeship program to a four-level apprenticeship program as well as dealing with the wage issues.

I'm told there's no magic formula for how long these discussions can take. It depends on a number of things. It depends on how anxious the PTAC is to make those changes. I expect it would depend on the willingness of both employer reps and employee reps to go ahead and make those changes. A lot of that would depend on the retention and recruitment issues that are being found in that particular trade. In truth, because PTAC's are people who volunteer for a very low stipend, who volunteer to come and put in their time, frankly, if a trade is very, very busy, sometimes it's not the easiest thing to convene a PTAC because people would rather be out there doing their job.

Mr. Pedersen: So we've already established that there was no notice given other than posted in the

Manitoba Gazette, that there was no notice that went out to the trades, to the union, employer, employee side. How was until some two months down the road when it—as I am led to believe, two months down the road, it came to the attention of some of the employees. Whose job was that again? Was that the council's job or how was this supposed to be done? Who's going to pick up the blame for the back wages owed for the lack of notice to all sides in this business?

Mr. Swan: I'm going to break that down into a couple of pieces. The member's point, which I accept, is that there was not notice given of the regulation. It was not given in a timely way. The branch generally is the one that gives that notification. As minister, I agree that is a problem. As we discussed yesterday, it seems to be a systemic problem that's been with us for some two decades. This has come to my attention. It came to my attention back in March. I've directed the branch to work with our various stakeholders to come up with a plan to make sure we don't have this problem. Ultimately, the responsibility for the notice rests with the minister. We are taking steps to make sure that there is a timely reporting of regulations that are passed, and that may very well mean that regulations that are referred to the minister have a particular date on which they take effect.

* (14:50)

The second piece, though, that I do want to get into is what the member describes as back-pay issues. The apprenticeship board, again, had a pretty comprehensive consultation with the various industry stakeholders, and all of the issues that the member is discussing were put on the table in the course of that meeting. I was not at the meeting. The understanding that I have from staff and from various individuals who attended that meeting on behalf of their own organizations was that there was a pretty frank discussion about the issue. A number of employer reps and employee reps mentioned that, in fact, not that many plumbers in Manitoba are paid at or, frankly, even close to the minimum wages in any event. That's been a necessity because, frankly, the minimums under the regulation had been in place for some time. Manitoba employers, whether they're unionized or non-unionized, have had to pay more than that minimum in order to attract and to retain people in that field.

So there is an issue which is out there. I, frankly, don't know that it's a very large issue. The most

important thing, though, is it is an issue that the board took into account. They heard from the stakeholders and the board made its decision not to change the regulation which had been signed into law on January 8, 2009.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): My question is related to the discussion that has just been taking place. I've had some contact with Parsons Plumbing Heating Cooling & Electrical out of Winnipeg here on Sherbrook. They are, obviously, a stakeholder in this issue, and I just asked for some clarification from them of when they received official notice of the change, whether their apprentice individuals, employees, had received word of the changes, and none had.

So my question initially would be, what type of consultation? How many meetings actually did occur with the Apprenticeship branch and the stakeholders? Was there more than one? Was there one? What date was that? When was it held and who attended?

Mr. Swan: The meeting that I believe the member is asking about took place the morning of April 9, 2009. In attendance were Scott Sinclair, who's the executive director of the Apprenticeship branch, as well as Karine Levasseur, who's a staff member; Leonard Harapiak, who is the chairperson of the Apprenticeship and Trades Qualifications Board; Peter Wightman, who's with the Construction Labour Relations Association of Manitoba; as well as Jamie McNabb, Bob Modjeski, Betty McInerny; Harvey Miller, who, I know, is with Merit Contractors' Association, which is an affiliation of non-union contractors; Kevin LeFevre; Heiko Wiechern, who's the business manager for plumbers' Local 254; Jean Ducharme; Ron Hambley, who's with the Winnipeg Construction Association; John Schubert, who's also with the Winnipeg Construction Association; Julie Kennedy, who's staff; Ryan Einarson; and Dave Martin, who, I know, is with the Winnipeg Trades Council.

So it was determined by the branch that these individuals represent employers. They also represent employees and they represent a pretty good cross section of the various employees and employers actively engaged in the plumbing trade.

Mrs. Rowat: So April 9. Just so I'm clear, the regulations, or the legislation changes would have been in place two months prior to this meeting?

Mr. Swan: Yes, we went through this in some detail yesterday. What occurs in Manitoba, and which, I think the Member for Carman (Mr. Pedersen) and I agree, needs to be reviewed, is that as soon as a regulation is signed by the minister, the practice in Manitoba is that it then becomes the law. When this particular issue was raised I had some concerns about that. My understanding is that at the meeting on April 9 that I've just detailed, there was a lot of discussion about the need to improve that system, and I think I do respect the views of those stakeholders, whether they represent employers or employees, and we are planning to make changes so that there aren't delays between a regulation being brought into effect and formal—personal, if I can call it that—notification being given.

Of course, these changes are immediately posted in the *Manitoba Gazette*. Legally speaking, that's notice, but we're not going to pretend that that is, practically speaking, appropriate notice, which is why the branch has its usual—its policy of making sure that all apprentices, all employers, and all labour organizations and employer organizations are made aware, in writing, of the changes.

Mrs. Rowat: I'm going to just give you a little background here, a little bit of their concern. I'm also going to actually provide you with a couple of suggestions of ways to enhance the communication aspect of this issue so that it doesn't happen again. I guess you may want to clarify a couple of points when I have finished my statement here and my comments.

My understanding is that an apprentice from Parsons Plumbing Heating Cooling & Electrical heard from another apprentice who was at Red River College that a discussion was had with the apprenticeship board and their class. That was, you know, prior to any discussions or meetings. There was absolutely—appears to be no consultation prior to this legislation being implemented. So the individual then went back to his employer and said, hey, you know, I understand that there are some changes happening here. The Parsons management staff, obviously, were interested and were—at first—you know, embarrassed to learn the changes from an employee, when, actually, they should be the leaders in this area and know about the legislation changes, because, obviously, it's going to affect salaries and job quotes, et cetera, that they were working on presently. But then their embarrassment turned to anger when they learned that the legislation had already been in law for four to six weeks prior.

So then the issue becomes a financial issue for the company, and an embarrassment for the company because they pride themselves on being good employers. They understand the significance of the paycheque for their employees, and so the financial ramifications have now become, you know, an issue. They've quoted, as I said earlier, on jobs, on work for these apprentices, so, obviously, it's going to affect the outcome of those quotes. It's going to affect their bottom line and the job that's going to be put forward by Parsons, and, obviously, the back pay is going to be an issue.

So a couple of questions and obvious suggestions: Why couldn't the government, since it's your legislation, provide notification through the database—that I know that you have, that is held by the government—that could have notified all level 1, 2, 3, and the majority of 4, fifth-level apprentices, and the companies that are listed in the database, and let the people know that this is actually going to be a change? I have a family member that is actually in the piping trade, so I know that that's a possibility. That is something that could have been done, and I believe it should be still considered and done immediately.

*(15:00)

The second point is your Web site. That should have been a clear notifier, an easy notifier to the industry under your What's New? section of your Web site. What's new? Well, heck, there's a new legislation that is going to have a detrimental effect on you as an employer and your employees. I think there's an obvious fit that you could have fixed by putting that in there. Instead, anybody that goes to the Web site has to work through an obscure list of links, and the links then lead to the legislation only. Make it workable, make it accessible and easy to use for the individuals that are out there, that are trying to do the best that they can in the industry. My understanding is when the department was contacted to give the suggestion of making it easier to find on the Web site, they were told that they are still working on the Web site—well, again, three months too late.

I'm just really concerned and disappointed in this government. You're looking at ways to attract and retain employees. You're looking at ways to keep small business going and appreciated in this province, and you pull off a stunt like this. To me it doesn't make any sense. There are ways that you can rectify this, could have in early April when you knew

that this was an issue. Instead, you scurry under a rock and ignore what is a very serious issue for the small-business owner, very serious for the employees who are going to be working through a process of getting back pay which they are entitled to. I believe every employer has no issue in paying because they know it's deserved. It's legislated, so they know it's the law.

So I've given you a very serious issue, an individual who's very concerned, a business owner, and I believe I've given you some immediate solutions that could help rectify the situation.

I thank Madam Chairperson for giving me the opportunity to put this on the record, and I look forward to some really positive and meaningful outcomes out of what appears to be a real mess.

Mr. Swan: I'm not going to rise to a lot of the political comments that the member's making. I think the Member for Carman (Mr. Pedersen) and I had a very productive dialogue on this issue, and I think the Member for Carman is aware that I agree with him that there is a problem which has existed, as the very experienced people in the department have told me has been in existence for at least 20 years. So the Member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat) is quite right. There is a problem which has been identified and as the minister and as the government, we are going to take steps to fix it.

The idea which has been put forward which probably has the strongest approach is to have a coming-into-force period on any regulation that comes from PTAC and from the apprenticeship board to the minister. We will still be playing a bit of a game of gotcha, quite frankly, even if we have immediate notification because employers and employees won't know until notification is given that the regulation is in force.

I take the member's comments and again, I'm going to filter out some misleading comments the member has made because there is a true issue here, Madam Chairperson. The suggestion is there should be a coming-into-force date so that the apprentices and the employers are aware that there is a regulation being put forward and assuming that it's signed by the minister, there is then a fixed date that everybody can rely upon.

I thank you for raising your concerns. I can assure the Member for Minnedosa, as I assured the Member for Carman yesterday, that there will be steps taken to deal with the problem which has

existed for at least two decades and probably longer in Manitoba.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister give me a time line? I'm thinking that the industry deserves at least a time line.

Mr. Swan: The Apprenticeship branch is very responsive to what needs to be done, so I do not expect it will be a very long wait for us to improve the system in Manitoba.

Mrs. Rowat: I have seen the responsiveness several months down the road of misleading and not providing the information to the industry. Can the minister give me a date, a month, that this information will be shared with—that there will be official notification provided to the industry and to the apprentices that are out there wanting some direction from this government on this issue?

Mr. Swan: I understand that the board, the Apprenticeship and Trades Qualification Board is actively interested in dealing with this. They are going to be dealing with it, I understand, later on this month. Whether they have a formal policy or whether they ask the branch for some more information or want further consultation is up to the board, as the board has the expertise to deal with this.

Mrs. Rowat: So, just to be clear, the industry is expected to pay two, three months' back pay without really having the confidence of this government in the policy that they've put forward or the legislation that they've put forward. So you're quite comfortable with how this has unfolded to the point where you're going to—it's business as usual in a sense. It's cut the cheque, pay the back pay, deal with your job, quote losses and, oops, we'll just get something to you before summer.

Mr. Swan: I will explain to the Member for Minnedosa. I explained to the Member for Carman. I think he understands it, but I will take the time now to explain to the Member for Minnedosa a little bit about how the apprenticeship system works.

The regulation which was put forward to me as minister was put forward by the Provincial Trade Advisory Committee, or PTAC. The PTAC is comprised of representatives of employers and employees. That PTAC, as I understand it, had concerns about both the wage rate in Manitoba—or wage rates in Manitoba for apprentices as well as the fact that Manitoba was still the only jurisdiction in Canada that still had a five level, so a minimum of

five-year program in order for someone to become a journey person plumber. That PTAC, which, again, has representatives of both employees and employers, decided that it was appropriate to make some changes. Again, there was the five-level issue. The other fact was that Manitoba's minimum wage rates for apprentices was the lowest in Canada.

As I understand it, the PTAC had concerns about the ability to recruit new apprentices into the trade. The PTAC also had concerns about the ability to retain apprentices in the trade and evidently decided it was appropriate to change the program from a five-level program to a four-level program, and to increase those minimum wage rates. That regulation was passed by the PTAC, approved by the board, and had to then go to Legislative Counsel who then draft the regulation in the required form for Manitoba regulations. As I understand it, that takes some time. As minister, I then signed the regulation on January 8, 2009.

After signing that regulation, concerns were expressed to me that there were difficulties with this regulation. There were concerns that there had not been appropriate consultation with all the stakeholders. So, as minister, I made the decision, based on some very good advice, to refer the matter to the board so the board with its expertise could take another look at the situation and determine what was appropriate. The board did that. They had the meeting that I have described to you with various individuals that I've named for you. After having that meeting, the board then convened a special meeting and determined that, in their view, it would not make sense to go back and change the regulation which had been brought into effect on January 8, 2009.

That does mean that there could be some issues of pay. I understand from branch members, I understand from some of the individuals who were present at that meeting, that the great majority of apprentices in Manitoba are already being paid more than those new minimum wage rates by their employers, which is really a function of what we all accept as a shortage of skilled workers, skilled labourers in Manitoba. So there may be an issue with some companies. The understanding I have, from those with some expertise in the area, is that it's going to be a very small subset of the total number of apprentices who may be affected by this regulation. But, again, I agree with the Member for Minnedosa. There has been a systemic problem, if we can call it that, and I'm very pleased we're taking action to resolve the issue.

* (15:10)

I understand from the Apprenticeship branch that there is no other regulation that's about to be sent to me. There is another trade which is moving down the road to having a new regulation drafted that is still some time away. I expect we'll take every action necessary to make sure by the time there is a new regulation passed we will have a new and a better regime for advising the apprentices, for advising employers and for advising both employer organizations and labour organizations.

I don't know what else I can tell the member on that point.

Mr. Pedersen: I thank my colleague from Minnedosa for bringing to light, just again on the ground, issues that this issue has brought up.

I really do disagree with one point that the minister has been making and that's about it being a systemic problem. My understanding from the contractors and the unions that I've talked to, this has not been a systemic problem in the past. There are always issues about when you change regulation and always issues created, but the notice change in here is not a systemic problem. That one arose out of here and basically, Mr. Minister, whether you want to agree with it or not, your department screwed up badly on this one, and it cost industry a lot of money on this.

Now, we're changing the five-year to four-year level in plumbers in Manitoba. Can the minister tell me what the 9,000 to 7,200 hours in Manitoba for training, what the levels are in Alberta for an equivalent plumber, for apprenticeships, the number of years and the number of hours involved? I'm using Alberta as an example given the manpower that goes back and forth between Alberta and Manitoba is quite substantial.

Mr. Swan: Just to set the member straight on his editorial comment from before. The understanding I have is that indeed the system, which, I agree, has some shortcomings, has been the practice in Manitoba for at least the past 20 years.

We can all agree that it's something that needs to be improved and we will be doing that. So I can assure the member of that fact.

I understand that the Alberta apprenticeship system is a three-level system which features 5,400 hours of work as an apprentice before receiving journey person status.

Mr. Pedersen: So, under AIT, is a journeyman plumber then a first-year journeyman plumber in Alberta, recent graduate, equivalent to a first-year graduate plumber under the new, under the four-year plan in Manitoba? Will they be recognized at the same skill level, the same pay level?

Mr. Swan: Now, just to take a step back. The labour mobility provisions only affect workers who have certification or who have a licence. An apprentice doesn't have their licence or certification until they become a journeyman, but it's a good question the member asks.

If somebody comes to Manitoba from another province that has, for example, 1,800 hours of experience, it would be the branch's usual policy to give that person credit, if you will, for the hours that they've worked at the trade in another jurisdiction.

Mrs. Rowat: Just in relation to what the Member for Carman (Mr. Pedersen) is asking, what you're saying is that the trade will be recognized across—is it going to be nationally recognized? So, if somebody with a journeyman seal here will be able to work across the country, there's not going to be any issue with the ability for them to be a journeyman worker in any province?

Mr. Swan: That's correct. When someone achieves their journeyman status, for most trades in Canada and most jurisdictions, in many cases, they will write a national exam to receive the interprovincial Red Seal designation, and that Red Seal designation is accepted across the country now under the labour mobility provisions.

Mr. Pedersen: I asked the question yesterday and we didn't have the expertise on the floor, so I can ask it now. Does Québec have a Red Seal program?

Mr. Swan: I understand, from Mr. Sinclair, who I understand had a wardrobe malfunction before he could come in the Chamber yesterday, that Québec, as usual, does things a little bit differently. In Québec, they have an apprenticeship system very similar to ours. An individual can complete that apprenticeship and, if they meet all the requirements, can be certified in Québec as a journeyman without writing a Red Seal exam and being qualified as a Red Seal journeyman. Québec workers have the opportunity to do that, but you can have some Québec journeymen who are Red Seal and some Québec journeymen who aren't.

Mr. Pedersen: Well, that could go for any province. You could have workers who have Red Seal and who

don't. We were talking, yesterday, about the lab technologists, Canadian certification, which is sort of the Red Seal of the lab technologists, if I may use that analogy; now we're talking plumbers who don't have Red Seal certification in Québec. They're a journeyman plumber in Québec; they have not written the Red Seal, which is, I understand, the Canadian certification. Is that plumber eligible to come into Manitoba and work as a journeyman plumber without writing the Red Seal program?

Mr. Swan: Yes. The way that it's been and, actually, the way it still is, gets back to the new way of, for many professions and occupations, that someone proves their credentials under this new system. What would happen, if somebody comes from Québec? They're certified as a journeyman plumber in Québec; they've chosen not to write the Red Seal exam, so they're not certified as Red Seal. The Apprenticeship branch in Manitoba would then do the analysis that we're now making everybody else do under the labour mobility agreement, to determine whether that worker has the appropriate skill sets to carry on the trade of plumber in Manitoba. We can't erect the barrier any higher than what Manitoba workers or Manitoba certified workers have to have, but if there are gaps in that training, the Apprenticeship branch could require that worker to go back and get more training.

Obviously, the highest and best standard is Red Seal. If a worker shows up with the Red Seal certification from another jurisdiction, it's very quick and, in fact, has been even before the labour mobility chapter came into effect. The trades have always had better mobility than a host of other professions and a host of other regulator occupations in this country.

* (15:20)

Mr. Pedersen: I'm trying to tie this in. Is your department, through possibly the Northern Manitoba Sector Council or under your training part of your department, are you involved in training workers for the Wuskwatim dam project?

Mr. Swan: The Hydro Northern Training Initiative indeed is an initiative intended to assist Aboriginal workers, particularly those in the north, to be trained to work on Hydro projects, but in truth, beyond that, for other projects in the north and elsewhere. The legal entity which is actually responsible for disbursing the funding to the various partners is the Wuskwatim and Keeyask Training Consortium Inc.

The funders of the consortium are the Manitoba government, Manitoba Hydro, as well as the federal government, which is a partner. The consortium, along with the Manitoba government and Manitoba Hydro, participate in an integrated monitoring strategy with each Aboriginal partner who comes on board for this process. I should add, it's the first large-scale Aboriginal human resource strategy in northern Manitoba to be planned, designed, and implemented by our various Aboriginal partners, so it's a bit of a groundbreaking initiative.

Mr. Pedersen: Is this program only for Aboriginal workers, or is it for anyone?

Mr. Swan: This particular program is only for Aboriginal entrants into the job market.

Mr. Pedersen: I know the Aboriginal population makes up a large part of northern Manitoba, but there are people from all over Manitoba that could work in Wuskwatim. Is your department involved or have any training for anyone else then, under any other program for Wuskwatim under this agreement?

Mr. Swan: Of course, as we know from the last several hours of Estimates, the provincial government is responsible for the apprenticeship program so many people, whatever their background, who are apprentices or have completed their apprenticeship and are journeypersons, find work on Hydro. As well, graduates from our college system, whether it's Red River College or Assiniboine College or University College of the North, which, of course, is funded in large part by the provincial government, also find their way to working on Hydro projects. There are various other training programs that are delivered to a wider range of Manitobans, but the Hydro Northern Training Initiative is directed at Aboriginal people.

Mr. Pedersen: So this consortium, if I may call it that, a consortium, Manitoba Hydro, Manitoba government, and the federal government, is it a limited company then that will be doing the hiring of the workers working on Wuskwatim and I'm assuming Gull Keeyask too? Is it Hydro alone? What I'm looking for is who's writing the cheques for the employees no matter whether they're Aboriginal or provincial or wherever they're from.

Mr. Swan: Just to clarify for the record, the Hydro Northern Training Initiative, through the consortium, offers pre-employment training. Once somebody enters an apprenticeship program, or once somebody begins working as a labourer on, let's say, the

Wuskwatim project, Hydro pays their wages as in any other situation, or a contractor if it's a contract.

Before that time, though, individuals who are receiving training under the consortium, the control of the money and the direction is made by the Wuskwatim and Keeyask Training Consortium. They decide in which communities training's going to be delivered, the nature of the training and those choices are made, again, with involvement of Manitoba Hydro and Manitoba.

Mr. Pedersen: So will the Northern Manitoba Sector Council be involved in this?

We talked about them yesterday, for workers that are between jobs, to find them other jobs, will the Northern Manitoba Sector Council be involved with this? And, again, I use the term rather loosely, a consortium, Manitoba Hydro, Manitoba government. What role will Northern Manitoba Sector Council play in this?

Mr. Swan: Well, just to give it some historical context, the consortium was formed in July, 2004, so it's been in existence for just over five years. The Northern Manitoba Sector Council is newer; it's been around for a little bit more than a year. Of course, Hydro, which is one of the major beneficiaries, I suppose if we could call it that, of the work the consortium is doing, is a member of the Northern Manitoba Sector Council. From getting to know some of the individuals on the Northern Manitoba Sector Council, initiatives such as this, to increase and improve the pool of workers for the north is a positive thing.

I don't believe that the sector council has any active role in the delivery of this initiative. If I'm wrong, and if there's any information available I'll provide that, but I don't think there's an active link right now. It's more indirect links between the other council and the consortium.

Mr. Pedersen: Is the minister aware of Hydro embedding a wage rate right now for Wuskwatim?

Mr. Swan: I'm not sure of the term that the member's using. Can he give me some more context?

Mr. Pedersen: Well, in past Hydro projects there have been things like northern allowance or site-specific wages, if I can call them bonuses, to the regular wage. My information right now is that, as an example, carpenters, a journeyman carpenter, has been offered a \$4.30 raise rate—additional \$4.30 over the minimum under the regulation. Right now we

have Manitoba, under regulation, journeyman carpenter's paid that. Hydro, from my information, has gone out and offered carpenters a \$4.30 top up over the minimum under regulation. Can the minister confirm this?

Mr. Swan: I mean, sitting here, I don't confess to the knowledge of particular rates, but I think what the member's talking about is a project labour agreement. It's not unusual, not just in the north, not just in Manitoba, but for major construction projects, for there to be a project labour agreement in which the various contractors, and also the various tradespeople or, in some cases, unions representing those tradespeople, come together to negotiate some standard terms and conditions for the length of that project. That way there isn't—let's just say the project labour agreement is intended to make sure that the agreement proceeds in a timely basis without strikes or lockouts, without unnecessary difficulties among different contractors.

* (15:30)

I believe there is a project labour agreement in place for the various Hydro projects, certainly for the Burntwood project. So I believe that's what the member is talking about. That project labour agreement though would be negotiated among the contractors and either the employees or the labour organizations representing those employees.

Mr. Pedersen: Well, I guess what we're talking about is a master labour agreement similar to what was done with the floodway in terms of rates paid to workers, the non-strike portion of it.

I'm asking if the concern's been brought to you that Hydro has not consulted with organizations such as the construction or labour relations association, Merit, and even with the union is my understanding, although I stand to be corrected on that. Hydro did not go to these organizations that deal with labour and pay issues all the time before they went out and started offering a project labour agreement, master labour agreement.

Does the minister have any input into these project labour agreements based on the amount of training and your input from the training side at least?

Mr. Swan: You know, I don't have exhaustive knowledge of Hydro issues. Again, the member's right. It's like a master labour agreement that's in place.

My understanding is that the usual practice for labour agreements of this type is that there is wide involvement. The various organizations that the member is mentioning would have someone entitled to represent them at those negotiations.

I don't have more detail about that. It's an issue between Hydro and its contractors and its employees. Certainly if there's an apprenticeship situation, there's a registered employer and a registered apprentice, and there are some minimums in terms of working conditions, in terms of pay, but nothing stops an employer and employee, or a group of employers and a group of employees from agreeing upon higher wages or different terms and conditions than what it contained in the minimums.

No different than Employment Standards where, under a collective agreement, there can be arrangements far in excess of what's contained in the employment standards act. Just as any private employment contract, there can be terms and conditions that go far beyond the minimum standards that we set out.

Mr. Pedersen: This will be a rare moment, Madam Chair, where I agree with the minister that all organizations have the right to set their own pay rate for particular projects. What I'm asking of the minister and just take it as notice, you really do need to include organizations such as the mechanical contractors, the Construction Labour Relations Merit, all these organizations and Hydro need to sit down because this is a large project, a huge project for Manitoba, and they need to be involved in these negotiations, and in terms of labour and labour agreement so that we are able to get the workers in place and have them not disrupt—many of these organizations are quite concerned about the labour rates that Hydro is proposing as upsetting the entire province.

So you need to bring these organizations in so that they are involved in this. Ultimately, it is Hydro's decision as to what, and the contractors' decision as to what's done, but all I'm saying is get these people involved and you really need—as your department needs to get these organizations involved.

Mr. Swan: Well, I thank the member, first of all, for his approval of project labour agreements. I think we've demonstrated in this province that they do result in large projects being done in a timely and effective fashion, and, indeed, project labour

agreements are common elsewhere in the country as well.

My understanding—it's frankly beyond the boundaries of this department—is that Hydro, when it has a project labour agreement, does actually cast the net very wide in terms of which groups are entitled to be represented. Whether or not those groups choose to avail themselves of being part of it is up to them.

If an individual contractor believes that the wage rates or the conditions are something they're not prepared to go with, then that company is going to make its free-market decision of whether or not they want to bid or be involved in a project of that size.

Again, I would remind the member that there is a shortage of skilled labourers in Manitoba. We've had successive, steady growth in this province. We acknowledge there are not enough skilled tradespeople in the province, that's why we're investing heavily in the apprenticeship system, in our training system to improve that pool of workers.

That's why I'm pleased our immigration system continues to bring in skilled people to the province. That's why I'm pleased that we're attracting skilled labourers from other provinces, and I believe the labour mobility agreement will only serve to assist us on that front.

So, I think we should all be moving in the same direction. The fact of the matter is that, to entice a worker who has the choice of various projects to work on in Manitoba, to get a worker to commit to spending a fair amount of time in what can be rough conditions working in the north sometimes requires a premium on their wages. Sometimes it requires a premium in terms of shipping them out of camp and back to their home communities every once in a while. There are certain aspects of getting big projects done, especially in northern Manitoba, that may warrant a pay scale or a benefit scale that varies from other projects in the province.

It's in the interests of Hydro and in the interests of contractors to keep their costs as low as possible, but it's also in the interests of Hydro and the contractors to make sure they actually have bodies on the job site when they're needed that are trained and are ready to actually do the work.

So I think everybody's interests can move in the same direction. If there are concerns that are raised, then within my responsibilities as the Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade, I will address

them. Some issues are within Manitoba Hydro's control. Some issues are within the Department of Labour's control. We do talk, and I'll keep my eye on the situation.

But you just have to realize that undertaking a major hydro project in the north is an undertaking that requires a lot of planning, it requires meeting some fairly complex labour needs over an extended period of time and, in some cases, it may take paying a premium, if you want to call it that, to make sure that work force is ready to go to work and get the job done.

Mr. Pedersen: I would like to clean up a few questions here. It would really be unfortunate if we didn't get to vote on the minister's salary today. So we've got to clean up some stuff here before I go.

When I was reading through yesterday's *Hansard*, just a quick question. The minister was talking about apprenticeships and so far we've, and I'm going to quote here: So far we've purchased an additional approximately 1,600 seats, so we're almost half-way there.

But, could you explain—when I see purchase additional seats, what do you mean by that?

Mr. Swan: Yes, there are two parallel processes, if I can call them that, but both equally important to getting more people through the apprenticeship system.

The first is finding, to matching, if you will, employees and employers. An apprenticeship situation is not created until an apprentice is taken on by an employer. That begins, if you will, the clock running and they can start to gather their hours towards achieving levels.

At the same time, although most of the training in apprenticeship is done on the job, every trade requires a period of classroom instruction. In some cases, it's four weeks; in some cases, it's eight weeks; in some cases, it may be somewhere in that range.

* (15:40)

It's necessary for us to make sure that we've got those training spaces available for every apprentice who enters into the program. It would be unfair to have somebody start apprenticing, they get to the end of their first level, and they don't have a space in a college or in a union training facility or in a different training facility. So, by purchasing seats, really what I'm talking about is ensuring there is a spot in a college or another location that can actually take that

person at the right time and give them the training they need to keep moving up and getting their next level.

As we discussed the other day, there have been some investments made for Red River College. There's a substantial investment being made in Brandon to improve and to expand their trades facility. That's all part of increasing the number of available seats.

Mr. Pedersen: I want to do a short discussion on minimum wage rates, and I know that this is the Department of Labour's field, but this affects competitiveness within our province and with other jurisdictions across Canada.

As of May 1, I believe it was, we went to \$8.75 on a minimum wage. We're going again to \$9 on November 1, I think it is—October, November 1, whatever it is. Prior to the changes that were brought in last year to minimum wage, did your department do any assessments of how this would affect small businesses? I'm particularly talking about the service industry—the restaurant, fast food business. Any studies done by your department of what effect this minimum wage would raise, would have on their businesses?

Mr. Swan: The process by which the minimum wage is changed in Manitoba is within the Department of Labour. There is a process which allows stakeholders to bring comments to the Minister of Labour (Ms. Allan), and I suppose you can ask about that as we get to Estimates.

What I do know, however, is that Manitoba has had and continues to have one of the lowest unemployment rates in the entire country. I also know that even with the recent increase in the minimum wage, we continue to have a lower minimum wage than our western neighbour of Saskatchewan, a lower minimum wage than our eastern neighbour, Ontario.

Mr. Pedersen: I'll take that as a no, that you didn't study this and, in particular, you didn't do any studies either in conjunction with the Department of Labour or on your own about the impact of raising minimum wage to its current rates versus raising the basic personal exemption?

Mr. Swan: As the minister responsible for the labour market in Manitoba, no, there were no studies done. However, I can tell you that with many, many employers out there telling me in my first year as minister that there is a shortage of not just skilled

workers, but a shortage of workers in the province, that I support initiatives which are going to get more people entering the labour market.

Raising the minimum wage is one way to do that as it becomes more attractive for people to take on work. It makes it more attractive for students who already have some of the lowest tuition rates in the entire country. It makes it that much easier for them to live out their dreams here in Manitoba. As well, raising the minimum wage by a reasonable amount as I've said, has kept Manitoba in a moderate minimum wage rate position while at the same time obviously not having a negative impact on employment in Manitoba as we continue to have one of the lowest unemployment rates, as well as one of the highest labour force participation rates in the country.

Mr. Pedersen: Well, through you to the minister then, again I'll just give you notice because I'm hearing about it every day, and the ones in particular are the restaurant and the hotel industry. If I can call it the local drive-in restaurants, I've had two just in my own area that have told me they're going to cut one staff member this year because of the increased cost of wages. This is a real concern to them. We're talking about young people. We all know that you cannot live on minimum wage—very difficult to live on minimum wage, but most of their employees are not out on their own. Most of their employees are high school students that are affected by this, and they're really hurting. It's a low-margin business to start with and they're really feeling the effects of this. It has affected their bottom line and they are cutting staff because of it.

Mr. Swan: I expect there are a number of groups who wouldn't normally find agreement with the Member for Carman saying that you can't live on minimum wage, which is certainly a factor in the steady and modest raises that have been made to minimum wage in Manitoba over the years.

Again, Manitoba has a moderate minimum wage rate. When you take into consideration everything else in Manitoba, it is a situation which we believe is going to attract, continue to attract, more people to enter the labour force with a modest cost, if you will, for various employers. Of course, I know well some of the restaurants in Carman. I never drive through Carman without stopping at Syl's to have a meal, and I expect I'll continue to do that this summer. I can promise the Member for Carman, if it costs me an extra dime or it costs me an extra quarter to eat at

Syl's or any other restaurant because they're paying their employees a slightly higher wage rate, then I am prepared to do that, and I think most other Manitobans are as well.

I looked with interest at the recent publication from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. I may not agree with them, but I read their materials. They had done a poll of businesses in Manitoba to see what they thought and, actually, a substantial number of business members thought that the minimum wage should actually be indexed to inflation. I'm wondering if that's something the Member for Carman would like to do. Perhaps we can deal with a whole bunch of minimum wage and social programs by automatically targeting some increases. I'm wondering if that's something the member wants the government to consider.

Mr. Pedersen: What I would like the minister to consider is to bring out a study showing the difference between a minimum wage at \$8 with a higher personal exemption versus your raises in minimum wage and keeping the personal exemption at the level it is right now. I realize that we're running late of time, and the minister always gets the last word, but when he's in Carman next time, go around the corner past Syl's and down to Buddy's restaurant, and I'll tell Connie Rose that you're coming. She will certainly give you an earful about minimum wage and what it's like for the employers. I'd just love to see her vent on you instead of me for a while. So thank you, and that's the last I have of questions.

Mr. Swan: If you're going to give me the last word, I will. I'll be happy to head down and I'm sure that we'll have a frank discussion. They will also be delighted to know that their small-business tax rate is at 1 percent, and I'm sure they'll be very happy to know that in the year 2010, the small-business tax rate on the first \$400,000 of taxable income of Buddy's will be zero percent—the first jurisdiction in Canada to get there. If the food is as good as Syl's, I know it will be a great visit.

Madam Chairperson: Is the committee ready to pass the resolution?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Madam Chairperson: Resolution 10.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$13,486,000 for Competitiveness, Training and Trade, Business Services, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 10.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$123,959,000 for Competitiveness, Training and Trade, Labour Market Skills, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 10.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,120,000 for Competitiveness, Training and Trade, Community and Economic Development, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

* (15:50)

Resolution 10.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,198,000 for Competitiveness, Training and Trade, International Relations and Trade, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 10.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,283,000 for Competitiveness, Training and Trade, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 10.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$789,000 for Competitiveness, Training and Trade, capital investment, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of the department is item 1.(a) Minister's Salary, contained in Resolution 10.1.

The minister's staff have left. The floor is open for questions.

Resolution 10.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$4,617,000 for Competitiveness, Training and Trade, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010.

Resolution agreed to.

This concludes the Estimates for this department. The next set of Estimates that will be

considered by this section of the committee are the Estimates of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines.

Shall we recess briefly to allow the minister and critic the opportunity to prepare for the commencement of the next set of Estimates?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Madam Chairperson: The committee is accordingly recessed.

The committee recessed at 3:53 p.m.

The committee resumed at 3:56 p.m.

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENERGY AND MINES

Madam Chairperson (Bonnie Korzeniowski): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will be considering the Estimates of the Department of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines. Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines): First I'd like to say thank you to all the staff. Once again, it's been a true pleasure to work with the staff on a very busy year. I'd like to take a few minutes to go through some of the accomplishments, but it's a real pleasure because we have a group of individuals who really work hard, are dedicated to the mission, really want to do an excellent job and really serve the public well, so I'd like to publicly thank all the staff.

Some of the things that we've done, we've been very ambitious in the department so I won't go over all of the programs that have been moved forward. I'll go through some.

One is the climate change initiative. I'm pleased that we were able to be the first jurisdiction in North America to legislate the Kyoto commitment to reduce greenhouse gas. Kyoto and beyond, our implementation policy, has 60 action items, and to meet those commitments and what I'm pleased to say is we continue to move forward on a lot of those elements like the coal reduction strategy, strategies to support public transportation, action with large file emitters, greening cars and trucks, extending the use of more fuel-efficient vehicles, capturing greenhouse gases, and moving on. All have been very, very

good, and I'd like to compliment the staff in that branch for moving a lot of these projects forward.

We are also moving forward on areas like biofuels, ethanol, biodiesel, et cetera, energy efficiency in geothermal, and I'm pleased with the progress we've moved forward on that, and we have a lot of other initiatives that are being moved forward and co-ordinated by my department throughout government. I'm pleased to see those are all moving forward quite well. With 67 different actions in the plan, I think it's been a very, very good progress in a very short period of time.

The implementation of the green initiatives also have stuff to do with the enhanced oil recovery project out in Virden. I'm pleased that Manitoba, in its normal quiet, efficient way, has got enhanced oil recovery project over in Virden, and it's reducing greenhouse gases but also increasing oil production, which is a win-win for both the environment, oil production and the province. It's been a very good project. The pilot project's moving forward, and I'm pleased with Tundra Gas and all the partners that have moved that forward.

Geothermal, once again I'm pleased to see this is again a very good win-win program. We have about 6,000 units of installed geothermal, which is about 25 percent of all the countries. We have a training course that's certified. We've got a very good manufacturing base with two manufacturers located here. We're moving forward with a Geothermal Energy Alliance group so that we're working with industry to expand it. It's really been very good, and I'm pleased that a number of my colleagues from the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), the Member for Wolseley (Mr. Altemeyer), the Member for Dauphin-Roblin (Mr. Struthers), myself and others, even the Member for Southdale (Ms. Selby) went and purchased this, which creates heat and cooling at a small percentage. I'm pleased that we've moved forward to that with the industry. It's created a lot of jobs.

* (16:00)

I'm also very, very pleased that we've moved from a ninth as far as energy efficiency to A-plus in energy efficiency. First in energy efficiency is nice. We've retained that standing through a third party, the Energy Efficiency Alliance, and through Power Smart and government's activities. We really are leaders in saving energy. I'm pleased that we're doing this because it saves bills for energy, it creates green

jobs for doing the renovations and insulations and it saves on greenhouse gas emissions, and, long term, on fuel consumption. So that's really good. It's a quadruple win.

Our energy efficiency approach to low income is really great. I look at BEEP and BUILD and basically that is also doing where some of the poorest people in the province are paying some of the highest energy bills. I'm very pleased with the staff and the commitment of people in all those programs to expand the low-income energy efficiency program areas in the province. It's really been a great project. I think it's been just highlighted, actually, in a conference that the Member for Wolseley (Mr. Altemeyer) attended in Ottawa, which was highlighting how we could create jobs, and environmental jobs, and create economic activity while saving the environment.

Other announcements on that were fuel quality standards were developed for production of biodiesel, and we've licensed the first biodiesel producer in the province, and we're working again with the federal government on moving that forward.

As far as other green initiatives, the e-waste roundup was held again in 2008, from May to September with 28 collection depots. They were open across the province and they collected 775,000 kilograms or 70 trailer loads of material. That means in two years we've collected about a million kilograms of e-waste.

I'd like to thank all the partners. I had a chance to meet some of the stores and some of the partners in this and I think it was a great initiative, and I'd like to compliment the staff and all partners on that.

Some of the science innovation and business development activities: we are funding three business incubators that have been able to support small, expanding and innovative companies in Manitoba. The eureka project at U of M was one that's done a very, very good job of spinning out ideas, and commercializing small companies and helping them grow; Biomedical Commercialization Canada was another partnership with the feds and it has done a very, very good job of getting medical technology to market; some of that are examples of projects in Manitoba that have been successful, our ISSYS and Intelligent Hospital Systems. And those are moving forward well, and we're actually getting quite a name for ourselves through our medical

devices and other innovations in the health-care industry.

Fortune Cat was also a neat incubator; it incubates new media games, and it's been very, very good. We've got three games that have been incubated and one is actually developing a game for NASA, which is life on Mars, and that's pretty good to have these. New media is huge, the gaming industry is huge and life sciences is huge, and so we want to make sure that these incubators continue to grow businesses as they have. They've been very successful and we want to continue to work with them and our other partners.

The Interactive Digital Media Tax Credit was introduced and it's moving well. The tax credit is available to the companies developing and producing interactive digital media projects in Manitoba. I actually attended some of the workshops and some of the activities there and I was very, very pleased with the excitement. I understand there're about 232 new media companies in Manitoba. That's a huge growth rate and it's creating huge economic activity and I appreciate that.

Direct research investments by the provincial government grew to over \$32 million. That's up from about \$19 million when we formed government, and this reflects the importance placed on creative new knowledge in Manitoba's research community. Research investments have now doubled since 1999-2000, when they were just around \$15 million, so we've gone a long way. We've doubled it and we continue to make investments in my department and others in research.

Manitoba's research community is also recognized by the private sector, as Amgen Corporation invested \$250,000 in research projects related to diabetes and oncology. That research investment was a direct result of STEM meeting with Amgen and creating the right environment for research to take place. That investment, that's another example of partnership in practice.

The first chair in water quality was established at the U of M through a \$1.2-million commitment. The initiative will fill a critical gap in the watershed science and builds upon our firm commitment to restore the health of Lake Winnipeg. Investments in the virtual realty technology services will help expand the availability of these technologies, Manitoba companies and researchers. I saw how life science researchers and companies were using the virtual realty centre to build their projects, and to

design things, and it was really nice to see that this equipment's being utilized.

In mining, a \$19-million program has been undertaken for the rehabilitation of orphaned and abandoned mine sites continuing our leadership in this. This includes 16 communities including Lynn Lake, Sherridon, Snow Lake and God's Lake. I'm very pleased that we're moving on the orphaned and abandoned mines strategy, cleaning up these mine sites and exploration sites that have been around for a long, long time. I'm pleased for a government that's committed to cleaning up these sites and moving forward in real time.

We also hosted a National Aboriginal Mining Conference to help support initiatives and improve relationships with First Nations. We continue to work with all our partners including the mining association, prospectors association, et cetera, and, again, we also hosted a wonderful convention with about 800 people, I believe, in attendance at the Convention Centre this year, and that was very, very good, and we actually had a very good relationship with a lot of our companies and we want to continue to facilitate that.

Service transformation and information technologies were also good. There were 37 new services brought on-line last fiscal year. This includes e-commerce activities for statutory publications in Canada map sales, creative element portal for all Manitobans, a smart search tool for access to government information by business, the Invest in Manitoba Web site, the Business Information Services, BizPaL has been expanded. Manitoba statutes are there, taxes are there, immigration portal, Workers Registration Protection Act registration, GIS map gallery for the use of the mining and petroleum companies and a green registry. I like the green registry because it's talking about how to track reductions and people can understand how their actions can actually reduce greenhouse gas.

We also have other groups that have continued to work in other aspects, but I figure that rather than continue to brag about a ministry that really has done great work, yeoman service, has done excellent work to the public in building a foundation on which we continue to build our economy. It's been a pleasure to work with this very energized staff who are working on energy, the science, the technology, mines, climate change, Green Manitoba. They're all great people who do a good job for Manitoba every day.

Madam Chairperson: We thank the minister for his comments.

Does the official opposition critic, the honourable Member for Turtle Mountain, have any comments, opening comments?

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I certainly thank the minister for his comments. I, too, certainly want to acknowledge the staff within your department who certainly, day in and day out, are doing the best they can within their respective departments. I should preface my statements now by saying that any questions that I ask the minister are certainly not to be construed as taking any offence to the good work that the people within the department are doing. Simply, it's my job and our job as opposition to question government spending and question policies and where the government's headed. So with all due respect to staff I appreciate what they're trying to accomplish in your department.

We certainly are at an interesting time here in Manitoba and across the globe. We have a lot of very interesting debate going on in terms of public policy and how it's going to affect the environment. Certainly we, as Manitobans, are a relatively small player in the big scheme of things, but I think we do have an important role that we can put forward to others across our nation and maybe to the south as well.

*(16:10)

Having said that, I think there are tremendous opportunities for us here in Manitoba, and, as the minister eluded to, certainly on the science and technology side of things, we have some great people working in the private sector that are trying to accomplish some very innovative things. Obviously, the role of the government should be to foster that development. Again, that's our role as opposition: to make sure that the government is doing what it should be doing to foster that kind of development.

It is good to hear the minister talk a little bit about the idea of embracing capitalism. I certainly think that the government or whatever government is, can't be taking on all initiatives on a stand-alone basis, and I think the government does have to work very co-operatively with the private enterprise to foster development. I think that's what it's all about.

We have tremendous natural resources here that can be used for the benefit of Manitobans. We have to make sure that the government doesn't get in the

road of that development and as I said, we as government have to make sure that we're working hand in hand with those individuals and those corporations that are trying to move forward on very significant innovations and projects across our province.

I certainly look forward to the discussion over the next couple of days. I know I mentioned it briefly to you last week, Mr. Minister, but my intent here is today to just have some general questions and then evolve into the mining side of it first. So my intent is to kind of work backwards. To start with the mining today and probably a good chunk of tomorrow, and talk about the energy side of things after that, and then wind up with science and technology side of things at a later date.

If the minister wants to allow his staff that wouldn't be needed today, certainly the opportunity to get back and do the good work for the people of Manitoba, I'm certainly more than happy to let them go.

Madam Chairperson: We thank the critic for those remarks.

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the minister's salary is traditionally the last item considered for department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall defer consideration of line item 1.(a) and proceed with consideration of the remaining items referenced in Resolution 1.

At this time we invite the minister's staff to join us in the Chamber, and once they are seated, we will ask the minister to introduce the staff in attendance.

Mr. Rondeau: My staff here that have joined us at the table are John Clarkson, who's the deputy minister of STEM, or Science, Technology, Energy and Mines; Leigh Anne Lumbard, who's the director of financial services in accountability for the department; John Fox, who's the assistant deputy minister for the mineral resources and petroleum department; and Jim Crone, who's the director of energy development and climate change programs.

Madam Chairperson: Does the committee wish to proceed through these Estimates in a chronological manner or have a global discussion?

Mr. Cullen: I think, hopefully, it would be in the best interest if we can discuss this in a global fashion, and I believe the minister would agree to that.

Madam Chairperson: It will be a global discussion. The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Cullen: I guess just first of all maybe just a few housekeeping items if the minister will allow. Some of the standard questions that we've been asking is a list of all political staff including the name, position and whether they're full time or part time? If the minister could supply that to us.

Mr. Rondeau: Right now in my office staff I have a special assistant, who's Chad Samain. My executive assistant is Esther Hiebert. My secretary to the minister is Marina Portz, and admin secretary is Pat Vouriot. The deputy minister's office has an administration assistant, Rachele Lamirande, and administrative secretary Shannon Wall.

To clarify, the two political staff are my special assistant and my executive assistant. The others are regular civil servants.

Mr. Cullen: I wonder if the minister could supply the names—and it doesn't have to be at this point in time, but supply us a record of staff that have been hired in over the past year, 2008-2009, and if he could indicate to us if they've been hired through a competition or through an appointment. Is the minister prepared to provide that list for us?

Mr. Rondeau: The staffing action so far this year—which I'll get you in detail—are 33 positions filled through competition, 1 has been appointment, and there are 14 reclassifications within the department. So staffing action: 33 positions filled through competition, 1 appointment and 14 reclassifications.

Mr. Cullen: Could the minister advise us what position was appointed and who was appointed?

Mr. Rondeau: The Information and Communication services, Manitoba branch. It was Ron Bowes, who is a security analyst and he was appointed for his specific skills.

Mr. Cullen: The minister referenced the 14 reclassifications. Could you elaborate a little more on those positions and what was involved in terms of the reclassification?

Mr. Rondeau: Most of the people were in the Information and Communications Technologies group: solutions architecture, application developers, LBIS—legislative business information systems—policy and program analysts with the climate and green strategies and industry consultants on the climate and green strategies. So mainly technical people in the ICT group are the vast, vast majority of

the people who were reclassified. There's also a GIS technician internet co-ordinator out of the Petroleum branch that was reclassified.

Mr. Cullen: Just to be clear, then, was it people moving from class to class or was it actually a change in the classification structure?

Mr. Rondeau: Basically, most of the reclassifications were done because of the centralization of the IT functions in one department. Instead of having all the different ICT functions in each department, they were centralized and there were some reclassifications to accommodate the new duties and assignments that people were given. So we have now taken—instead of having different architects and programmers and developers in every department, they've been generally moved together and now that they have different functions, they've been reclassified to complete those functions.

*(16:20)

Mr. Cullen: So the minister indicated there have been 34 new positions. That's about 10 percent of the minister's staff. Has that kind of been the current—is that turnover, about 10 percent, is that historically a level from where you've been the last few years, or is that any significant in change there?

Mr. Rondeau: I understand that a number of these vacancies were through the ICT Services Manitoba. What it's doing is filling some vacancies through competition and getting people there, and I understand being a younger, more dynamic sector, there is a lot of mobility in the sector, and people have a chance to move in and out of Government Services. So it is an area where people don't tend to start and finish 40 years later in the same career. People have a chance in other opportunities and sometimes they seize them, and both we get new competitions where people are filled, and other people find other opportunities and move in those areas.

Mr. Cullen: So would the minister know how many positions were changed last year, how many numbers of turnover you would have, even just a ballpark. I'm just trying to get a sense of, over the last couple of years, if that 10 percent figure is consistent.

Mr. Rondeau: Generally, we have a vacancy rate of about 5 percent, but during the ICT restructuring what we did is we created a number of positions centrally. These were filled through competition, and that's what generally those positions were for.

Mr. Cullen: The minister mentions the vacancy rate, and you said you're usually at 5 percent. Can the minister indicate where he's at today in terms of vacancy rate?

Mr. Rondeau: Madam Chair, 5.38 percent.

Mr. Cullen: I see the minister must have had some IT people working on the stats for that. It's good to hear.

So the numbers in the book here referenced are 367 full-time equivalents. Is that number correct minus the 5.83 percent vacancy rate?

Mr. Rondeau: Our total FTEs are 367.32, and I don't know exactly how you get a 0.32 at the end of it, but 367.32.

Mr. Cullen: I wonder if the minister could indicate if any of the positions have been relocated from rural or northern Manitoba or vice versa. Have any positions been moved from Winnipeg to rural or northern Manitoba or if any positions have been transferred from either rural or northern Manitoba into the city?

Mr. Rondeau: I understand that we have not had any movement from the city to rural or from rural to the city.

Mr. Cullen: Would the minister be able to indicate what number of staff the department has outside of the city of Winnipeg, again in rural or northern Manitoba?

Mr. Rondeau: We don't know exactly the number right now, on our fingertips. We can endeavour to get you that information. The only question would be is if you want the people who work—like, there are some inspectors that work in and out. There are people like the Aboriginal consultation person in the Mines branch that works a lot outside. Are you talking about where they're located as far as the placement of their office, or where they conduct all the majority of their work?

Mr. Cullen: Yes, if the minister would, I'm interested in the location of their office. If he could also maybe indicate how many people are travelling outside, say the bulk of their work is done outside of the city of Winnipeg. Just a ballpark amount, if he would.

Mr. Rondeau: We'll endeavour to get that and get it to you.

Mr. Cullen: The other thing of interest would be the details of how many and what type of contracts are

being awarded directly by the department, why it's happening and how many are going to tender. Not necessarily all contracts, but I'm thinking substantial contracts over \$100,000.

I guess the question would be: Does the department do a lot of contracting work, and is the minister prepared to explain to us what type of contract work his department is doing?

Mr. Rondeau: I understand that there are 73 untendered contracts over \$1,000. I can get you a list of the contracts over \$100,000. I can tell the honourable member that because of the information, communication, telecommunications, the phone contracts are part of that, the cellphone. There's a lot of—as far as the orphaned abandoned mine contracts, there are numbers of those going out.

So we have a lot of contracts, whether it's the ICT group or the Mines branch or other groups, we often work with groups that have very, very specific specialties and have expertise and then we do contracts through that. I can endeavour to get you a list of the untendered contracts, the contracts over \$100,000, and which ones are tendered and which ones weren't.

Mr. Cullen: I'm interested in your policy. I don't know if each department has a separate policy in terms of when they decide whether they're going to tender a contract or whether they're just going to hire someone off—on a certain basis.

Does the minister or his department have a policy guideline for contracts and when you make the decision to actually tender a contract? Is there a dollar figure that's involved, or are there specifications around other principles that might be involved in terms of when you decide when you're going to go to tender for a contract?

*(16:30)

Mr. Rondeau: Generally, we always follow the government processes and protocol as far as contracts. Generally, we tender for all contracts except where there's a sole supplier or special circumstances, and I'll give you an example of that. If you buy Adobe, you have to use Adobe to provide your support. There's certain cases in ICT where you have to have certain sole source support for their software, et cetera. That's where we'd go for special needs. There are special circumstances and sole suppliers for certain things. Those are the ones that we have to do. Generally, though, we tender for all contracts, and we try to work to give the best deal for

the public we can. We do follow the tenders, and we've done a good job as far—I think the department's done a very, very good job of working with the private sector in getting good bang for the buck as far as the tenders.

Mr. Cullen: If there is a written policy either within your department or within government, would the minister be able to share that written policy with me?

Mr. Rondeau: With the batch of material that you'll have at the end of this, we'll get you a copy of the tender policy.

Mr. Cullen: I'm sure that package will make for some interesting reading down the road.

We certainly know that the Premier (Mr. Doer) likes to travel to different places and, certainly he's been out spreading the message on the environment and greenhouse gases and what a good job Manitoba is and what a lead role they like to take.

I just wondered if the minister would be able to provide any travel by the Premier or any delegation led by the Premier that was paid for by your department, and if so, of course, the pertinent details of the travel, such as the location, the purpose, dates, costs and who attended.

Mr. Rondeau: We did not pay for any travel for the Premier at this fiscal year, nor did we pay for any delegations which he led.

Mr. Cullen: Is there a line in your budget in your Estimates booklet here for out-of-province travel? Is that a separate line in the budget or are those expenses just part of each department?

Mr. Rondeau: They're part of each operating line in each department.

Mr. Cullen: I guess what I could ask then is the ministerial travel. How many out-of-province trips has the minister taken this past year and would he provide details of those trips as to purpose, dates, and who might have accompanied the minister on those trips?

Mr. Rondeau: I'll read it right now with you. My out-of-province travel for 2008-2009, in April, I attended Banff, Alberta. It was the meeting with the Western Economic Diversification of Manitoba with me and the Western Economic Diversification of Canada minister. The total cost of the travel was \$700.41. I was also accompanied by my deputy, John Clarkson.

In June, I went to San Diego, California to attend BIO 2008. The cost of that trip was \$1,920. Again, I attended with John Clarkson, and it was a very good meeting. We attended with a lot of companies. We met with a lot of partners. I'm pleased to say that I met with Amgen and a number of other companies and partners there. I found that BIO was amazing because we have some very good company players, which I try to keep in contact with. They're all trying to expand, and BIO is a worldwide phenomenon. Companies are trying to find partners and economic opportunities everywhere, and that was very, very good.

I'll go back to the April meeting with the Western Economic Diversification. We were talking about partnerships. We were talking economics, and we were talking about how to grow our economy. That was a very good meeting. I met with the federal minister and many of my provincial counterparts, and we shared what we were doing and how we were going to move forward in the future.

In July, I went to Vancouver, B.C. I visited a number of mining companies on one-on-ones. What I generally do is—I believe it's important to have good relationships with mining companies, and so we visited a number of mining companies that were doing business or thinking about doing business or exploring in Manitoba. We spent a little bit of time, a few hours, with each mining company, and we discussed issues. We discussed their concerns, their long-term plans, how we could be of assistance. That trip cost \$1,759.41, and I was accompanied by a staffperson from the Mines branch who did a very good job.

In August, I went to Vancouver, B.C. This is the same sort of trip, which cost \$334.39, again to meet with the various mining and mineral companies. I believe I met with—there was no airfare because I did this as part of my vacation. So, while I was on vacation, some companies had called and asked for me to go to Vancouver from Victoria. I went there during my vacation—which was an interesting discussion with my spouse—and we met with a few companies there in Vancouver.

In September, I went to Saskatoon to attend the Energy and Mines Ministers' Conference. The cost was \$1,176.98. I was accompanied by a number of people because we had a good presentation on electric vehicles, what we were doing with energy and various issues. The contingent included Dan McInnis, who's the assistant deputy minister, Ken

Thomas, Ernie Armitt, Ric Syme, Gary Ostry and John Fox. It was very good. I find that it was a very, very good conference. We talked with numbers of companies and other of my compatriots, other ministers, federal and provincial.

In September, I went to Stratford, Ontario, to attend with the provincial and territorial ministers on science and technology. I was accompanied by Doug McCartney. That trip cost \$1,563.46. That one, we were talking about a science and technology strategy for provinces.

In November, I went to Halifax, Nova Scotia, to an energy efficiency conference. I was accompanied by Dan McInnis and Susanne Parent. The cost was \$626.06. We met with provincial ministers and started to talk about energy efficiency and make it an economic driving force.

In January, I attended the Roundup. It's a mineral roundup in Vancouver where all the mining companies get together and we met there. It cost \$797.11. I was accompanied by John Clarkson, Ric Syme, Scott Anderson and Chris Beaumont-Smith. The interesting part about that is that, again, we met with numbers of companies on a face-to-face basis; plus I met with a minister from B.C.; plus I met with the minister from the Yukon. So it was a very, very productive few days.

So the total of my expenditures for out-of-province travel in 2008-2009 was \$8,877.82, and most of it dealt with meeting with specific companies or federal-provincial meetings.

Mr. Cullen: I thank the minister for that. So you attended two separate conferences in Vancouver relative to the mining industry? That was your statement? Or was it just one?

* (16:40)

Mr. Rondeau: No, I attended one conference. It's not a conference; it's called the Roundup, which involves a whole bunch, maybe a thousand mining companies getting together, the industry, government and all this. It's a large collection of different companies and players in the mining operation, so I attended that, which was a conference and meetings with companies. Then I actually had individual meetings with specific companies on a face-to-face basis during the summer, as I regularly do.

Mr. Cullen: While we're on this topic, I just want to get the minister's point of view. I know I attended the PDAC in Ontario, and it was certainly quite an

enlightening couple of days for me to be involved in the mining industry. I just want to get a sense of the difference between what you'd see in Vancouver in terms of companies and the discussion there and what you'd see in Ontario. I think you've been to the Ontario meeting before, so I just want to kind of get your views on the differences and the pros and cons to those two different areas.

Mr. Rondeau: I go to both as many times as I can. I talk to companies, and in Vancouver I had spent an extra amount of time because I knew the economy was having difficulties. I spent a great deal of time face-to-face with companies during the summer. Then we had a very successful mining convention here with about 700 people—800 people participating. So we had about 800 people participate there, and the Roundup was very successful because what we did was we actually—there was a conference where a lot of the mid and smaller sized companies that are doing exploration and projects were in attendance. So a lot of the mining companies and exploration companies are Vancouver-based and they do business in Manitoba. That's why generally I go there twice a year.

This year I had gone twice a year. We had been in large amount of communications with the different companies to see what their issues were, because we knew that the mining industry was having some difficulties. So my staff has done an excellent job with communicating with the industry. We went out on a lot of outreach projects to talk to these companies and spend time with as many players as we could in the Manitoba industry. We've done trips within Manitoba to talk to those players and see those sites, and so we endeavoured to do a lot of outreach.

The Toronto PDAC, as it's known in the industry, I've gone for many, many years. Because we had done a whole pile of outreach throughout the proceeding four months and I had tried to contact almost every company that was doing business here—the department has done an excellent job in contacting them—I felt it was okay this year, because we had done so many trips in the past and we had worked very, very hard in building our relationships, that I could miss on this one. I generally don't, but I think that what we've done is we've built up great communications with the companies. In fact, they're at the stage where when they come through Manitoba they pick up the phone and say, come, let's go for coffee, let's meet. Usually, it's not coffee in the mining industry. But what we do is they talk to

us, and we have good communications such that, if there's an issue, they pick up the phone; if there's a concern, they pick up the phone, and so it's done very well. So that's why I chose not to go to PDAC this year.

Mr. Cullen: It might be an opportune time just to segue into the mining side of things at this point in time. I think the minister probably is aware of where the economy is these days, and, obviously, with the economy the way it is it certainly impacted the mining industry in a very negative way. There's just not the demand there for the materials that producers would like to be producing and selling. So, certainly, there are challenges there, and we've seen some layoffs here in Manitoba as a result of some of those challenges.

I guess probably the other big drawback on the industry side is the lack of available credit. Obviously, these companies rely on credit, and they rely on people wanting to bring some investment dollars to the table and take a bit of a risk and see if they can make some money in the mining industry. Quite frankly, that just isn't available these days.

Manitoba, as a bit of an example, we had the issue with the Crocus Fund and we've lost some of that—at least one pool of ability to finance some of these venues. Around the world there just isn't that pool of resources there. I guess we as a government have to make sure that we're in a position that, when the economy turns around, we can take full benefit of that turn around. When the markets do increase in terms of values, and when there is money available to invest, we want to be attracting that investment dollar.

I think over the next little while we're going to have to have that dialogue of how the department and the government are going move this industry forward. As it is now, we certainly have the potential to lose companies within the industry if we don't take a kind of proactive stance and try to move some of the—not just the financing issues but the policy issues forward. I'm certainly hoping we can have a good discussion on some of those finances and some of those policies.

Maybe the minister has a comment on the industry. I know it's a huge industry in Manitoba. Back in 2007, it was a \$2.4-billion industry if you include the petroleum side of things. Obviously, we know it's not the same this past year, but there's still, I believe, some opportunities for us when things do turn around.

I know the industry at that time was responsible for 12.5 percent of Manitoba's exports and employed 3,300 people. It's a significant industry for us in Manitoba. I want to get a sense of where—what issues the minister thinks are important to this particular issue.

Mr. Rondeau: I'd actually like to thank the member for that question, because I think it's an important question. I think it's important because we want to be facilitating the industry. We think it's very, very important to work with the industry and move it forward. Just to let you know, basically in 2008 the production value was \$2.5 billion. That was good. It was about 6 percent of our GDP and about 10 percent of our exports. It employed about 5,200 people directly and about 18,000 through spinoffs.

One of the very positive things was we had \$141.5-million worth of mineral exploration in 2008. It's an interesting industry because if you also take petroleum it's about \$3.1 billion. It's a considerable industry, and we want to continue to help support the industry how we can. Some of the policies that we've got are simple things like the Mineral Exploration Assistance Program. The Mineral Exploration Assistance Program, or MEAP, was renewed for three years beginning April 2008. The program offers \$2.5 million annually to encourage mineral exploration and prospecting. When we're talking to companies and we go visit companies, they rave about this program, because it's money up front that they can use to invest in their operations. They talk about it being very, very supportive.

The other program that's really good, that works very, very well is the Prospectors' Assistance Program. Again, it provides money for people who are doing on-the-ground work and that they support fully. In assistance to MEAP, the Mineral Exploration Tax Credit, which we renewed in July 2007, the tax credit provides incentives for Manitobans to invest in Manitoba-based exploration projects. The key is that, if you want to find deposits, you have to explore. If you're not exploring, you're just removing your resource. You need to make sure that you have the resource there.

* (16:50)

The other thing that I'm very pleased with is we've invested more in geoscience. I think Ric Syme and the Geological Survey do an amazing job as far

as the knowledge base. Again, if you're not doing geoscience, you're not finding your base information and you're not finding your next discovery, so that becomes really important. Funding totalling \$3 million over three years will be cost-shared by the federal government under its Geo-mapping for Energy and Minerals initiative. Geoscience funding will be used to remap prospective areas in Manitoba's far north where exploration activity is currently low and mining is the only viable industry. I'm pleased to see that we're doing this additional geoscience, and that's moving forward well. That's important for providing the base information.

I can continue. [*interjection*] Okay, the other thing—

Madam Chairperson: The honourable Member for St. Norbert.

Report

Ms. Marilyn Brick (Chairperson of the Section of the Committee of Supply meeting in Room 254): Madam Chairperson, in the section of the Committee of Supply meeting this afternoon in Room 254 considering the Estimates of the Department of Health and Healthy Living, the honourable Member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger) moved the following motion:

THAT line item 21.1.(a) be reduced by \$45,999, reducing the Minister of Health's salary to \$1.

Madam Chairperson, this motion was defeated on a voice vote. Subsequently, two members requested that a counted vote be taken on this matter.

Formal Vote

Madam Chairperson: A formal vote has been requested. Call in the members.

All sections in Chamber for formal vote.

In the section of the Committee of Supply meeting in Room 254 considering the Estimates of the Department of Health, a motion was moved by the honourable Member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger).

The motion reads

THAT line item 21.1.(a) be reduced by \$45,999, reducing the Minister of Health's salary to \$1.

The motion was defeated on a voice vote. Subsequently, two members requested that a formal vote on this matter be taken.

The question before the committee is the motion of the honourable Member for Charleswood.

A COUNT-OUT VOTE was taken, the result being as follows: Yeas 19, Nays 33.

Madam Chairperson: The motion is accordingly defeated.

* * *

Madam Chairperson: The hour being after 5 p.m., committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Speaker: The hour being 5 p.m., the House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow (Wednesday).

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 5, 2009

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