

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

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Eighth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
AGLUGUB, Cris	The Maples	N.D.P.
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.
BRICK, Marilyn	St. Norbert	N.D.P.
CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CULLEN, Cliff	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
CUMMINGS, Glen	Ste. Rose	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.
HAWRANIK, Gerald	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
HICKES, George, Hon.	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri	Fort Garry	N.D.P.
JENNISSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	N.D.P.
KORZENIOWSKI, Bonnie	St. James	N.D.P.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
LATHLIN, Oscar, Hon.	The Pas	N.D.P.
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	La Verendrye	N.D.P.
LOEWEN, John	Fort Whyte	P.C.
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	N.D.P.
MAGUIRE, Larry	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	N.D.P.
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McGIFFORD, Diane, Hon.	Lord Roberts	N.D.P.
MELNICK, Christine, Hon.	Riel	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	P.C.
MURRAY, Stuart	Kirkfield Park	P.C.
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	N.D.P.
OSWALD, Theresa, Hon.	Seine River	N.D.P.
PENNER, Jack	Emerson	P.C.
REID, Daryl	Transcona	N.D.P.
REIMER, Jack	Southdale	P.C.
ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Rupertsland	N.D.P.
ROCAN, Denis	Carman	P.C.
RONDEAU, Jim, Hon.	Assiniboia	N.D.P.
ROWAT, Leanne	Minnedosa	P.C.
SALE, Tim, Hon.	Fort Rouge	N.D.P.
SANTOS, Conrad	Wellington	N.D.P.
SCHELLENBERG, Harry	Rossmere	N.D.P.
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield	P.C.
SELINGER, Greg, Hon.	St. Boniface	N.D.P.
SMITH, Scott, Hon.	Brandon West	N.D.P.
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	P.C.
STRUTHERS, Stan, Hon.	Dauphin-Roblin	N.D.P.
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	N.D.P.
TAILLIEU, Mavis	Morris	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, March 21, 2005

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONS

Highway 200

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

Highway 200 is paved from Winnipeg to the Canada-U.S. border except for approximately a 10-kilometre section between highways 205 and 305 which remains unpaved. School buses, farm equipment, emergency vehicles and local traffic must travel on Highway 200 which is dangerous, if not completely impassable, during wet spring weather and other times of heavy rainfall.

Due to unsafe conditions, many drivers look to alternate routes around this section when possible and time permits. The condition of the gravel road can cause serious damage to all vehicles.

Insufficient traffic counts are not truly reflective of the traffic volumes because users tend to find another route to avoid this section. Traffic counts done after spring seeding, during wet weather or during school recess are not indicative of traffic flows.

Maintenance costs for unpaved highways are high and ongoing. It would be cost-effective to pave this section.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Lemieux) consider paving Highway 200 between highways 205 and 305 to ensure a smooth, safe and uninterrupted use of Highway 200.

Signed by Rick Lehmann, J. Dorvault, John Froese and others.

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

Provincial Road 355

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

The unsafe conditions of PR No. 355 from the western edge of Minto municipality to PR No. 270 (including the hill out of the Minnedosa valley), poses an undue risk to Manitobans who must travel on this roadway.

The steady stream of traffic on this stretch of PR No. 355, which includes automobiles such as "B" train semi-trailer tractors, mail delivery vehicles and school buses, make the roadway in its current state dangerously impassable.

Continued expansion of the regional economy in livestock development, grain storage and transportation and the proposed Mohawk Plant, puts additional strain on PR No. 355 and creates further safety concerns for motorists.

PR No. 355 experiences an increased risk in traffic flow during the spring season when there are weight restrictions on surrounding provincial trunk highways.

For several years, representatives of six municipal corporations, as well as an ad hoc citizens' group have been actively lobbying the provincial government to upgrade and reconstruct the stretch of PR No. 355 at issue.

Manitobans and visitors to the province deserve a better rural highway infrastructure.

We petition the Manitoba Legislative Assembly as follows:

To request the Minister of Transportation and Government Services (Mr. Lemieux) to consider upgrading PR No. 355 from the western edge of the R.M. of Minto to PR No. 270 (including the hill out of the Minnedosa valley).

To request the Premier of Manitoba (Mr. Doer) to consider supporting the said initiative to ensure the safety of our Manitobans and all Canadians who travel along Manitoba highways.

Signed by and including these and others Tom Northam, Val Collins Northam, Doug Northam.

* (13:35)

Westman Area Physician Shortage

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

These are the reasons for the petition:

The Westman region serving Brandon and the surrounding area has been, and will continue to be, periodically without the services of an on-call pediatrician.

As a result of the severe shortage of pediatricians to serve the Westman area, Brandon and area women with high-risk pregnancies as well as critically ill children are being forced, at even greater risk, to travel to Winnipeg for urgent medical attention.

The chiefs of the departments of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Family Practice and Anesthesia at the Brandon Regional Health Centre have publicly voiced their concern regarding the potentially disastrous consequences of the shortage.

Brandon physicians were shocked and angered by the lack of communication and foresight on the part of the government related to retention of a local pediatrician.

The Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) has stated that Brandon has to put its best foot forward and recruit its own doctors.

Doctors have warned that if the current situation is prolonged, it may result in further loss of services

or the departure of other specialists who find the situation unmanageable.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To strongly urge the Minister of Health to consider taking charge and ensuring that he will improve long-term planning efforts to develop a lasting solution to the chronic problem of pediatrician and other specialist shortages in Brandon.

To strongly urge the Minister of Health to treat this as the crisis that it is and consider consulting with front-line workers, particularly doctors, to find solutions.

To strongly urge the Minister of Health and the Premier of Manitoba to consider ending highway medicine now.

Signed by E. Johnson, Len Gillis, Dalphine Davidson and others.

Ambulance Service

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

In May 2004, 46-year-old Peter Krahn suffered a heart attack while exercising in East St. Paul and was pronounced dead just under an hour later after being transported to the Concordia Hospital in Winnipeg. Reports show that it took nearly 18 minutes for an ambulance to arrive for Mr. Krahn.

The Interlake Regional Health Authority claims that 21 minutes is an acceptable emergency response time, whereas the City of Winnipeg uses a benchmark of 4 minutes.

Ambulance coverage for East St. Paul is provided from Selkirk, which is almost 25 kilometres away.

The municipalities of East St. Paul and West St. Paul combined have over 12 000 residents.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the provincial government to consider providing East St. Paul with local ambulance service which would service both East and West St. Paul.

To request the provincial government to consider improving the way that ambulance service is supplied to all Manitobans by utilizing technologies such as GPS in conjunction with a Medical Transportation Co-ordination Centre (MTCC) which will ensure that patients receive the nearest ambulance in the least amount of time.

To request the provincial government to consider ensuring that appropriate funding is provided to maintain superior response times and sustainable services.

Signed by Valerie Jaworski, Wayne Jaworski, Marc Jaworski and many others.

* (13:40)

TABLING OF REPORTS

Mr. Speaker: I am pleased to table the Annual Report of the Office of the Children's Advocate for the period April 1, 2004, to February 25, 2005.

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table the Supplementary Information for Legislative Review, 2005-2006 Departmental Expenditure Estimates for Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I would like to table the Supplementary Information for Legislative Review, '05-06 for Justice, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table the Supplementary Information for Legislative Review for the Department of Labour and Immigration for the years 2005-2006.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I have a ministerial statement for the House.

On March 21, 1960, in South Africa, 69 citizens were killed by police during a peaceful demonstration against apartheid laws. As a result, the United Nations declared March 21 as International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. We cannot deny the existence of racism in our midst, nor can we deny our responsibility to confront it and challenge it at every opportunity.

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination gives us a chance to reaffirm that there is no room in Manitoba for colour barriers, religious ridicule or mocking of others' ethnic origins. This day reminds us of the importance of recognizing and sharing our cultures, languages, religions and heritage to better understand each other. As citizens of one of the most culturally diverse communities in the world, we are privileged to live in a country where we can freely express our views and beliefs. We are encouraged to preserve our cultural traditions and to share our heritage with the larger community.

Our government is committed to ensuring that Manitobans of all origins may freely pursue their goals and dreams and fully participate in our society. The Multiculturalism Secretariat provides services such as presentations and material to education institutions and community groups on racism, citizenship and multiculturalism. The Ethnocultural Community Support Fund supports approximately 94 ethnocultural organizations to preserve, enhance, develop, promote and share Manitoba's rich and diverse cultural heritages and to address the challenges of living together in harmony and equality for diverse groups of people.

In February 2005, the secretariat partnered with the Black History Month celebration committee to host a cross-cultural forum on multiculturalism. We remain committed to creating a province where all citizens are treated with respect, understanding and acceptance. We also remain committed to the establishment of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights here in Manitoba.

As a Manitoban, I am proud to join others around the world in officially acknowledging and addressing the issue of racism. I also encourage each of you to join me in promoting racial harmony and eliminating racial discrimination not just today, but everyday. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, I, too, would like to make a few remarks as we celebrate

March 21, as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. On this date, 45 years ago, in Sharpeville, South Africa, 69 people were peacefully protesting South Africa's apartheid past laws when they were killed by police. The carnage made worldwide headlines. In 1966, the United Nations proclaimed March 21 International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in an effort to call upon the international community to dedicate their efforts to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination.

Racial discrimination, wherever it is practised, constitutes a most severe impediment to social equality, diversity and understanding that is necessary for all people, regardless of race, to live and work together. This day is important for Manitoba as our province is in large part characterized by its rich, multicultural fabric that has been woven by a variety of ethnic and cultural groups that have chosen to call Manitoba home. While Manitobans have made great strides in fighting intolerance and empowering many individuals to fight racism, it is clear we all must do more. Unfortunately, racism is still present in our society.

Winnipeg has seen a dramatic rise in anti-Semitic incidents over this last year. A national survey to be released today indicates approximately four million Canadians, or one in six adults, has been the victim of racism. Whether directly or indirectly, the reality is that racism has a detrimental impact on each and every one of us. Therefore, we must all continue to work together to raise awareness to overcome cultural misunderstandings and to change racist attitudes that inhibit us from achieving an equal, accepting and open society.

* (13:45)

I would like to commend schools, communities, multicultural organizations and racial awareness groups across Manitoba for promoting public awareness of the negative consequences of racism and for their efforts in empowering individuals to promote diversity, equality and the eradication of racially intolerant attitudes. Let us all continue to strive towards making Manitoba, Canada and the world free from the burden of racial discrimination. Thank you very much.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, I would ask leave to comment on the ministerial statement.

Mr. Speaker: Does the honourable member have leave? *[Agreed]*

Mr. Lamoureux: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and members. The United Nations has made this a world day in recognition of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. This is actually going to be the first time for me personally in which I have sponsored an event in our local community to do what I can and play a role in trying to heighten the awareness of the issue.

I look at individuals and groups that are going to be participating in recognizing this day. I was really touched by a number of poems that were sent to me from some Grade 6 students from Meadows West School, Ms. Murdoch's class. I can just read, very briefly, the top three.

"Racism, I hurt from it, / I am sad from it / I see it everywhere / You may not know you're doing it / Don't try to / So help me stop it." by Caniesha.

"Why is there racism / There shouldn't be / Everyone should treat each other the same / Even though they're different cultures / They shouldn't talk about them or else it'll fire back and you will see how it'll feel / Don't make fun of their colour / It's not the outside that counts / It's the inside / So don't be someone who's racist." by Ryne.

"Racism is a horrible thing that goes on all around the world / Racism is the thing that can affect any little boy or girl / Racism is the thing that makes you feel horrible and hurt inside / Racism is the thing that no one can run away from or hide." by Meagan.

Mr. Speaker, we all want to recognize the damage that racism causes, and I commend the government and the Opposition House Leader (Mr. Derkach) in standing and paying tribute to what is a very important day throughout the world. Thank you.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 18—Le Collège de Saint-Boniface Incorporation Amendment Act

Hon. Diane McGifford (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), that Bill 18, Le Collège de Saint-Boniface Incorporation Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi

constituant en corporation le Collège de Saint-Boniface, be now read a first time.

Mr. Speaker: It has been moved by the honourable Minister of Advanced Education and Training, seconded by the honourable Minister of Finance, that Bill 18, Le Collège de Saint-Boniface Incorporation Amendment Act, be now read a first time.

Ms. McGifford: Mr. Speaker, this bill will amend Le Collège de Saint-Boniface Incorporation Act. These proposed legislative changes respond to the recommendations made by the Manitoba Auditor General in his 2003 report regarding Le Collège de Saint-Boniface, and they will clarify the college's role within the province's post-secondary education system. I do recommend this bill to all members of the Legislature. Thank you.

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

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us from the Horizon's Adult Learning Centre nine students under the direction of Mrs. Tara Debreuil. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Member for Point Douglas (Mr. Hickes).

I would also like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today Bruce Campbell, Laura Jean Campbell, Wendy Anderson, Jim Anderson and Mason Moir. These visitors are the guests of the honourable Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard).

Also in the public gallery we have with us today 25 Journalism students from the Red River College Princess Street Campus. These students are under the direction of their instructor Mr. Duncan McMonagle.

On behalf of all honourable members, I welcome you all here today.

* (13:50)

ORAL QUESTIONS

Comments Deputy Speaker

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Official Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I rise this afternoon in my

role as the Opposition House Leader, and I have a question for the Premier. Later today we will be debating Interim Supply. During that process, we have Committee of the Whole where the Deputy Speaker will be taking the Chair.

My question is to the Premier. Last week the member from Wellington was forced to apologize to members of this House for his inappropriate conduct in the House. After apologizing in this House, the member stepped outside the Chamber and in an interview with media he said he saw nothing wrong with members bringing knives into the Chamber. I want to ask the Premier if he stands by and supports the comments of the member from Wellington.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I think the member opposite pointed out that the member apologized last week when the incident was raised in this Chamber. The Speaker has taken the issue in dispute under his attention and has ruled that the matter has been dealt with. I feel the Speaker has ruled appropriately.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, this has nothing to do with the Speaker or it has nothing to do with other members of this Chamber. It has everything to do with the actions of the Premier.

Mr. Speaker, the Premier stood in his place on a motion of non-confidence on the Deputy Speaker and voted to support keeping the member from Wellington as Deputy Speaker in this Chamber. Given the member's comments outside the Chamber, I want to ask the Premier if he still has the confidence of the member from Wellington as the Deputy Speaker in this Chamber.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, I believe the member did state in the House that he would not be bringing a paring knife back into this Chamber. I think that obviously dealt with the issue in terms of the Chamber itself.

Mr. Speaker, the member did apologize to members. I recall there had been issues and disputes before with previous presiding officers. We were quite concerned in opposition when we felt every right that we enjoyed as an elected representative was stripped away with a unilateral vote ordered by the former Speaker, one Louise Dacquay, years ago. The vote took place in the Chamber. The rulings were made. We moved on to debate issues on behalf of our constituents.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Speaker, I might want to remind the Premier, maybe he has a bit of a lapse of memory, it was his party that stood at the back of this Chamber and refused to vote after the Speaker had ruled. We are not acting in that way. I want to know whether or not this Premier has any credible standards or ethics when it comes to actions in this Chamber, especially when members of his caucus are the perpetrators.

Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the Premier this. Schools in Manitoba practise a zero tolerance policy when it comes to brandishing knives or weapons of any kind. Can the Premier explain to this Chamber why it is that his standards in this Chamber and with his caucus have a lower standard than those within our schools in Manitoba?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, the member apologized for the paring knife. The issue was raised on a point of order by the member opposite and by the member from Inkster. It was dealt with by the Speaker. There was a vote in the Chamber. The member has promised not to bring the paring knife back into the Chamber.

Safe Schools Legislation Codes of Conduct

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, on the heels of a report last week, it indicated that Winnipeg has seen a number of anti-Semitic incidents triple this year. Today Ipsos-Reid released a survey of attitudes that stated one in six Canadians say they have been victims of racism, and 20 percent of residents in Saskatchewan and Manitoba are most likely to agree with this statement: "I have personally been the victim of racism."

Mr. Speaker, speaking with people in the community about issues of racism in our communities, they have expressed disappointment in the NDP government for not taking a leadership role to combat racism as they had done when they were in opposition.

Mr. Speaker, today is International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. I would ask this Premier to please explain to all Manitobans why he has failed to provide the leadership, the programs and initiative to combat racism, the programs that he promised.

* (13:55)

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Unlike the 1996 budget which cut money from the multicultural department that was dealing with anti-racism programs, we have enhanced the investments in that department.

Mr. Speaker, as Premier of this province, I was the first elected person in Canada to speak out against the fact that the federal government was providing tax relief for terrorist organizations that were out to eliminate the state of Israel in the Middle East. I was the first elected politician to speak out in that regard.

Mr. Speaker, we all have a role to play in terms of racism in our society. I think it is very, very important that every member, no matter what their political party, continues to work as vigilantly as possible. I recall, even the ruling of the Speaker again in the past, where the word "racism" could not even be used in this Chamber. We opposed that because there have been examples in the past where racism exists.

For example, at one point, members of Manitoba society could not be members of the Manitoba Club if they were Jewish. It was the NDP that raised that in the Chamber and actually forced the government to refuse to pay membership for the Manitoba Club when they refused to have Jewish members allowed to be members.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, we understand that all people have a role to play. On that basis, I certainly would like to echo the comments that were made by B'nai Brith that talked about the Winnipeg Police Service being commended for their implementation of the Hate Crimes unit. We applaud the Winnipeg police for doing that. We had also acknowledged Black History Month acknowledging the hard work of the Winnipeg police, but this question comes down to the Premier. It comes down to leadership from this Premier.

In November of 2002, Safe Schools Manitoba held a youth conference to discuss the central safety issues in schools. The top area of concern revolved around the lack of respect students have for each other, and the youth identified bullying and racism as some of the most troubling problems. These youth delegates also identified numerous strategies to address the many safety issues in their schools.

Mr. Speaker, here we are, now some two and a half years after that conference, and there is still no action from this Premier. Can the Premier explain to all Manitoba youth and all concerned parents and educators why his government has ignored the concerns and suggestions raised in that 2002 conference? Why is that, Mr. Premier?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to applaud teachers that are on the front lines of education across Manitoba. I know, as a parent with kids in the public school system, that teachers are involved and leading many very, very excellent discussions with parents and children on both the topics raised by the member opposite.

The member opposite raised a question, Mr. Speaker. I would point out, on behalf of the bullying programs and The Safe Schools Charter, that the Teachers' Society last week said they give credit to the Education Minister, Mr. Bjornson, the member from Gimli, for his leadership in his battle against bullying. The minister's Safe Schools Charter—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members when making reference to other members in the House, whether it is a quote, members by constituencies, ministers by their titles. Just a reminder to all members. Also, I would ask all members, when the Speaker is seeking decorum, that all members please co-operate.

Mr. Doer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If I may continue, that the minister's Safe Schools Charter has gone much further than the efforts of any previous government to address what has always been a persistent problem. He has done an outstanding job of bringing teachers, trustees and parents to work together on this issue.

Mr. Speaker, as he indicated to the House last week, I believe 23 out of 24 school divisions have responded to the new guidelines required under The Safe Schools Act. We expect all of those recommendations from parents, from teachers, from educators will be contained in the regulations that will be passed in June of this year. We again want to applaud parents and teachers working on the front line on both the issues raised by the member opposite.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, indeed there are a number of people to applaud on this issue. Unfortunately, this Premier is not one of them.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP has failed to provide the promised leadership that is required to support all those things necessary to combat racism. That is a problem that is growing in our province. They have failed to follow through on suggestions and advice solicited from Manitoba youth at a conference from November of 2002. They have failed.

The International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination was first established in 1966. Next year would be the 40th anniversary of this very, very important day.

Mr. Speaker, I ask this Premier this. It is about leadership. Will this Premier commit today to providing some leadership and will he commit to recognizing this very important anniversary next year with some meaningful programs? Would he at least commit that today?

* (14:00)

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, whether it is investing in the whole area of multiculturalism here in Manitoba, whether it is a very vigorous effort to increase the number of people in our communities, we have now got a situation where immigration is four times greater than it was when members opposite were in government. Whether it is increasing support where English is a second language, whether it was the new legislation that we passed last year that highlighted not only the bullying issue but also the requirement for educators, school divisions to work on the diversity of students that are in their schools, educators are working every day to teach and enlighten students on the diversity, the great diversities that take place at our schools, the great nature of our international community.

I would say to members opposite, on this day of dealing with human rights violations, we should all be committed to stomping out racism that exists in Manitoba. It exists in Canada, and all of us have a job to do, to lead in a non-partisan way for the elimination of racism.

Safe Schools Legislation Codes of Conduct

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I, too, would like to applaud teachers. I am just surprised that this government dumped the whole bullying

legislation into their lap and left it up to the educators to deal with this issue.

Mr. Speaker, an Education Department official said that codes of conduct to address bullying are to be in place now. The Minister of Education said that these codes do not have to be in place until this fall. I would like to ask the Minister of Education how he can be so out to lunch on his own legislation.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): Mr. Speaker, with respect to safe schools legislation, there are a number of initiatives that we have been undertaking in the last three years. First of all, speaking on the issue of curriculum, we have been addressing curricular content around safe schools. We have been addressing curricular content around appropriate behaviours and appropriate relationships in the health curriculum. We have been engaged in a number of cross-department initiatives such as the Roots of Empathy. Today, there was a wonderful announcement by the Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Oswald) on positive parenting, Triple P, which is going to help parents deal with—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Bjornson: It is quite appropriate, Mr. Speaker. I was about to say how the Triple P initiative will help with disruptive behaviour. The Triple P initiative is going to provide parents with the resources to help deal with children very early in the developmental stages. We have a number of initiatives that have also been brought forward through partnerships.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, last week the Minister of Education did not know enough about his own bullying legislation, and it looks like he has not had a tune-up on that issue over the weekend either. Last week he said that he did not require codes of conduct to be submitted to him. A year ago, he indicated to the media that codes of conduct did have to be submitted to him. I would like to ask the Minister of Education this. Which is it?

Mr. Bjornson: Mr. Speaker, 23 out of 24 school divisions have replied with their codes of conduct, and they will be in place by the time the regulations are introduced in the House as well.

As I said in this House before, we are doers in this government. It is rather insulting to the people who have been working very hard on the codes of conduct that the member opposite suggested last week that we have done nothing. There are a number of initiatives that have been brought forward. Teachers, superintendents, parents, trustees have all been engaged in this process. They have been engaged in the process around the codes of conduct legislation. They have been engaged in the process around the development of regulations. The department has provided supports to schools to develop the codes of conduct and will continue to do so as we work towards the development of the regulations. It was not until this government took office that things are being done to address the seriousness of the issues in the schools.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, it is this Minister of Education that has shown no leadership on this issue. He is the one that has done nothing. I do imagine it is the schools and the teachers that are picking up the brunt of this because he dropped it all on their lap, and he did nothing himself. So the criticism is directed right at him. He seemed more interested a year ago in grabbing headlines than he did in following through on his own legislation.

I am pleased to hear that he has done a little bit of work to find out how many schools are in compliance with developing these charters. I would like to ask this Minister of Education, seeing as he is responsible for ensuring that all of these codes of conduct are in place, what is he doing now today. As his department official has said, those codes of conduct should all be done now. What is he doing today to ensure that is happening now?

Mr. Bjornson: Perhaps the member opposite should have done some research of her own with respect to the position of her party.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Bjornson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the position of her party on this very important issue, last year in the House, during the debate on the passing of Bill 30, the Member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Loewen) went so far as to say that he was really looking forward to the minister actually

trying to justify why he is even wasting any of his department's time on this piece of legislation.

Members opposite—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Bjornson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Members opposite had the opportunity to take action and did nothing. Even worse—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Bjornson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Even worse, when we took time and action introducing the legislation, the member from Fort Whyte called it a waste of time. When we provided direction and supports to schools, the member called it a waste of time. When we chose to introduce The Safe Schools Charter, it was called a waste of time.

Crime Rate Reduction Strategy

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): I would like to thank the members opposite for that warm round of applause, but unfortunately this weekend was another weekend of violence in the city of Winnipeg.

Winnipeg police, this weekend, were pleading with parents to look under the beds of their children, to look into the closets of their children for guns because they have seen a dramatic rise of guns on the streets of the city of Winnipeg since this government has come into office. Perhaps the Minister of Justice wants to look into his own closet of hollow announcements and see if he can pull out something else, some kind of a strategy to get guns off the street.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): What an odd question coming from the member opposite who voted against our budget which provided 54 new officers, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Goertzen: That is an arrogant answer from the minister, and he should not be surprised because we will always vote against underfunding of our police officers. We will always vote for that.

The Winnipeg police spokesperson said that many of the guns that end up on the street come as a result of break and enters. The Premier (Mr. Doer) recently announced that he was going to prioritize and reduce the number of break and enters and home invasions in the province.

I am sorry, I see the Premier looks confused. That was not a recent announcement. That was on September 15, 1999, that he said he was going to prioritize that. Why has the minister waited for 2000 days to finally take action when his Premier made a promise on September 15, 1999? Why have they not lived up to their promise, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Mackintosh: The last time the federal government reported on the violence in Manitoba, it was my understanding that violent youth crime was down, I believe, 5 percent. Violent crime was down across the board, Mr. Speaker. I ask how a member opposite can ask such a question. When they were in office and Manitoba was suffering the highest violent crime rate ever recorded in this province and this country, they cut resources for policing. When we are faced with challenges of public safety, we stand up with the citizens of Manitoba. I wonder where they were when they voted against the budget. Why did they not stand up for 54 more officers?

* (14:10)

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, where have this government and this minister been for six years? He has been sitting in that chair gathering dust for six years, and now the Winnipeg police are telling parents to go to their children, look under their beds, look in their closets, maybe they should be looking in their lunch kits and going through their backpacks before they go to school.

Mr. Speaker, why do the police have to issue a plea to parents to pat down their children before they head off to school when this Minister of Justice has had six years to do something about the problem? Take some responsibility, sir.

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, is there an old saying that you make up for lack of substance by volume?

I wonder why, in addition to the failure of members opposite to adequately support our public school system, something that is now a thing of the

past but is a continuing commitment each and every day by members on this side, would they vote against a budget that not only provides 54 new officers for Manitoba, but builds on our commitment for hope and opportunities for youth, builds on our commitment for more Lighthouses for Manitobans. Some day members opposite will understand that dealing with crime, dealing with violence in society, dealing with racism is not a one-trick pony. There are many answers, and we are bound and determined to make sure that there is a new initiative in this province to cover that.

Pediatric Dental Surgeries Waiting List

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, 600 dental surgeries were promised to children in our province some four months ago, and how many surgeries have been performed to date? Two. The Minister of Health said the reason for this was because, and I quote, "It took some time to purchase the necessary equipment, train nurses and find anesthetists."

Mr. Speaker, should this not have been perhaps before the minister made the announcement, or was he, in fact, more concerned about grabbing a headline than he was about kids waiting for dental surgery in our province?

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, the reason that my predecessor moved dental surgeries to Thompson, that we moved surgeries into Beausejour and we will do 600 more surgeries this year at the Misericordia is because dental surgery for children is a very high priority, as is the prevention of the need for dental surgery. I would just remind members again that they voted against the equipment and spoke against the equipment to put those dental surgeries in Beausejour. They voted against the budget that put the money into Misericordia to do the dental surgeries. Which side are they on? Children or their own partisan attacks.

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, Mr. Speaker, the Premier (Mr. Doer) might have been right about one thing, and that is the NDP and the Tories are not the same. We do not play politics with children. They do.

Mr. Speaker, the minister admitted himself, and I quote, "It is slower than I would have liked. It is the same problem we are facing in all of our areas." Why did the Minister of Health provide false hope to

children by making an announcement that he knew he could not deliver on?

Mr. Sale: We are delivering on that commitment. There are dental surgeries this week in Misericordia. There will be dental surgeries in other weeks; 600 additional surgeries will be done there.

I would ask the member to ask her own leader why did he speak against putting dental surgery equipment into Beausejour. Why did the opposition vote against the very resources that will flow to Misericordia to do those dental surgeries? I simply do not understand the incredible inconsistency of complaining that it is not being done, and voting against the very resources that would allow it to be done.

Maples Surgical Centre Pediatric Dental Surgery

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, six months ago this Minister of Health was given the opportunity to partner with the Maples Surgical Centre to eliminate the wait list for pediatric dental surgery in our province. Yet, because this minister was so blinded by his ideology, the number of children has increased from 1200 on that wait list to some 1800 children waiting for dental surgery.

Mr. Speaker, given the fact that this plan, this Minister of Health's plan, has failed, will he now agree to set aside his ideology, do the right thing and partner with the Maples Surgical Centre to deplete this wait list? For the sake of the children, will he do the right thing?

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, the members opposite have only one answer in health care. Privatize, privatize, privatize. That is their only response. They do not seem to understand that we are spending more money. We have increased the resources to our health care system.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. We have guests in the gallery. We have the viewing public. They are here to try and hear the questions and the answers. I am a lot closer to you than they are. I cannot even hear them. I ask the co-operation of all honourable members, please.

Mr. Sale: Mr. Speaker, I only hear heckling from one side.

Mr. Speaker, the problem we have here is that the answer seems to be only one in kind. Privatize, privatize, privatize, for which the only understanding is Americanize, Americanize, Americanize at 50% more than Canada spends on its health care system.

When we moved cataract surgeries to the Pan Am Clinic, we saved \$300 per surgery by taking advantage of the productivity of the public sector properly managed, Mr. Speaker. That is our view; that is our values.

Financial Services Planning Minister's Interests

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): Mr. Speaker, when the Premier (Mr. Doer) shuffled his Cabinet in the fall, in October, he moved the Minister of Healthy Living to the position of Minister of Industry (Mr. Rondeau). In his press release, he indicated that the minister is a financial planner, in fact, a partner in a financial planning agency. Indeed, that seems to be the case because even when you go on a Web site for Partners in Planning financial services as late as March 14, which is last week, the member from Assiniboia, the minister is listed as a financial representative.

Mr. Speaker, the issue really is on that same Web site in which the member is advertising his services as a financial planner, he directs anyone who has any inquiries to a Web site which is, obviously, paid for by his constituency allowance. I would ask the member if he thinks it is appropriate to conduct business, in fact, to have a business that he operates on the side, to direct people to his constituency Web site which is paid for with taxpayers' money, in order to carry on business.

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce and to inform the House that when I assumed this position, as per instructions from the independent counsel, I put my business in trust. I do not have any involvement in the day-to-day operations. I do not have any involvement in the company. What I have done is I went to the independent advisory person, Mr. Bill Norrie, asked for advice and not only did that, I followed that advice. I even further put it in trust where I not only declare it, but I removed myself from all operations of that business entirely. In fact, I am not even an officer of that. A different officer runs the affairs,

manages it and a different person administers the entire trust.

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, I would ask the member to listen to the question, kindly.

This has nothing to do with conflict of interest. This has to do with the member, over the course of his time, both as a Minister of Healthy Living and as a Minister of Industry, using constituency funds, taxpayers' money, to set up a Web site advertising his constituency work. At the same time, he had a Web site when he was in business prior to his appointment. He was in business, it said, in the press release as a financial planner for three years. He was using a Web site advertising himself at Partners in Planning that was directing prospective clients to a Web site funded out of taxpayers' money.

I would ask him, and it has nothing to do, sir, with a conflict of interest, it has everything to do with using taxpayers' money to gain income through your own work on the side. I would ask the minister if he thinks it is appropriate that he use taxpayers' money to fund a Web site in which he directed people to come to him for the business of financial planning. Does he feel that is appropriate?

Mr. Rondeau: Mr. Speaker, I urge the member opposite to look at the facts. I am not involved in the operation of that business. I do not receive any funds from the operation of that business, nor—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

* (14:20)

Mr. Rondeau: I followed the rules set by Mr. Bill Norrie to ensure that not only did I comply with the law, I exceeded what was expected of me of the law.

There is a trust fund which I do not direct. I do not direct, with financial clients of mine, and I think it is very appropriate that I, as Minister of Industry, have no direct involvement of running that business, discussing with clients, et cetera. I took myself completely out of that operation when I became part of Cabinet.

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, once again this member is deflecting the issue by not answering the question.

This has nothing to do with a conflict of interest. This has to do with a misuse of taxpayers' money.

I would ask the Premier, who on March 15, 1999, in the Steinbach *Carillon*, and I quote, "The NDP do not need an ethics commission. I will be the ethics commission of the NDP in government." I would ask the Premier if he thinks it is appropriate, in fact, if he thinks it is ethical that members of his Cabinet use, does he think it is appropriate for these ministers of the Crown to use taxpayers' funds to assist them in conducting business which is supplementing their ministerial salaries.

Does he think it is okay? Does he think it is ethical for a minister to set up a Web site using taxpayers' money and then advertise the businesses he is in back when he was Minister of Healthy Living that sends people to that taxpayer-funded Web site? Does he feel that is ethical?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, the issue and the issues related to the member's business were all dealt with prior to the Cabinet shuffle. The commissioner dealing with MLAs' issues of conflict, it has been established with legislation that we passed, the individual did meet with the individual, Mr. Bill Norrie. He followed the advice of Mr. Bill Norrie. The member opposite obviously has, if he feels there is anything incorrect, he has recourse to take.

Environmental Stewardship Oil and Gas Emissions

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, the NDP's proposed amendments to oil and gas legislation appear to be a failure because they only apply to new wells and not to old wells, nor to oil batteries where crude oil is processed before shipment.

Residents of the Tilston area in southwestern Manitoba, including the Campbells, the Andersons and Mason Moir, who are with us in the gallery today, have been exposed to sour gas emissions of hydrogen sulphite from these oil batteries that have made some of them seriously ill. My question to the minister who is responsible for oil and gas emissions is this. When will this government introduce changes that really address these concerns instead of the inadequate draft legislation that we were presented with last week?

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines): Mr. Speaker, I

understand a couple of years ago, the previous minister in this portfolio introduced legislation dealing with batteries and up to this point, there has been much money spent on upgrading the batteries. I think it is very appropriate that this legislation we are putting in is going to deal with abandoned wells, deal with problems that are out there in the oil exploration, and with what is out there as far as the environmental issues. What we are trying to do is collect money to make sure that the abandoned wells are protected, so that our water supply is not damaged. We are trying to make sure that the environmental issues that happened in the past are corrected, now and in the future.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, it is scary when a person is standing in his own backyard and is suddenly exposed to a plume of hydrogen sulphite which knocks him out cold. That happened and for five years the NDP government has been using a scary and inadequate approach to the environment.

Mr. Speaker, we are all aware of situations where there are large environmental and health liabilities as a result of poor environmental stewardship. There needs to be a framework for compensating people for environmental and health injuries due to oil field emissions. I ask the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers) this. When will this government introduce compensation legislation so that citizens, industry and government know what they are responsible for, and so citizens can be compensated while industries are not faced with huge and unplanned liabilities?

Mr. Rondeau: Mr. Speaker, I assure the member opposite that my department, if there is ever an environmental issue, will go out and explore it to make sure that the companies are following the regulations and are legitimately doing their job. In fact, I would like to assure this House, that time again, if there is an issue, they go out and they deal with it. In fact, I understand that the batteries in the Tilston area are one of the most advanced, actually the most advanced in the province, and one of the most advanced in western Canada.

* (14:30)

Safe Schools Legislation Codes of Conduct

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, my question for the government is that we all need to be concerned in terms of what is happening in our

schools, whether it is bullying or racial incidents. What we see is everything from the extremes of our kids committing suicide, to missing school, to other sorts of school-related problems. When it comes to bullying and racial incidents, we are actually calling upon the government to take affirmative, strong action.

We are looking to the government to make it very clear publicly to lead on policy, to demonstrate leadership, and say that there is zero tolerance in Manitoba when it comes to bullying and racial incidences. The public has an expectation that when their children go to school, they are in a safe environment. Will the government commit to zero tolerance today?

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): Once again, Mr. Speaker, we have two positions from our members of the Liberal caucus, because the member from Inkster is abdicating zero tolerance, whereas his own leader said that clearly, our society, we look at this framework—and this is from Hansard on the debate on Bill 30—we need to look at not just the issues of punishment, but rather of issues of how we support better behaviour, how we support change. It is not just a question of punishing bullies.

Mr. Speaker, the approach that we are taking on The Safe Schools Charter is one that has involved extensive—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Bjornson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The steps that we are taking have engaged teachers who are at the front line of this issue. We have engaged principals, trustees, administrators, parents. They have all been at the table talking about this issue and we are acting on it. The members opposite had called it a waste of time. Protecting our children is not a waste of time.

Mr. Speaker: The time for Oral Questions has expired.

Speaker's Ruling

Mr. Speaker: Following the daily Prayer on December 6, 2004, the honourable Member for

Springfield (Mr. Schuler) rose on a matter of privilege regarding the holding of an embargoed press conference that morning by the government on Bill 10, The Pension Benefits Amendment Act. The honourable Member for Springfield contended that the media had received a full briefing on the bill, even though the bill had yet to be introduced into the House, and that he as the critic had been contacted by the media for comments on the bill but could not comment as he had not been present at the briefing, nor had he even been aware that the briefing had taken place.

He concluded his remarks by moving "THAT this be referred to the Speaker and that Mr. Speaker report back to the House on this matter."

The honourable Deputy Government House Leader (Mr. Ashton), the honourable Member for Steinbach (Mr. Goertzen), the honourable Official Opposition House Leader (Mr. Derkach) and the honourable Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) offered advice to the Chair on this matter. I took the matter under advisement in order to consult the procedural authorities.

There are two conditions that must be satisfied in order for the matter raised to be ruled in order as a prima facie case of privilege: first, was the issue raised at the earliest opportunity, and second, has sufficient evidence been provided to demonstrate that the privileges of the House have been breached in order to warrant putting the matter to the House.

Regarding the first condition, the honourable Member for Springfield asserted that he was raising the matter at the earliest opportunity, and I accept the word of the honourable member. Regarding the second condition, whether there is sufficient evidence that the privileges of the House have been breached, it is important to determine whether parliamentary privilege has been breached in the actions complained of. This issue is a complex one, and there is commentary from procedural authorities as well as Manitoba precedents that must be taken into consideration.

In terms of Manitoba precedents, on June 2, 1983, a matter of privilege was raised respecting the distribution of a news release regarding a bill at the same time that the bill was distributed. Speaker Walding ruled that there was no matter of privilege. He stated "the matter of which he (the Member)

complains of may be a matter of discourtesy, but it is not a matter of privilege."

On July 8, 1986, a matter of privilege was raised regarding a press conference held to announce amendments to a government bill prior to the bill being introduced for second reading.

Speaker Phillips ruled on July 11, 1986, that there was no matter of privilege. In her ruling she quoted from the 5th Edition of *Beauchesne*, Citation 19(3): "Statements made outside the House by a Member may not be used as the basis for a question of privilege."

She also quoted from a November 23, 1976, ruling from Speaker Jerome of the House of Commons: "It is clear that parliamentary privilege does not extend and never has extended to compelling a Minister or Prime Minister to make a statement in the House under any circumstances, regardless of the importance of the subject."

On June 26, 1991, a point of order was raised concerning the release of a report by the government of the day at a press conference prior to the report being tabled in the House. On July 4, 1991, Speaker Rocan ruled that there was no point of order nor were there grounds for raising the issue as a matter of privilege. In his ruling, he stated that, and I quote: "The rules and customary modes of proceeding apply only to activities occurring within the House. However, the action complained of occurred outside the House; therefore, it does not qualify as a point of order. Further, there is not, in my understanding, any custom that reports must be tabled in the House before being released to the media."

Speaker Rocan also cited *Beauchesne* Citations 352 and 31(10). Citation 352 states: "The option of a Minister to make a statement either in the House or outside it may be the subject of a comment, but it is not the subject of a question of privilege." Citation 31(10) reads: "The question has often been raised whether parliamentary privilege imposes on ministers an obligation to deliver ministerial statements and to make announcements and communications to the public through the House of Commons or to make these announcements or statements in the House rather than outside the chamber. The question has been asked whether Hon. Members are entitled, as part of their parliamentary privilege, to receive such information ahead of the general public. I can find no precedent to justify this suggestion."

Joseph Maingot, in the 2nd Edition of *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, advises on page 224 that "a complaint that a Minister of the Crown has made a statement outside the House rather than in the House or that the government provides information only to its supporters in the House may well amount to a grievance against the government, but in the absence of an order in the House forbidding such activity, there is no personal or corporate privilege that has been breached in the doing, and neither does it constitute contempt of the House in the 'privilege' sense."

* (14:40)

Maingot also goes on to advise on page 224 that parliamentary privilege is concerned with the special rights of members, not in their capacity as ministers or party leaders, whips or parliamentary secretaries, but strictly in their capacity as members in their parliamentary work. Therefore, a complaint of a prima facie case of privilege could not be extended to a member in his or her duties as a critic.

However, there have been some recent rulings from the Canadian House of Commons on the subject of press conferences and legislation that I would like to share with members, as the findings by Speaker Milliken do have the potential to have an impact on the situation in Manitoba. I hope members will bear with me as this is a very serious subject matter that is before the Speaker.

On March 19, 2001, Speaker Milliken found that there was a prima facie case of privilege where the federal government held a briefing for the media on Bill C-15, An Act to Amend the Criminal Code. In this instance, Speaker Milliken explained that he was making the decision based on the fact that information concerning legislation, although denied to members, was being given to the media without any effective measures to secure the rights of the House.

On October 29, 2001, Speaker Milliken ruled that there was no prima facie case of privilege in the situation of the then-Minister of Transport holding a press conference to announce a \$75-million bailout for Canada 3000 without advising the House or the opposition. In his ruling, Speaker Milliken stated that although the House of Commons Modernization Committee did release a report recommending that more ministerial statements and announcements be

made in the House of Commons, he questioned whether the report has changed the situation such that failure to make a statement in the House has become a question of breach of privilege of the House.

On December 5, 2001, a question of privilege had been raised in the House of Commons regarding the alleged disclosure of information to the media on Bill C-42, An Act to Amend Certain Acts of Canada, and to Enact Measures for Implementing the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention before it was introduced in the House. In this ruling, Speaker Milliken stated that although there were articles in the media which included speculations and assertions about the content of the bill, it was not evident to the Chair that any actual disclosure of Bill C-42 had taken place prior to its introduction in the House, therefore the Chair could find no basis for a question of privilege.

On May 13, 2003, Speaker Milliken delivered a ruling on a question of privilege raised in the House of Commons alleging that information on the marijuana bill was widely available to the media, and that the minister responsible had gone to Washington to talk to the U.S. Attorney General about the proposed bill, however the bill had yet to be introduced in the House. In his ruling, Speaker Milliken stated that unless there is some considerable evidence that the minister has made available copies of the bill to someone else, it is hard for the Chair to find any breach of the privileges of the House. He did go on to state that "of course the Honourable Member, I am sure, will monitor the situation closely and watch and see if copies are being bandied about in advance, which I admit might be a breach of the privileges if that sort of thing were going on. We do not have evidence of that at the moment, so there is not a question of privilege here."

Taking these rulings into account, and given that there was no demonstrated proof that the media received copies of the bill at the briefing, I would find that there is no prima facie case of privilege. However, I would strongly urge the government to reflect on the information that I have presented to the House in this ruling, and to not take the finding of no prima facie case of privilege as an endorsement that this type of activity is acceptable. Should a similar situation occur in the future, I, as Speaker, would look at all of the evidence presented most carefully. In addition, the subject of the holding of press

conferences of this type is one that could also be considered by the Standing Committee on the Rules of the House, given that the technology of communication has changed significantly over the past 20 years.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

Ms. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, I rise to put a few words on the public record about today being the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and to congratulate Arthur A. Leach School on being one of ten Canadian schools winning this year's Racism. Stop It! awards. Students travelled last weekend to Ottawa to receive their award. This is the school's second year in a row winning this award. This annual competition is open to all Canadian youth 12 to 18 years in age and is sponsored by the federal government.

March 21, is a dark part of our history. On this date in 1960, approximately 7000 anti-apartheid demonstrators were peacefully protesting the South African law that saw all black South Africans having to carry a passbook wherever they travelled. Police opened fire on the demonstrators injuring 180 people and killing 69.

This event was known as the Sharpeville Massacre. Subsequently, the UN declared March 21 as the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, in 1966.

For this year's Racism. Stop It! awards, students at Arthur A. Leach entered a script and 60-second video entitled, "The Bigot Award." With the help of teacher, Vincent Pearase, students developed the script and performed as actors. The video shows a young girl being bullied by another girl. The bully calls her colleague a terrorist and, as a result, wins the Bigot Award from a television announcer.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to continue fighting racism in our communities. I would also like to congratulate the students at Arthur A. Leach for winning this award. I would like to inform the House that the video prepared by these students will be made available to local television stations and music channels for public viewing. Thank you very much.

Supported Living Programs

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Over the last number of days and the days to come, I have been and I will be presenting petitions to this Legislature regarding supported living programs in our province. A number of people from across the province who have children with special needs, or just simply those who have a concern about this issue, have signed petitions and presented them to me and asked that I bring them to the attention of this Legislature and, in particular, the government, Mr. Speaker.

In point of fact, what is happening today in Manitoba is an issue of inequality. We see that those parents who are taking care of their children with special needs in their own homes are not receiving the same level of funding as other organizations or other institutions which are taking care of special needs children. That is posing a problem for a number of families with special needs children who simply do not have the resources, the wherewithal and the means to take care of their own children. They have made a conscious choice, Mr. Speaker, that the appropriate place to take care of these children in their situation is in their home. They are providing a loving and caring home, but some of them are concerned they are going to have to turn their children over to the government and to the state to raise because they are not receiving the equitable amount of money that other institutions and organizations are.

I think the government needs to listen to these concerns because it is more costly for them as an organization, as a government, to take care of these children with special needs than it is for the parents. Where the parents are able to take care of special needs children, they provide a strong and nurturing environment for the needs of those special needs children.

Mr. Speaker, we bring these petitions forward as an issue of equality, as an issue of fairness, and I hope the government will take them in that spirit, look at the situations seriously and address the issue. Thank you very much.

Elimination of Racism

Mr. Rob Altemeyer (Wolseley): It is with great pride today I rise to acknowledge the inspiring work of three extraordinary students from Balmoral high

school located in my constituency of Wolseley. Krupa Kotecha, Teresa Kennedy and Alex Campbell produced a one-minute commercial that has been selected as one of ten winners in the Racism. Stop It! national video competition.

Over 900 creative and insightful projects were received for the 2005 competition, and winning projects were selected based on originality, audio-visual quality and the effectiveness of delivering the Racism. Stop It! message. These students' entries used innovative technology to depict the experiences of a student new to Canada as she confronts the racial slurs she thought she had left behind.

Mr. Speaker, I am particularly pleased to be recognizing the work of Krupa, Teresa and Alex on this the International Day for the Elimination of Racism.

Forty-five years ago today in Sharpeville, South Africa, 69 black South Africans were massacred by the white police force and 180 additional people were wounded. This sad tragedy has given birth to the day that we now recognize around the world for the elimination of racism. I am delighted to see that, out of this tragic event, exciting and original activities are being used in our schools today to educate our youth about the ignorance of racism and its harmful effects on society.

* (14:50)

Canada is a country which prides itself on its tolerance and rich multicultural identity. Socially conscious students such as Krupa, Teresa and Alex are examples of this. Their work gives all of us reason to be optimistic that our country will continue to cherish these values for future generations.

To conclude, I would like to call on all members of the House to join me in congratulating Krupa, Teresa and Alex on their well-deserved award. I would also like to thank the teachers and school administrators throughout Manitoba who encourage their students to participate in this very important exercise.

Delmar Commodities

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): It is a privilege to rise today and congratulate Mr. Martin Harder, the general manager of Delmar Commodities, a Winkler-based grain company.

Recently, Delmar Commodities had the honour of being recognized by the *Manitoba Business Magazine* as the fifteenth fastest-growing company in Manitoba.

Mr. Martin Harder had been a Cargill employee for 25 years when, in 1995, he decided to develop his own grain market that provided a personal touch to his customers. Delmar Commodities began by trading grain from a small office on a load-by-load basis. Mr. Harder's hard work and dedication to customer service quickly led to the expansion of Delmar Commodities, which now includes four separate locations across Manitoba that can clean and transfer grain and which have a total grain storage capacity of more than 17 000 metric tonnes.

Over time, Delmar Commodities has also been able to build a reputable feed grain business that serves Manitoba's hog and poultry industry as well as the beef industry in Alberta. It also offers milling oats to a number of U.S. markets. Thanks to Mr. Harder's vision and entrepreneurial drive, these initiatives have permitted Delmar Commodities to increase its revenue by more than \$14 million, or 73 percent, since 2001. This company has generated innumerable economic spin-offs for Winkler, its surrounding communities and the province of Manitoba.

Moreover, the success of Delmar Commodities demonstrates that even in difficult times rural Manitoba is brimming with economic opportunity and hardworking, dedicated individuals.

On July 2, 2003, Delmar Commodities officially opened the soybean crushing plant now known as Jordan Mills. Because of the demand that they have for the production of soybean oil as well as soybean meal, the production has doubled since 2004.

Again, it is my privilege to congratulate Mr. Harder and all the staff at Delmar Commodities for their great success and devotion to the people and economy of rural Manitoba. I invite all members to join me in wishing them continued success in the future.

Incidentally, I just wanted to indicate that Mr. Harder told me that in spite of some of the labour laws and so on that this Province has introduced he was able to continue.

Coffee Parties

Mr. Harry Schellenberg (Rossmere): Mr. Speaker, with great pride I rise today to inform the House of the overwhelming success of the annual Rossmere coffee parties.

In all, five coffee parties were held in January and February, each of which was extremely well-attended. Everyone who came was treated to coffee and delicious baked goods as well as the heart-warming company of friends and neighbours. The seniors who attended have tremendous life experiences and have overcome many adversities. It was a privilege to listen to their fascinating stories and wise insights.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot stress enough how highly I value these parties. They give me a priceless opportunity to sit down with numerous seniors in my constituency and talk one-on-one about their various concerns and interests. Regardless of whether their concerns are the paving of new sidewalks or something larger, such as Pharmacare, their voice is heard.

Government officials need to stay connected to the interests of their communities. This is what is really important. Government begins at the grassroots level. This was the model of Tommy Douglas, the greatest Canadian, and I am proud to say it is the model of the NDP today.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank all the residents at Kiwanis House, Donwood South, Sarina Towers, Sunrise Apartments, Granite House and L and B Towers for such enjoyable afternoons. I cherish the time spent with them and I look forward to doing it again soon. I have been holding meetings at Sarina Towers for 11 years now. Each year the crowd keeps getting bigger. Thank you.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Would you please call Supply, Interim Supply in particular, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: The House will now resolve into Committee of Supply to consider the resolution respecting the Interim Supply bill.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

Interim Supply

* (15:00)

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Harry Schellenberg): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. We have before us, for our consideration, two resolutions respecting the Interim Supply bill. The first resolution reads as follows:

RESOLVED that a sum not exceeding \$2,747,125,010, being 35 percent of the total amount we voted as set forth in Part A of the Estimates, be granted to Her Majesty for the fiscal year ending the 31st day of March, 2006.

Does the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) have any comments? Thank you.

Does the official opposition Finance critic, the honourable Member for Lac du Bonnet, have any comments?

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): I would like at the outset to first say to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that during my budget debate on Thursday, I was quite pleased that you in fact tried to maintain some order. I know that members opposite did not like to hear what I had to say during my budget debate, but you did maintain some decorum within the House.

With respect to The Interim Appropriation Act, The Interim Appropriation Act that is proposed by the Minister of Finance authorizes up to 35 percent of the operating expenditures that have been budgeted and up to 35 percent out of capital expenditures that were budgeted by the Province. We are being asked to approve up to 35 percent of those operating and capital expenditures in about a two-and-a-half-month period, including April, May and up to June 10. We are only sitting up to June 10, and the Finance Minister and the Premier (Mr. Doer) know, in fact, that we are only going to be sitting till June 10, and that particular period of time is only about 20 percent of the time that is allotted during the budget year. Yet we are being asked to approve

up to 35 percent of the operating budget spending authority and up to 35 percent of the capital expenditures.

My question to the Minister of Finance is this: Why is he asking for 35 percent of the operating and capital expenditures to be approved prior to June 10? Surely we will complete the Estimates by that date or before that date; why is he asking for so much spending authority? Is it because he has misstated the budget numbers as he has done in the '04-05 budget? Has he misstated them again so badly that he needs 35 percent of the money for 20 percent of the time? That is my question to the Finance Minister.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Harry Schellenberg): Any other members?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): I thank the member for the question. The deadline of June 10 that the member has identified is ultimately under the control of the opposition. There is no absolute guarantee that that deadline will be the point at which we pass this legislation. We have put this number in here to ensure that we have enough money to keep the programs flowing until we have finalized all the votes, the formal votes, on the budget. That is why the numbers would have been there.

We could theoretically be here in July if the member wanted to do that. Concurrence is apparently a process that has no time limit on it except what the members opposite agree to. We have to put an amount of money in here that ensures that we can keep government rolling along until we finally come to a decision on the vote on the legislation for the final budget bill. Hopefully, that will be done by June 10 in which case the additional authority will be rescinded, and we will just follow the normal budget appropriations as we have voted on them.

Mr. Hawranik: I remind the minister that June 10, from what I understand by way of agreement, is when we are going to be sitting to, and that only still is only 20 percent of the time.

My next question is with respect to 35 percent of the capital expenditures that are being approved under this bill. Can the Minister of Finance tell me what projects would be included within that 35 percent, within the 20% budget time frame?

Mr. Selinger: Once again, the authority is put in place to deal with capital projects, some of which are

ongoing, the specific list of which I do not have in front of me here. As the member knows, sometimes capital projects can be lumpy. Sometimes they need the money up front for last year's projects or previous years' projects. Sometimes the money is not needed right away, the project has a slow ramp-up period, but, again, it was to simply ensure that there were sufficient resources to allow the business of government to carry on until the final vote occurred.

We do have an agreement, but until that agreement is finally enacted, there is no 100% certainty that that will be the date. With interim appropriation authority, we simply just wanted to ensure that we had the resources to ensure that no paycheques were missed or major capital program expenditures were unable to be supplied with the capital they needed in order to move them forward.

For example, we have resources in there for things like Rancher's Choice. We have resources in there for things like the floodway. I do not anticipate that there will be a huge call on them up to June 10, but if for some reason the session went longer, then we would want to ensure that we were not halting these programs.

Mr. Hawranik: My comment to the minister is the fact that, even if we did go beyond June 10, which is only 20 percent of the time period within the budgetary year, certainly, if that ever did happen, he could introduce another piece of legislation amending, or not necessarily amending, but adding another piece of legislation to ask for another interim appropriation. Would that not be correct?

Mr. Selinger: That is a possible scenario. We try to deal with this in an efficient manner by having one bill. Hopefully, the authorities in this bill will not be fully required if the agreement is lived up to that we have had prior to this in terms of timing for the session, in which case, the unused authority would lapse and it would go back into the budget bill that we passed. We are not trying to in any way get additional authority without accountability. We are just trying to ensure that if the session, for whatever reasons, does not come to the budget bill final vote by the dates that have been agreed on, that there is authority to ensure that the programs of the government continue.

Mr. Hawranik: Yes, during the budget debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I heard members opposite, some of

them, talk about the general purpose debt as though it is the entire debt of the province, that it is the only debt that the Province is responsible for. Would the Minister of Finance agree that simply quoting the general purpose debt is, in the words put to him by the Auditor General, misleading by omission because, in fact, those numbers can be manipulated by the government of the day, they depend entirely on the operating fund of the Province? As we have seen in the past, the Minister of Finance has included revenue in those financial statements that is not really revenue, such as the transfers from the rainy day fund. As well, he has not included some expenses that really are expenses to the province. As a result of that, any of those operating fund financial statements can be easily manipulated and can be easily balanced.

So members opposite in their budget debate and, in fact, even the Minister of Finance, when speaking about the debt of the province, continuously talks about the general purpose debt which, in fact, can be manipulated very easily by the Finance Minister and by this government. Would he agree that simply quoting the general purpose debt is misleading by omission and, in fact, those numbers can be easily manipulated to serve the government's purpose?

Mr. Selinger: The short answer is, no, I do not agree with the member's characterization of our behaviour. I simply point out to the member that the legislation we follow, the law of this province, was legislation crafted by the members opposite and passed by the members opposite. We are following their practices on reporting under balanced budget legislation, but in addition we, for the first time, have printed the full summary budget in the budget documents and report on it in the Public Accounts every year. So there is more information there now than there was ever under the previous government.

Mr. Hawranik: Mr. Deputy Speaker, there is no denying it, in terms of the total debt of the province, I mean it is right in the budget papers, Budget 2005, but the Finance Minister never quotes from those numbers because they are not to his advantage. We have a total obligation in this province of \$20 billion. There is a \$20-billion debt that is projected in the 2005-06 budget in terms of the total overall debt of the province. A simple increase of 1 percent in interest rates to the province would result in a \$200-million increase in interest costs. That is higher than

the Agriculture Department budget alone and almost as much as Justice.

My question to the Minister of Finance is this: What are his plans to minimize the effect of interest rate increases to the province?

Mr. Selinger: There are things we do to try to mitigate interest rate fluctuations. I was prepared to discuss this fully with the member when we go to Estimates, and we can bring our officials forward that have technical responses as well, but we do try to smooth out our interest rate fluctuations in the way that we refinance the debt. There are a number of technical instruments that are used for that, some of which are swaps, some of which are entirely eliminating our exposure to foreign currency, some of which are go-forward contracts which can eliminate future escalations of interest over a specific period of time. So we have a variety of instruments that we can use to minimize interest rate escalation in the budget. That is my answer to the member's question.

* (15:10)

Mr. Hawranik: I have a question of the minister with regard to the cost to service the debt, just the operating debt of \$6.5 billion, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The cost to service that operating debt went up from '04-05 to '05-06 from \$238 million to \$269 million. I ask the Minister of Finance why did that occur. Interest rates are down from last year, yet the NDP claimed that the debt was down, was paid down. Obviously, if the debt was paid down, interest rates are down, why did the cost of servicing go up?

Mr. Selinger: Actually, the member is wrong. Interest rates have gone up since last year. That is the first point the member needs to know, and that is the primary reason for the public debt cost going up. The member may want to look at pages B-30 and B-31 and see the decline in interest rates over, several, one, two, three, four, the six last years. In 2001, the interest rate costs were \$511 million. This year they are \$269 million, and the Bank of Canada has been raising interest rates during the last year.

Mr. Hawranik: Would the Minister of Finance agree that from '99 to this budget year—obviously, I am aware of the fact that since '99 interest rates have decreased, and this government is not responsible for those interest rate decreases. In fact, the interest rate

decrease from '99 to this budget year is essentially the reason the cost of servicing the debt has gone down. Would he agree with that statement?

Mr. Selinger: No, I would not. I think that is one contributing factor. The other factors are the way the debt has been managed by our officials. If the member wants to say the only reason interest rates have gone down is because of Bank of Canada reducing interest rates, then the member would also have to agree that the only reason interest rates have gone up is because of interest rates. If the member wants to be consistent, we can talk about it.

Mr. Hawranik: I ask the Minister of Finance, in terms of his press releases, why does he not indicate the total debt of the province. Is it just because it is not to his advantage to do so, or is he just misleading by omission as the Auditor General has indicated in his '03-04 Auditor's Report?

Mr. Selinger: I was wondering if the member could repeat the question. There was a lot of interference coming from the Member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Loewen).

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Harry Schellenberg): Could we have order, please?

Mr. Hawranik: I ask the Minister of Finance again: Why do his press releases not indicate the total debt of the Province at \$20 billion rather than just talk about the general purpose debt as he does continuously? Is that not misleading by omission, as the Auditor General talked about in his '03-04 Auditor General's report?

Mr. Selinger: Once again, all the information on the debt is placed right here in pages B-30 and 31. The general purpose debt is the debt that is required to be managed under balanced budget legislation and the Debt Retirement Fund as set up by members opposite. That is the law they wanted the government to be accountable for. There is additional debt, some of which is self-financing such as Manitoba Hydro debt.

Mr. Hawranik: I ask the Minister of Finance, if all the information is, in fact, in the budget papers, then why was the Health Department budget last year misstated by the Minister of Finance.

Mr. Selinger: There is no connection between the premise of the member's question and the actual

question itself. There was no misstatement of the Health numbers last year.

Mr. Hawranik: Is the Minister of Finance stating that the news report which indicated that he misstated the numbers in the budget is wrong?

Mr. Selinger: I do not make it a practice to comment on newspaper reports.

Mr. Hawranik: I would turn to the estimates of revenue in the Manitoba Budget 2005 and indicate, first of all, that tobacco taxes, it indicates estimates of revenue for '04-05 were \$203.7 million and for '05-06 it is exactly the same number. I ask the Minister of Finance why would he expect the same estimate of revenue from Tobacco Tax when, in fact, we have introduced a non-smoking ban in the province. He expects the same amount of revenue without increasing the Tobacco Tax.

Mr. Selinger: I just want to make sure. The member is asking me on page 5 of the Revenue Estimates why item (m), Tobacco Tax, is roughly the same as last year. Once again, I believe that the officials estimated the same amount of tax because last year they factored into the estimate the expected impact of the tobacco ban before it was actually brought into place.

Mr. Hawranik: I ask the Minister of Finance whether or not the tax on tobacco is going to go up through the back door, through Order-in-Council, as opposed to through the budget papers.

Mr. Selinger: The amount of revenue identified here is assumed on leaving the Tobacco Tax as it is stated in the budget.

Mr. Hawranik: I understand that the government can increase the Tobacco Tax through Order-in-Council. Can the Minister of Finance confirm that in fact he is not going to increase the Tobacco Tax through Order-in-Council, rather than going through the budget?

Mr. Selinger: I just answered the member's question. The revenue assumed here is based on the Tobacco Tax staying as it is stated in the budget.

Mr. Hawranik: Does the Minister of Finance have plans by Order-in-Council to increase the Tobacco Tax in the province this year?

Mr. Selinger: The plans I have for the revenues of the province are the plans that have been published in the budget, and the published number in the budget leaves the Tobacco Tax as it is now.

Mr. Hawranik: I ask the Minister of Finance, if everything is in the budget, why did Vital Statistics increase their fee for the registration of same-sex marriages without going through the budget.

Mr. Selinger: That fee was increased, actually, last year for all marriages. The member, once again, is being pernicious in the way he frames his questions. He seems to enjoy doing that. The point is that that \$10 fee was increased as part of the requirements of the special operating agency to operate in the black. The member might recall that special operating agencies were a creature created by the previous government to bring a business model to government, and the business model was expected to have a bottom line that paid for the cost of service.

Mr. Hawranik: I ask the Minister of Finance how much more money can Manitobans expect to pay through increased licence fees, permits and other fees without budget approval.

Mr. Selinger: One thing that we did not announce in the budget is that the dairy processing plants' licensing fee of \$100 will be eliminated.

Mr. Hawranik: I ask the Minister of Finance, and I refer to the detailed Estimates of Revenue. There are all kinds of taxes and so on under Finance like Individual Income Tax, Corporation Income Tax, Corporation Capital Tax, Gasoline Tax, Insurance Corporations Tax, Land Transfer Tax, Levy for Health and Education, and so on, all the way through to Environmental Protection Tax.

I ask the Minister of Finance: Is he planning on increasing any of those or broadening the effect of any of those taxes that are under the subheading, Finance and Taxation? Is he planning on increasing any of those or broadening their effect without going through the budget?

Mr. Selinger: Could the member, for purposes of clarity, identify which page he is looking at when he is referring to those lines?

Mr. Hawranik: Page 5 of the Estimates of Revenue.

Mr. Selinger: For greater clarity, the member is asking if any of the lines on page 5 under Finance are going to be increased outside of the budget?

Mr. Hawranik: Yes, that is my question.

Mr. Selinger: The Individual Income Tax, no. Corporation Income Tax, no. Corporation Capital Tax, no. Gasoline Tax, no. In general, I would say to the member that there are no plans to increase any of these taxes.

Mr. Hawranik: Are there any plans to broaden the effect or the application of any of those taxes without going through budget approval?

* (15:20)

Mr. Selinger: Any increase in any fee or revenue has to go through a process of, first, the department, and then up through the Treasury Board system to Cabinet. I am not aware of any specific initiatives in that regard with respect to taxes on this page 5 in the Revenue Estimates. If there is anything specific being planned, I can discuss it with the member when we get to Estimates.

Mr. Hawranik: Can the Minister of Finance guarantee to Manitobans that those items under Finance, each one of those taxes, will not be broadened without first going through budget disclosure and budget questions, that their application will not be broadened and those taxes will not be increased during the '05-06 budget year?

Mr. Selinger: Once again, there are no plans that I am aware of to do that. If there is any information that I have not covered today, I will be happy to bring it to the member's attention as soon as I receive it, but I am not aware of any plans to do what the member asked.

Mr. Hawranik: I turn to page 6 of the Estimates of Revenue for Budget '05, and I ask the Minister of Finance: Are there any plans to increase the application, the broadening of the fees and revenues that are available under heading 2, Legislative Assembly, Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, Advanced Education and Training, Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives, Civil Service Commission and Conservation? Are there any plans to increase any of those fees or permits, either by broadening the application of the tax or of the revenue or by increasing the fees

themselves or permit amounts themselves? Are there any plans to do that in this budget year '05-06?

Mr. Selinger: Once again, I am not aware of any plans to do that.

There are, from time to time, departments that do bring forward proposals in year on specific items that are in their jurisdiction, and I may not be aware of the plans they have, but they would be reported, and they would be put on the public record. The one item I did want to mention to the member, which I had mentioned earlier, is the dairy processing plants' licensing requirement of \$100 has been eliminated, and that was not announced in the budget.

Mr. Hawranik: Does the Minister of Finance agree that, in fact, any increases in fees, any increases in permits, any broadening of the application of any tax within these Estimates or the budget papers, anything increasing the application of those fees or licences or taxes, should actually go through the budget process and should withstand the tests from members opposite?

Mr. Selinger: I agree with the member that if there are any fee increases proposed by a department, they have to be properly scrutinized for their need and necessity. If a government decides that they are going to enact them, they have to publicly report that and give people information that it is coming, but they do not all necessarily come specifically through the budget process. There are in-year measures that are taken both to reduce fees and levies and, sometimes, to increase them.

Mr. Hawranik: I draw the minister's attention, in particular, to page 6 of the Estimates of Revenue and looking under Conservation, letter (f), Parks Fees, and I have heard the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers) indicate that, in fact, he is in favour of increasing the lease fees and park fees in our provincial parks, whether it be the rental fees that are charged to cottagers, or the rental fees that are charged for businesses within the parks. Has the Minister of Finance had any conversation with the Minister of Conservation with respect to increasing those fees this year?

Mr. Selinger: My recollection is that that item has been discussed for many years, and many members of the communities have had ideas and recommendations around that. As to the specifics this year, I

am sure the Minister of Conservation would be happy to discuss it when his Estimates come up.

Mr. Hawranik: Can the Minister of Finance guarantee that those park fees will not be increased in the '05-06 budget?

Mr. Selinger: The specifics of those park fees could be discussed with the Minister of Conservation in his Estimates.

Mr. Hawranik: I draw the minister's attention to page 7 with respect to Culture, Heritage and Tourism, Education, Citizenship and Youth, Energy, Science and Technology, Family Services and Housing, Finance, Health, all of those headings, in which the government obtains revenue from each one of them. Can the Minister of Finance guarantee that none of those headings, none of those fees and permits and applications, none of those will go up without budget scrutiny?

Mr. Selinger: I can assure the member that if any of those fees, and I am not aware of any of them going up, but, if they are, there will be the appropriate public process of review and public process of disclosure with respect to the specifics.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I would like to refer the question to the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk). The \$20 million that has been budgeted in the tax relief, the concern that we have on this side of the House is why it was put into the Agriculture budget instead of the Education budget. We feel that it going to be setting up the farmers for the WTO complex where it could be referred to as a direct subsidy. Can the minister comment on that?

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Harry Schellenberg): The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Selinger: I think it was for the Minister of Agriculture.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Harry Schellenberg): The Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): The \$20 million is a support for farmers. It should show up in the agriculture budget, as it is a direct support for them. I am not quite sure why the member opposite would want to not show something that is refunding

farmers' money, showing up in the area where it is most supportive.

Mr. Eichler: It is very clear under the Free Trade Agreement that the subsidies have been an issue, if not only in the hog tariffs, and now if you do it in the ag sector for grain land and farmland, this is going to be definitely contentious issue for us down the road. So I think it is better to address it now before we get into the hearing process on that.

Ms. Wowchuk: If someone was making a challenge, a WTO challenge, they would not be looking only at one budget. If they are looking for supports to the industry, the people who are looking would look in all departments, but this is a commitment we made last year, when we were returning a third of the money back to producers. We are returning them their own money that they paid out, and we have increased that to 50 percent. As I talk to producers, it is very much appreciated.

Mr. Eichler: So, then, for the '04 budget, the 33 percent that was rebated was deficit-financed and under the budget for the 33 percent that was paid out in '04? Is that correct?

Ms. Wowchuk: No, it was not deficit-financed.

Mr. Eichler: Then we will move on to the CAIS program. With the March 31 deadline coming up for the required signing up for the CAIS program, we have asked that the Province take the leadership role in eliminating the deposit on that. The minister has come and said that they have deferred the requirement until March 2006. However, the farmers still have to sign up in 2005. Can the minister highlight on whether or not she is going to insist that this deposit be moved forward in the 2006 budget?

Ms. Wowchuk: Manitoba has taken the leadership role, and we have taken this issue to the federal-provincial meeting. It was agreed that there would be a delay in the CAIS deposit until such time as an alternate proposal was put in place. It is the same point that the federal Minister of Agriculture raised when he said he wanted to see the CAIS payment removed, but there had to be an alternate put in place. That is what is being done. There will be announcement that the producers will not have to put their deposit in until March of '06 or until alternates come into place, and the producers have until mid-

May to decide whether or not they want to participate in CAIS.

Mr. Eichler: For those farmers who have already put in their CAIS deposit, then will that be refunded back to them so they will utilize that money for the input costs for this year?

* (15:30)

Ms. Wowchuk: Producers have the ability right now, even without the announcement, to withdraw their money that is over the one third. So, if you have more than one third of your amount that has been assigned to you, you have the ability right now to withdraw that money. If you have one third in and you trigger a payment, you will be able to withdraw your money and not have to put it back in again until a decision is made on deposits.

Mr. Eichler: With the recent announcement with regard to R-CALF for July 27 for the hearing date on whether or not the R-CALF decision will be held up, out of the \$3 million could the minister or the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) comment on what the criteria are to access the \$3 million that they announced in the last couple of weeks?

Ms. Wowchuk: On announcement of the \$3 million, we said details of the program would be available shortly. We are in discussion with the industry as we develop the details of that program, and I hope to have those details available shortly.

One of the announcements that was included in that was to cover up to 90 percent of the feasibility studies for plants that were looking at how they could go from provincial to federal standards. This is to complement what we have already been doing where we had hired Myers Norris Penny to do a prefeasibility study and provide information to all producers. As well, there has been money for feasibility studies for processors who are looking to upgrade their provincial facilities. Part of the money that I announced will now help producers do their feasibility to move to federal standards.

Mr. Eichler: There are 29 processing plants in the province of Manitoba, one of which is federal. The \$3 million which you just outlined, 90 percent of that will go to feasibility upgrades. Out of the \$2 million you announced last year, how much money actually

flowed to upgrading those plants to federal standards?

Ms. Wowchuk: There is only one federally inspected plant as the member just indicated. There have not been and there is no plant that has made their final decision to move to a federally inspected plant, but we are working with several processors who are looking at how they might move to federal standards.

Mr. Eichler: With respect to the Rancher's Choice, Mr. Acting Speaker, the equipment is being shipped up from the United States as we speak. They come in every day, truckloads. Can the minister indicate when we might be seeing the monies flow to Rancher's Choice in order that they might be able to proceed with the tendering process for the building and trying to get the environmental licence up and running shortly?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, I want to first of all pay recognition to the producers who formed Rancher's Choice and commend them for the tremendous amount of work they have done to get this facility up and running. As the member has indicated, the equipment is starting to move and the co-op is in the process of finalizing some of their application forms. Staff in various departments are working with them to get those plans in place so they can begin construction soon.

Mr. Eichler: Does the minister have a deadline of when she thinks the money will start to flow to Rancher's Choice?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, some money has flowed to Rancher's Choice, and we are working out details on their plan. They are in the process of hiring a CEO, and I can assure you that staff in various departments are working very closely with them to get this project going.

Mr. Eichler: There is roughly \$16 million, of which you have committed \$11 million. You just said you flowed some of the money. Could the minister tell this House how much money they have flowed so far?

Ms. Wowchuk: I would be happy to discuss the matter with the member a little later. This is a private business co-op, and I can tell you that there has been some money that flowed. I would be happy to talk about

it with him, rather than discussing a co-op's business on the floor. I would be quite happy to share the information with him later.

Mr. Eichler: With respect to the Go-offices and Go-centres within the province and the restructuring, could the minister highlight for the House how much money is going to be saved and how many jobs will be amalgamated through the new Go-offices and Go-centres?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, I am really pleased that we took a different approach than other provinces did. Where other provinces centralized their services and closed down offices and, in fact, laid off a lot of people, our direction is different. It is our goal to bring services closer to people. It is not our intention to close offices, but, in fact, enhance services to people in rural Manitoba both on the agriculture side, the food processing side and rural economic development.

Mr. Eichler: The minister made another announcement last week with regard to three economic development officers being hired for the province. Now, the \$650,000, is there any financing for these businesses that they are going to be trying to set up, or is the \$650,000 just going to travel and administration costs?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, what we announced is that there are 10 regions in the province, an increase from 4 that we used to have before. Previously, we had seven economic development officers. We are hiring three more so that we can have the whole province of agri-Manitoba covered by an economic development officer that will work with the teams that we are putting in place of business planners and agriculture support specialists.

The member asks about what is available. There are several programs that are available, that are there for people as they come forward. There are supports to help them as they do their feasibility studies. We welcome any business plan. We hope that many will develop, and then we will work through them and look at where financing is.

Many times people have business ideas, and they may not have to come to government for financing; they use their own financial institutes right in their community. The really important part is to work with them to get the business started and then develop a

marketing plan so that we can really get some value added to products in Manitoba.

Mr. Eichler: With respect to the amalgamation of MACC and Manitoba Crop Insurance, could the minister highlight, just briefly, the savings or the thought process that went into that?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, as a government, we have been looking at how we can cluster departments, how we can cluster corporations to take advantage of human resources and take advantage of new technology that is available. That is what we did. In this situation, we brought together the management side of the corporations. We will have some savings, but there will not be office closures. There will be some savings in the human resource side and the technology side. If you have two technology departments running and you can bring them both together, there is going to be some savings. We anticipate that there will be savings here, but I can assure the member that one of the priorities is to continue to operate the financial side and the insurance side as separate entities. Those two pillars will not be brought together; it will be the human resource and the management side.

We looked at other provinces that have a lending branch and an insurance branch, have had these institutes under one management. We talked to them, and we, in fact, believe that by doing this and improving some of the technology and technological service, we will be able to improve service to producers. Again, we are not intending to close any offices.

*(15:40)

Mr. Eichler: One final question that has to do with the upcoming loans that will be due this fall with respect to the \$50,000 in loans that was loaned out to the farmers and the interest that will be coming due: Has the government allowed for relief or postponement of these loans in the 2005-2006 budget?

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, when we put those loans in place, we did make the provision to turn them into long-term loans and that has been provided for. As with all of our other loans that are offered to producers through the credit corporations, there is always the ability to have a discussion and work out terms that will be in the best interest of the producer.

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chair. I would like to ask the Premier, in the budget on the revenue side, Estimates of Revenue side, showing a substantial increase in the Manitoba Lotteries Corporation, and I just wonder if the Premier could explain what decisions were made that would allow them to see an increase of, well, it is close to \$40 million on that line, knowing that he has a history of being concerned about the number of people that gamble in Manitoba.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Speaking generally about the revenue, the percentage revenue generated by Lotteries today is, as a percentage of revenues in the budget, down over '99. Secondly, we flat-lined out Estimates in the anticipation of the smoking ban having an impact, and it did not have the impact we anticipated.

Mr. Murray: Well, thank you very much. Did I hear the Premier say correctly that he anticipated the smoking ban would have a much more negative impact on revenue than it has had and that is his words that are reflected in the budget?

Mr. Doer: As a percentage of revenues, as the member indicated, it is lower than it was in '99 and '98, but it is higher, the revenues are higher, because I believe last year's budget included pretty well, we built in conservative estimates, small "c" and—*[interjection]* Well, I did not use Progressive Conservative, so I understand you are not, I only used the term "conservative," so obviously the growth was a little higher than we anticipated and that is reflected in the budget.

Mr. Murray: Well, thank you. I always find it interesting that when the First Minister has a chance to say the word "conservative," it seems to bring a smile to his lips. So we are always delighted when that is the case. I would say, though, that in this issue, and we have raised the issue in the Legislature, and the Premier is no stranger to it. In fact, he was probably pretty antagonistic of the former government in terms of revenue that came through Lotteries, and that sort of thing. We now see unprecedented advertising here to Manitobans, you know, with catchy slogans like, "Get off the couch" and "Come down for the fun of it."

How does the Premier reconcile the fact that he is showing this substantial increase in Lotteries on

the revenue side, and how does he reconcile that, or can he, with the fact that Manitoba has such a high addiction rate with respect to gambling?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, the member will know that the big increase in gaming took place between, I believe, 1991 and 1995 or so. The majority of the expansions took place at that time. A further expansion took place in '99 in August when additional machines were forwarded to some communities, unbeknownst to us, if I might say.

If you will recall the '95 election, there was a promise only from one political party to, I think, take action on Sundays, if I recall. I think that was Mr. Edwards's promise. We did not make that promise. If you look back through our election promises in '99 and 2003 and in '95, you will find that we have acted in a consistent way.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Deputy Chair, I think the years that the Premier cited were the years that he was very opposed, extremely opposed and completely against. I just find it fascinating that he would take that kind of an approach. When you see a substantial increase, can the Premier indicate if that increase is because of the fast new machines that have been put into the casinos, or is it because he thinks it is because of the effectiveness of the advertising?

Mr. Doer: Well, I am not going to try to become an expert on these issues. I have never put a nickel in a VLT machine. I would point out and ask the member opposite—

An Honourable Member: Most of them take loonies.

An Honourable Member: Toonies.

Mr. Doer: Toonie? Well, the member opposite is obviously more aware of how they work than I am. I do like playing blackjack, but I have not played it for a number of years, either in Manitoba or outside of Manitoba.

An Honourable Member: Maybe we could have a game one of these days.

Mr. Doer: I think it is a good idea. Having said that, I know that the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) last year, instead of projecting the usual percentage increase because of the increased population of

Manitoba, projected a flat line, I believe, or even a very flat line of revenue, and I believe the revenues exceeded that.

We, of course, had complaints from hotels and the hospitality industry. There are the government benefits, obviously, from the VLTs with revenues.

In any election campaign, you will find that I did not make a commitment or a promise to deal with, to reverse the revenue that had come in from the introduction of VLTs: (a) I knew that it was important to the hospitality industry; (b) I think that the numbers were over \$200 million in the pre-'99 period. You can go back and look at any comments, but when media asked me, "If you are elected, will you eliminate this or that?" I said, "I cannot make that commitment because the revenues are significant." That is what I said then, and that is what I say today.

The percentage revenues today as a percentage of this budget are lower as a percentage of the revenues they were in the 1999 budget.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Deputy Chair, I do not have the verbatim to go back, but I do recall in 1999 an announcement made by the Leader of the New Democratic Party outside a casino. I am going to have to dig that one up because I remember it very, very well, and I think it had something to do with perhaps talking about rather than putting money into gambling that you should be putting money into health care. I am not 100 percent sure, but he knows it better than I because he is the one that made it. He is the one that made it. I am just very interested.

* (15:50)

I think I heard the First Minister say, "flat-lining the revenue." I do not know, maybe he has been hanging around with his Minister of Health (Mr. Sale). I am just going through his own revenue, and they show an increase from \$232 million to \$271 million. I am not sure. I just would like to, before I continue any other questionings, is that line that goes from \$232 million in their numbers to \$271 million, their numbers, is that what he is referring to as flat-lining?

Mr. Doer: No, I am referring to the budget, last year, basically, flat-lined. I would have to get the

numbers from the '03 budget and the '04 budget, but I basically believe they were very close to being flat, maybe just slightly different. This year, the revenue was higher than we had anticipated. So what we did was reflect the reality in the budget, but I think you would have to go back two years to look at the '03 number and the '04 number.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite does quote my press conference. I know he was the Communications Director then for the Progressive Conservative Party and—

An Honourable Member: Thank you for stating that. Now there is a smile.

Mr. Doer: There you go. I know that they are Progressive Conservatives, unlike the Darwinian conservatives that I met this weekend.

The press conference, I had basically said that when the provincial government decides and announces that they are going to build an expansion of the casinos, they happen overnight. When they decide and announce to build a personal care home or a hospital, they never happen. I have talked about the Brandon General Hospital, the Health Sciences Centre and I talked about the Oak Bank Personal Care Home. But what I did not know when I had that press conference, and I have to confess, I did not know that those casino expansions would come in about \$100 million over budget. Now, I was opposed to the closure of a downtown casino and the expansion of the casinos at Regent and on McPhillips. I am not the only one. The Winnipeg tourism association, the Manitoba Hotel Association, Destination Winnipeg and the NDP opposed the expansion of those casinos. At that time, we did not know the answer from the former Minister of Finance, Mr. Stefanson, was that they would come in lower, the expansion of the casinos would come in lower than relocating the casinos from the Fort Garry Hotel to, say, the Convention Centre. Boy, were we surprised when we came into office and read the Auditor's report.

That was my press conference; I am glad the member remembers it. But it was not, and you can pull out the press release, I never, ever thought that if we were elected in government in '99, I never thought—*[interjection]* We like to be underestimated.

Mr. Speaker, yes, we would rather have lower estimates and have better results. You are right.

Mr. Murray: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chair. I have this year's revenue and I have 2003, I just happen to have it. But it was just interesting, again, when you go back to the First Minister talking about flat-lining, in '02-03 Manitoba Lotteries had \$252 million, \$259.5 million in '03-04, \$232 million is what they showed down in '04-05 and \$271 is what you are showing in '05-06. In other words, arguably, according to your own numbers, between '03-04 and '04-05 there was a decrease that has substantially more than made up for what you are showing in the \$271 million that you show in this estimate of revenue for this year.

Again, before I move on, I just want to make sure I have it very clear from the Premier that when he talks about revenues that were \$252 million up to \$259 million, down to \$232 million, back up to \$271 million, is that what he refers to as flat-lining?

Mr. Doer: We anticipated some loss in revenue based on what had happened in Brandon. The obvious difference between 259 and 271, I believe the number is, its percentage increase is a lot lower than it was in the nineties and the early 2000s as a percentage increase. It is a financial increase, but we take the numbers from the Lotteries Corporation. But, also, I should point out to the member opposite Lotteries Corporation's numbers also include something that was not in place when we got elected. There was no mortgage on the casino expansions. The member opposite referred to the casinos.

When we came into office, there was no amortization of the capital asset of those two casinos. There was no payment made to the capital investment, so part of what has happened is there is actually a contribution. In fact, the government was taking all the money and not leaving any money back to pay for the capital assets that they in fact had ordered take place. That is one difference, but the other difference was we took the numbers from lotteries, we obviously budgeted prudently last year, too prudently, and the numbers were a little higher. That may not happen again next year. I am not predicting what is going to happen. I am not an expert on behaviour of gamblers. I am not. I am just not an expert. I play with my friends in a little football pool and do not do that well on it, but other than that, I am not an expert.

Mr. Murray: Again, I would just like to get a sense from the Premier, only because I know his passion

through the nineties being so opposed to VLT revenue, to gambling, the opposition was clearly loud and noted. So, with the increase of some \$40 million from '04-05 to '05-06, \$40 million and, according to his own words, he indicates that they are a little bit, I think his word was "conservative" in the way they budget their revenue. Arguably, if you listen to his own explanation, it could be higher than the 271, so it could be in excess of \$40 million in terms of additional revenues through the Lotteries Corporation. Again, I just would ask the First Minister: Is that on the basis of all of the increased advertising that the NDP government is doing here in Manitoba to Manitobans, or does he think that it is the slick new VLT machines that the casinos have been receiving over the past eight to ten months?

Mr. Doer: I cannot answer specifically about the lottery revenue. I would point out that 259, I am going from 259, and I thank the member for those numbers, to 271 is a very slight increase on a percentage basis compared to previous years, and the percentage of revenue in this year's budget, the percentage of revenues is down from when it was when we came into office. It is still over 3 percent of revenues for the government, but, as a percentage of the overall revenue of government, it is lower as a percentage than it was. In other words, the dependency the government has on gaming revenue is lower today than it was when we came into office.

Second point: The economy is doing quite well. There is a lot of economic activity. The hospitality industry is doing relatively well. I was just in Brandon this weekend. A new hotel has gone up, new confidence, new numbers of patrons, it was three or four hospitality areas in that wonderful new hotel. If you look downtown—I know members opposite were opposed to the new arena—a lot more activity downtown, a lot more activity going on, so I think that there are a lot more things going on in this province, and that is reflected in revenues right across the province.

Mr. Murray: Again, I just find it interesting that the question is fairly simple, that there is an increase in revenue, and so the increase in revenue has to come from somewhere. That somewhere, of course, is more people, either additional people, Manitobans going into casinos, or—[interjection] I think I hear chirping, Mr Deputy—

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Harry Schellenberg): Order, please.

* (16:00)

Mr. Murray: Thank you very much, Mr. Acting Speaker. I would just ask, and as a matter of fact, it was the member that was trying to be part of the discussion, I think, who was instrumental in keno into Laundromats. So I think it would be interesting. He may be able to advise the Premier (Mr. Doer) on this because, for example, they may be looking at putting keno into the washrooms in the casinos. I do not know, they may already have them. It may be part of their plan. If you cannot put them into Laundromats, you might as well put them into washrooms. It seems to be part of the way that they are expanding the gambling.

Mr. Deputy Chair, I just would ask the Premier, knowing full well that there have been brand-new, spanking-new VLT machines that have gone, under his watch, into the casinos, and we have seen revenues that have been put towards, like expenditures from the government side that have been put towards more advertising to Manitobans to get involved in gambling just for the fun of it because it is a great way to spend an evening, apparently. So I just would say to the First Minister, of those two initiatives—and I understand he is not an expert. But he is the Premier, he sees these budgets, he sees the increases, he is quite aware of it, and he would be quite aware of it, frankly, because he was so opposed to it when he was in opposition.

So I think it is just a fair question to say, directly: Do you think it is the increases based on your government's advertising to more Manitobans to get off their couches and go down to the casinos for the fun of it, or do you think it is the slick new machines that your government put into those casinos that have shown or will show this increase in revenue?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Deputy Speaker, there are a lot more people in this province today; there are a lot more people working. The average income levels went up higher than any other province; people have more disposable income for their own entertainment dollars. Some people spend it. The Moose attendance is way up. I know people in downtown facilities, hospitality areas—I very rarely frequent those, but I

have the odd beverage—and they are reporting very, very significant activity.

There are lots of factors in the economy growing, and I think that it would be very, very improper for me to take one of the two doors when there may be many doors about activity in that area. During the session, I think the Lotteries Corporation will appear before the committee of the Legislature. I believe it does appear before the committee. The people will be there, as they should be, and they may be able to give the member a better answer.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

I also want to point out, you can go back and, you know, there were some things I did not like in gaming. If you want to look at the frequency of questions, my biggest concern was the cancellation of the Fort Garry Hotel, not the cancellation of the casino in the Fort Garry Hotel but, rather, not using money from gaming revenues and expanding two suburban casinos. I was very much opposed to that, using that money. I thought we should have a presence downtown, and history has shown that my comments, I think, were accurate in terms of cost and the allies I had. You go through Hansard, I raised more questions on that issue than any other issue on gaming.

I mean, you can try to create some image of me about what I said on gaming, but I had an election platform in '95, the one party that promised to reduce the amount of machines in this province before the Desjardins report was out. It was Mr. Edwards, and he had a number of sources in the old lottery corporation, used them liberally in the House in questions. I did not know if we were ever in government—that was a lot of revenue, and I was very careful about what I said about gaming revenues because once it was well over \$200 million; at one point, it was almost 2 percent of sales tax, and that was a lot of money. I did not make statements that I could not deliver on.

Mr. Murray: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Chair. So, in order words, I would like to move on, but from what I hear from the Premier, his sense of why the revenue is going up is that, in his words, the fact if there are more people in Manitoba then there are more gamblers to entice down to the casinos, which I think is unfortunate, because I think that—

[interjection] Well, he did. He said the reason the revenues are going up is because there are more people in the province. You check Hansard, but that is exactly what the inference was.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Murray: Madam Deputy Chair, I know the exuberance on the other side, but you know, I would just say that the First Minister, again, I think is caught in a tough position on these ones. I understand that because this is an issue he was very troubled with in terms of when he was in opposition, and advertising, particularly with the unprecedented amount of advertising we see being done here to Manitobans by the NDP is unfortunate because of course it plays at a level that I think makes things very difficult.

I would like to just ask, on one of the other lines I see that the NDP government has increased, once again, the water power rental rates. We know they were around \$50 million. They have radically increased those to \$100 million, and we see in the estimate of revenues that they are going up again to \$105 million. Knowing the First Minister's sort of penchant for wanting to go in and increase all sorts of costs on the back of Hydro, can he give Manitobans and this House his 100% guarantee that they will not take more than the \$105 million out on the water rental rates in the year '05-06?

Mr. Doer: The number on water power rental rates is provided by Hydro and the Department of Conservation. It is provided based on water flows. The rates have not gone up in this budget. I want to say that clearly. The rates are not up on this budget. The revenues were down in the 2003 year, dramatically, because of the drought. I cannot say to the member opposite whether—I cannot predict how much rain we are going to get, and how much water moisture we are going to get so I cannot give him—only God can probably tell us whether we are going to have less revenue or more revenue, but the number provided in the budget is a number provided by Hydro in consultation with water experts. It is not a number derived from political analysis.

Mr. Murray: Madam Deputy Chair, in light of what we have seen with this government's desire to look at Hydro as their opportunity when they are short of revenue to use Hydro as a bit of a cash cow. I understand the comments. The Premier talks about

God and a whole lot of other elements that will play into that number, but you put a budget in front of Manitobans and I think there is a concern. There is some nervousness that this Doer government loves to sort of go in and use Hydro as a cash cow.

* (16:10)

The \$105 million that you have allocated, that is a number that is substantially higher than a year ago. I think that, with the past history, I would just like to get the First Minister's sense because we know the debt-to-equity ratio in Hydro has increased. I will get the latest numbers. I know that they want it to be around 75:25. I think the last I heard they were sort of 87:13. So I would just like to get a sense from this Premier (Mr. Doer), if for some reason that number does escalate, does he see taking that additional revenue into his line, on the \$105 million, or will he see returning some of that, knowing that \$105 million is a maximum number, returning some of that money to allow Manitoba Hydro to pay down some of their debt?

Mr. Doer: The water power rental rate has not changed in this budget. The water power rental rate has not changed in this budget, has not changed in these Estimates, and I think it is important to point that out to the member opposite. The water power rental rate has not increased in this budget. Period.

Mr. Murray: That is an interesting statement. To use the vernacular, I guess it just does not really hold water. I do not what he is saying, it has not increased. He knows in his own revenues, they estimated \$100 million, they are now talking about \$105. It is pretty hard for something in this year's budget to change, because this is a budget for Estimates of what is happening this year. I am not clear when you say it has not changed. It went from \$100 million a year ago. You are increasing it by another \$5 million. So, when you say it has not changed, I just need you to explain that.

Mr. Doer: Yes. The water power rental rates which, of course, have been increased by different governments, and have been treated differently. When you look at the footnote, page 40, of the annual report of Hydro a couple of years ago, when the water power rental rates were dealt with in a certain way, in exchange for projects, were paid for in capital projects, by Hydro, they were not obliged to pay. This is a much more consistent way than with other

provinces. This is not the highest water power rental rate in Canada. I know British Columbia has a higher water power rental rate. I know other provinces do as well.

Secondly, it is a rate, but that does not guarantee a revenue. Two years ago, the number in the '03 budget was, I think there was about \$30 million to \$40 million less than '03-04 budget on the water power rental rates based on the water power flow. In this year's budget, it is slightly higher on revenue projections, because the water levels right now, based on moisture levels in the '04 year, and based on the reservoir levels, are given to us to put in the budget.

This is not an exercise. The Minister of Finance does not take a number from Hydro and change it. He does not take a number from the water experts and change it. He takes the number we are given. This is quite an independent exercise based on scientific flow of water. Now the other side of this is, if the water levels get a lot higher, it presents a real challenge on the other side. I do not want to see, I will be honest, a higher rate of flow here in Manitoba, because I know that it means more communities are going to get flooded in spring. I do not want to see a higher rate of flow than we had last year when a whole lot of farmers got flooded with cold weather.

This is not an isolated number in the budget, because last year, the water power rental rates were, the flow levels were higher than '03, but the costs of the crop insurance which under GAAP is taken out of crop insurance, is taken out of the revenue, is shown as a deficit in crop insurance, was much higher, the payments that came out of there, much, much higher.

So there are weather-related numbers in the budget, quite a lot of them, quite a number. There was drought payment in '03 that we had to increase with the BSE situation. There was lower, I think by \$40 million, was it \$40 million in the '03-04 budget of water power rental rates, with actual over budgeted? Usually, if there is a really dry year, we have to pay money for drought assistance, lower water power rental rates, and much more money for forest fires.

We would prefer that we do not have increased flow of water to a point where farmers are affected

negatively again, and flooding costs are dramatic. You cannot take one number and not look at its impact on other places. If the water power rental rate flow goes up over what we had budgeted, I guarantee you the flood-protection costs are going to go up as well.

Mr. Murray: If there is an additional if, and I am just asking, because it is a budget and this is an Estimates process, so there is no science necessarily to it, but it is interesting to note that if there is an additional amount of money that comes into the water power rental other than the \$105 million that has been budgeted, would you look at turning some of that money back to help pay down debt, or would you just take it in as additional revenue?

Mr. Doer: The number here is based on no increase in rate on water power rental rates. That is in the budget. That is in the Estimate line, and it is based on science. The science does put a number in the budget. The scientists, the engineers at Hydro provide a number and that is plugged into the budget. We do not put another number in there. We put the number that we are given. Period. The rate did not go up in this budget.

Mr. Murray: I would just ask the First Minister, when you look at the Estimate of Revenues on page 5, I do not know if he has the document, but I would just ask him on the Estimate of Revenues that they have: Does he have any intention or can he confirm that he will not be increasing any additional user fees than what is allocated in this document?

Mr. Doer: There were very few increases in some of the fees and there was some elimination of some of the fees. I think the question was asked. I think that the dairy licensing fee, and there were a couple of others that were eliminated. There are not very many in this budget.

Mr. Murray: Could I ask then, just because of the process that we are going through, Interim Supply, could he then turn his attention to page 5 of the Estimates of Revenues, and specifically under point 1, Taxation, under Finance, there are a number of issues there. I would just ask the First Minister if he has any intention of increasing any of those taxes prior to the next budget.

Mr. Doer: I did not hear the question. Do we have any intention of raising any of those taxes?

Mr. Murray: Yes. If the Premier did not hear, I will repeat it. I am asking him to turn his attention to page 5 of the Estimate of Revenues. In their '05 budget under Taxation 1, under Finance, there are a number of taxes, and I would just ask the First Minister if he could give his commitment today in this Chamber that his government will not be increasing any of those taxes listed in that caption under No. 1, Taxation, Finance, (a) to (n)?

Mr. Doer: The only action we have taken in the last 12 months beyond the budget of '04-05 was actually to lower education taxes on farmland. Certainly, we anticipate that all of the commitments we have made on tax reductions—*[interjection]*

Well, the member opposite raised the portioning of farmland. We are lowering the taxes on farmers, so the record is good. It is clear. It is substantive.

Mr. Speaker, all of these items, we have lowered the individual tax, we lowered the corporate tax, we have changed some of the provisions of the corporation capital tax, and we have frozen the gas tax. We have the land transfer tax. I believe it is not affected by this budget. The levy on health and education has to go before a referendum in the balanced budget legislation. I go through this. Retail sales tax has to go through a referendum. That still is the existing law, even though on Mondays and Thursdays the members opposite do not like the old balanced budget legislation. On Wednesdays they do like it. I do not anticipate any changes. Most of those taxes are going down.

* (16:20)

Mr. Murray: The Premier, obviously, when they put their budget together, looked at all of the tax brackets and where we are at in terms of in this particular budget. I know that Manitoba, once again from a middle-income standpoint, remains the highest taxed west of New Brunswick. I just wondered over the fact that now eight provinces still have not produced their budgets. When you looked at these numbers, how much further behind do you anticipate us being knowing that we still are the highest taxed west of New Brunswick?

Mr. Doer: I do not accept the premise. The member opposite will know that the middle-income tax bracket has gone down in terms of its—when we came into office, the middle-income tax bracket was 16

point something. It is now 13.5. When we came into office, they had a flat tax of 2 percent. We eliminated that. We lowered the high-income tax bracket to be below Ontario, and we also lowered, had a tax that took, literally, 20 000 people off the payroll.

We are dealing with two other issues that we are trying to make some progress on. Members opposite left us with the highest corporate taxes in Canada. Kind of ironic, is it not? We have lowered that considerably. We have lowered the small business tax from 8 percent to 4 percent. We are also dealing with property taxes. The property taxes went up 68 percent in the 1990s, including in every school division of any member sitting across there. The taxes went up dramatically and we are lowering that.

We put \$50 million in this budget into property tax reductions, \$20 million into education tax on farmland and 30 on an ESL, on top of the \$20 million or so on funding to education and on top of the capital that is double what it was in the Tory years. You have got to look at everything together. There has never been a budget, ever, brought in by the Tories that lowered corporate taxes, lowered income taxes, lowered education taxes, put more money into the rainy day fund and paid down the operating debt. There has never been a Tory budget, ever, that has been brought in and had all four features, ever.

Mr. Murray: Madam Deputy Chair. I know the Premier is still reminiscing after his gathering of his political party in Brandon and of course, that may have received some modicum of applause out there. Maybe it did not, I do not know, maybe some of his members feel that some of the things that he is doing are not sort of the kinds of things that his party should be doing. That I do not know. I would not even begin to speculate on that.

However, I think that we have seen in Manitoba unprecedented revenues coming in, and it is unfortunate, Madam Deputy Chair, because one would love to be able to stand up as a proud Manitoban and say, "It is because of all of the competitive groundwork that the government has laid to allow businesses to grow and flourish." But it is well known, and the First Minister knows, that all of the revenue that is coming into the province of Manitoba is really through transfer payments from the federal government.

When you have that kind of additional revenue, unprecedented additional revenue, I guess in a very small way one could stand up and try and blow their horn about how terrific they are doing, but really, it is a little bit like, sorry to go back to lotteries, but it is a bit like winning the lottery, and you come along with a windfall of cash, and so the First Minister knows that and Manitobans know that. It is not that our economy is growing per se, it is just that the federal government has started to transfer payments into the province of Manitoba, which by the way, I must tell you, it is somewhat gratifying to even hear this First Minister when he is down lecturing the Prime Minister of Canada about funding health care and reminds the Leader of the Liberal Party, the Prime Minister, about how drastically they cut the transfer payments in the mid-nineties, which, of course, this Premier railed on the previous government for having to live with some of those decisions.

I just think it is small justice, if I could use that, to hear this Premier at least recognize—he would not admit it, I am sure, to too many people, although, of course, these things are taped and so they would never know when those things could show up. But it is interesting that he would admonish the First Minister for cutting transfers to the provinces in the mid-nineties, and looking for some assurance for the funding of health moving forward. Of course, we hear the political rhetoric not only from the First Minister, but we hear it from all of his other ministers about what happened in the nineties.

As I say, I just want to make the comment, and I say to this Premier: Good for you for being honest and admitting that in the nineties things were tough and there were some cuts. I just wish that he would be honest and admit that to more Manitobans, rather than get on the political rhetoric that he does from time to time. As I say, those things are written and people can read, and they can make their decisions accordingly as to what it is the people have said.

I would like to ask this First Minister, just on one of the revenue lines—I am just quite interested how they would show, to use his words, flat-lining revenue on tobacco taxes from 203 million, 203.7 to 203.7 year over year, in light of the smoking ban that is there. I am just wondering if he could indicate why he would see a flat line in tobacco revenue.

Mr. Doer: There are a number of things the member opposite raises. I just want to have the historical

record accurate. When the federal budget came in, in 1995, my comment was it was the equivalent of closing every hospital in rural Manitoba down. It also reduced dramatically support for Canada social assistance, and it reduced dramatically support for post-secondary education. The money that we did negotiate, and some of us were actually at the table constructively negotiating, did restore some of the money and its share from health care from the past. That was important for Canadian medicare. It did not restore the amount of money—and it is in the budget—that was invested in post-secondary education.

Mr. Speaker, if members opposite want to read pages 63 and 64 of the Romanow report, you will find he documents clearly where the federal government, when they created this omelette called the transfer, was able to manipulate the share of money in health care, post-secondary education and social assistance.

Madam Acting Chair, I would also point out, just for the record, that the amount of money in equalization which did form part of this budget, again as a percentage of revenue in the provincial budget, is lower today than the '99-00 budget as a percentage of revenue. The amount of money that we got on equalization, again which I was involved in negotiating, we actually put that away in the savings account. We did not spend it; it is in the rainy day fund. The amount of money for equalization in the '05-06 year is actually down from the '04-05 actual amount. So this is only a temporary issue because the federal government is talking about looking at this issue, although they keep cutting other deals. So I appreciated the new agreement on health care, I said so at the time. I would not have agreed to it and said so publicly.

Let me point out another major difference on the budgeting of '99 versus today, because I think it is important.

In 1999, the federal government announced a three-year so-called "wait-list money." I think the amount of money was \$135 million. When we got into office, it was all spent. In this budget the federal government puts the money in a trust account. Now, we would have preferred that that money be budgeted year over year over year, but part of that money is in the rainy day fund. Again, we did not spend it. We did not spend it. *[interjection]*

Well, it went for every province. There are some Conservative provinces out there too. Conservative provinces, they are an endangered species, but they are out there.

* (16:30)

So the historical facts for the member opposite should point out that the majority of the so-called increase in equalization, which only took place for one year—equalization is down this year. *[interjection]* Well, you laugh, it went down \$9 million, so those are the facts. I know, facts, you laugh, but you do not read. I would ask the members opposite to read. The '04-05 number was up. The '05-06 number in this budget is down, down \$98 million.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Acting Chairperson (Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski): Order, please.

Mr. Murray: I am always fascinated when the First Minister throws around numbers, and I just want to go back to his book, his Estimate of Revenues. I just want to make sure I understand. He is suggesting that in the Estimate of Revenues on equalization, and I am just talking equalization, unless there is some change that he is able to explain, but it is \$1.435 billion and then in '05-06 they are advocating or estimating it to be \$1.601 billion. I think the First Minister said that it was down. Is his book incorrect, or was he incorrect in what he said?

Mr. Doer: Go back and read what I said. The '04-05 budget had increases in equalization and the '05-06 budget had decreases.

An Honourable Member: You did not say that.

Mr. Doer: Yeah, I did. Go read Hansard. I know the numbers.

Mr. Murray: I want to ask this First Minister: Is he suggesting that the revenue that they are advocating from equalization in '05-06 is down from the revenue that they had in '04-05?

Mr. Doer: If the member opposite will look at B-17 in the Budget Financial Revenue and Statistics, he will see, Mr. Speaker, the numbers, and they went up. The actual in '04-05 was higher than the budgeted '04-05, and that money, a significant

amount, was put into the rainy day fund. The Estimates in '05-06 are lower than the actual in '04-05.

Mr. Murray: Again, I will ask one more time, because I would ask the Premier to refer to his Estimates of Revenue on page 10 under 3, Government of Canada, Equalization. The estimate of revenue that his document shows for '04-05 is \$1.4358 billion. The estimate of revenue that they are showing for '05-06 is \$1.601 billion, so I do not follow how you can suggest that there is a reduction there. I am just going by your—on that page, perhaps just refer to that and then maybe just walk us through how that is a decrease to go from \$1.4 billion up to \$1.6 billion.

Mr. Doer: Yes, as I said, the actuals in '04-05 were higher than the estimate, and the estimate in '05-06 is lower than the actuals.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Madam Chair, I have a couple of questions for the Premier, if I might, and I appreciate the Premier taking the time to answer them.

The first question I have to ask the Premier is with respect to the sharing of casino revenues with the City of Winnipeg. It is an obvious fact that the second largest city in the province, which is Brandon, does not have a casino. I wonder why Brandon was left out in his announcement in the budget where he promised to share 5 percent, I believe it is, of revenues—I am not sure if it is net or gross; I would assume it is net—with the City of Winnipeg? Brandon has been left out completely.

Mr. Doer: Well, Madam Acting Speaker, we reviewed this with a number of members of the Executive Policy Committee. It looked like there was an undertaking to look at this before we were elected with the casinos that were introduced in Winnipeg. We are just treating the 10 percent in the casino revenues comparable to other gaming revenue. Secondly, in terms of Brandon, we did put in an extra, I believe, \$170,000 beyond the 8 percent, beyond the 8 percent—

An Honourable Member: One hundred and seventy thousand.

Mr. Doer: He will check the numbers for two police officers in Brandon. So the 5 percent for this year to

go to twenty police officers in Winnipeg or more was matched by two police officers in Brandon. When you take the increase in percentages and then take the police increase, two police officers in Brandon is pretty equivalent to twenty police officers in Winnipeg, which, of course, is what the dedicated amount of money is. It is very comparable.

Mr. Derkach: Thank you, Mr. Premier, for that. I guess my issue is that the 5 percent of net revenues from the casinos to the City of Winnipeg, is that the right figure?

Mr. Doer: The first 5 percent was to be dedicated to police officers. It was a tied amount to have more police officers. To have equity outside of Winnipeg which has the other 40 percent of the population, we had two other initiatives: (1) we are having more RCMP officers throughout Manitoba; and (2) we are dedicating funds for two extra police officers in Brandon. We actually think that provides a lot of symmetry between the way in which all the municipalities have been treated. The percentages are very comparable.

You have to look also at the transit grants which, for Brandon and Winnipeg, both went up 15 percent. I do not know the exact number for Flin Flon and Thompson, but they also went up. They went higher.

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, the issue is that of equity. First of all, casinos in Winnipeg get their revenue from people from all over the province, not just from the people in Winnipeg. There are a lot of people who come from all parts of this province to leave their hard-earned dollars, if you like, in the sin capital, and that is the casino gaming centres in Winnipeg. Other cities do not have the ability to share in that revenue even though that revenue comes from all over the province.

Brandon, being the second largest city, it may have been given two police officers. I do not think that is very substantial in a sense when you have a city the size of Brandon to say that now with two police officers, we will address your crime issues.

I think the more important issue here is that the percentage of casino revenues is on an ongoing basis. It is on a go-forward basis so that it is there for them to be able to budget from year to year. That is not the kind of comfort level that was left with the city of Brandon.

I know the Premier talks to all the cities, and I see his minister is now going to whisper in his ear, but I want to know from the Premier, in his position as the Chair of Executive Council, why he would treat centres outside the city less equitably than he treats people in the city. I have no difficulty with us being fair to the people in Winnipeg, but why is there such an unfairness to people outside the city? I have addressed this with the mayor of Brandon, I have talked to other mayors as well across this province and nobody can understand or, I guess, rationalize why they are being treated in the way they are.

* (16:40)

Mr. Doer: I know the community of Brandon is very pleased to get two extra police officers paid for, and it is built into an ongoing commitment from us.

There are 20 more police officers in rural Manitoba. We feel the 5 percent for Winnipeg dedicated to police officers, plus the other—*[interjection]* Does that mean I am cut off? It is quite pretty music, though. If you could put on the Hallelujah Chorus here while I finish off my answer, all four parts of the Hallelujah Chorus, because you have four parts here. You have the Organized Crime Unit of the RCMP, who will work across Manitoba. You have more officers for the RCMP throughout Manitoba. You have more police officers in Brandon; two—

An Honourable Member: Four are retiring.

Mr. Doer: No, the funding is on top of the complement, and 20 police officers in Winnipeg. If you look at Winnipeg's population, which is 10 times that of Brandon, and you look at 20 in Winnipeg and 2 in Brandon, I do not want to get into a per capita, but it is certainly equitable. I can argue it on equitability.

Mr. Derkach: Madam Chair, I will let the Premier stand on his record and we will argue otherwise.

Madam Chair, rural Manitoba contributes significant dollars to the provincial treasury through their VLTs. During our tenure in government, we tried to share equitably with rural Manitoba those revenues. Those revenues were shared for programs like the Grow Bonds program, the REDI program, infrastructure program. They were identified so that it was transparent in terms of how much money was coming into the revenues from gaming, from the VLTs, in both city and urban, and it was transparent

in what money was going back to rural Manitobans for these programs.

Madam Chair, since this government has been in office, under this Premier's stewardship, I think they can boast of one, or maybe two Grow Bonds that have actually been started. Now, I remember the Premier's comments when he was Leader of the Opposition with regard to the Grow Bonds program and I understand his attitude, if it is still the same, about it.

But we have devastated the opportunities for economic development in rural Manitoba. It is largely because the Premier has chosen to do away with the department which was called Rural Development there. I do not know what, he could have renamed the department. But he has just merged it in with Agriculture now. Basically, it has blurred any division of responsibility, to begin with. Secondly, most of those programs are basically geared to agriculture-type programs and we do not have any champion, if you like—I use that word in quotation marks, I will come back to that later—but there is not any champion for those people who are small, emerging businesspeople in rural Manitoba.

I want to know why the Premier chose not to address that in his budget this time and at least give some, not notoriety, but at least some mention and some acknowledgment of how hardworking our rural people are in trying to establish businesses and run businesses in a very, very competitive and adverse environment today, not only because of what has happened in the drought and in the flood and in the prices and in BSE and all of those kinds of things. But we have some very, very struggling businesses out there that need that assistance and we do not have it now.

Now I know the minister will tell me that, oh, she has expanded the number of economic development offices to 10, I believe it is, from 7. But that is not the issue. The issue here is that, if I am a business in Winnipeg, I can go to the department of industry, trade and tourism, or I can go to the business department and I know that I am dealing with people who deal with business every day. But, when I am a business in rural Manitoba, I have to go to the Department of Agriculture to get my information. That, certainly, first of all, sends out a message and, secondly, it diminishes the kind of

respect that businesses out there should command from a government.

I want to know why the Premier chose not to address this by putting in at least a department that would look after the needs of businesses in rural Manitoba.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, we thought the biggest pain in terms of the economy in Manitoba that needed the biggest redress and, certainly, as a percentage of budget, was the farmers in Manitoba. We exceeded our promise that we made in 2003 because of the very serious situation with the weather, the prices on the grain and oilseed side and the issue of the cattle producers' loss of income.

We know that there has been some recovery in the hog industry income, but we know also the year before it went the other way; it went down. So we felt that we had to do something substantive, in that regard. That is why we put the \$20 million into the education tax on farmland. I talked to a lot of farmers, not just ones that were delegates at our event this weekend. Of course, when you are around the Keystone Centre, there are lots of people coming in for hockey games and curling games and dog shows and indoor soccer games and everything else, which, I think, will be aided and abetted by the \$15-million partnership agreement we have for the Keystone Centre. They like the fact that we have lowered those taxes. They are still very worried about this year's prices and they are still very worried about the trade disputes that are going on. So that is where our major priority was.

Our second priority was policing. We put a major amount of money into policing in Manitoba, and it is equitably distributed between the four components of policing: Brandon, Winnipeg, organized crime unit at the RCMP, and rural detachments. So that was the other concern we had, as all of us do, on safety.

The third issue is how do we invest in the future of agriculture and rural economies. We believe that putting money into the functional food centre and the nutraceutical centre at the University of Manitoba is an investment in businesses here in Manitoba, and agricultural businesses in Manitoba. We believe putting money into the St. Boniface Research Foundation, for its project on biomedical food is also an investment in our future. We believe that putting

money into the Food Development Centre at Portage is also an investment. We have other infrastructure proposals, and the minister has already talked about the slaughter requirement and funding the potato plant in Portage.

I think if you add up the investments they are substantial, but that is where our priorities were in this budget, and you asked me the question. In fact, we thought we should even pre-empt the budget to some degree with the announcement on a farm education tax rebate, based on the speech from the throne in '04-05.

Mr. Derkach: I am glad the Premier finally woke up to the fact that education tax rebate was an important element. We ran on that in 2003, and I remember the Premier's comments, "Where are they going to get the money? Show me the money." He said, "Show me the money." Well, the money was there, but the Premier chose to have his political blinkers on and, at that time, with that feigned indignation, he kept saying, "Where are we going to find this money? We would love to do it, but we cannot find the money."

I am glad he finally woke up to the fact that this is a priority for Manitobans, and that, in fact, he followed our lead, not adequately, not to its fullest, Madam Chair, but, certainly, he has started to follow the lead of this party, when we, in 2003, and I might say in 1999 we ran on the issues that we had to reduce and get rid of the education tax, which was such a negative tax, and which was such a derogatory tax, and did not reflect anything in terms of education, had nothing to do with education, but it was just an antiquated system that we had to rely on. I will give credit where credit is due. I just wish the Premier had moved the full way, because he could have in this budget.

But, Madam Chair, there still is not any money for the small and emerging businesses. I am going to give the Premier a little bit of a lesson on economics here, because, if he had looked at some of the positive stories out there in rural Manitoba with respect to how businesses have grown that started with a little Grow Bond, and I will refer to one. Now, sure, there were some failures, and he knows that in any kind of a venture of this kind, whether it is capital venture programs or a Grow Bond program, there will be losses. We do not need to get into the fight on venture capital programs, because, I think, I

can probably hold my own against the Premier on those.

* (16:50)

But, let me say that on the Grow Bond side, Madam Chair, there is a lot of evidence out there where Grow Bonds really worked to help small businesses grow and get into even larger businesses. I will name two, Elias Woodworking out of Winkler. There are, also, the Acrylon Plastics and Keystone Grain. There is also the flour mill at Portage, and the third one is Pizzey's Milling. Pizzey's Milling in Angusville grew out of a \$180,000 Grow Bond. Now he talks about nutraceuticals. Why did the Premier (Mr. Doer) not, when he was talking about this nutraceutical company and nutraceutical centre at the University of Manitoba, even take time to go and visit the nutraceutical centre in Angusville, Manitoba at the Pizzey's Milling? They are known worldwide. *[interjection]* Yeah, you have been there, but you do not know anything about it. Maybe you need to go out there and learn something about it because, as a matter of fact, their lab probably, at one time, rivalled the University of Manitoba laboratory. Today, they are doing business all around the world, and that is the kind of business that started with a \$180,000 Grow Bond. That company is as large as CanAmera Foods now. CanAmera Foods employs 53 people; Pizzey's Milling employs 54 people.

Now that is the kind of business I am talking about. That is the kind of endeavour I am talking about. That is the kind of investment that brings back untold benefits, not only to the government, but also, to the people working there. So that is why I am so offended by the fact that we no longer have a champion to go out and seek out those types of businesses that today could be the Pizzeys of this world. So, for that reason, I think that it is the leadership of the Premier here that has to take hold of what is out there, and that we really need to address that issue.

Having said that, I have one more question for the Premier and that has to do with rural health. I think it was probably June 1, 2003, the Premier came through the communities of Erickson, my constituents, and Rivers. My constituents, I will never forget this because, as the Premier drove out of town, I drove into town. I had a meeting with my constituents the very same day who were ecstatic because the Premier was just there, and he promised

the community of Erickson that their facility would not close, they would not lose services, and by the spring of 2004, their services would be restored to what they were before. You know, I have to tell you that that reminder is still on posters in Erickson. As a matter of fact, I think they are planning a billboard because they are asking the Premier where his commitment is that he made to them in 2003.

Now, it is clear that the Assiniboine Regional Health Authority CEO says, "If that is the Premier's promise, it is up to him to keep it, not mine." Those are her words. I understand that changes in health care delivery need to be made, but this was a commitment made by the Premier to the people of Erickson and surrounding area, and this is an area that is going to be opening up because of the tourism that goes on at Clear Lake. We have got 100 000-plus people living in that area in the summertime, and we do not have an appropriate medical facility next to that region.

So I want to ask the Premier whether or not he is still committed to those facilities in Erickson and in Rivers and, to a lesser extent, in Rossburn, who took from his promise that those facilities would continue to operate. I regret that those are in my area, but in the western side of this province we have seen, for example, in Russell, we used to have chemotherapy which has been discontinued. We had a promise of a dialysis unit that was supposed to be installed two years ago in August. It still has not been installed, and today we are operating with two doctors rather than the five we had. So there are some really, really big concerns in that area. I just want to ask the Premier whether or not he is still committed to ensuring that services in that part of the world are, indeed, going to be restored to what they used to be.

Mr. Doer: Well, we have been able to really succeed, I think, in Gladstone in terms of recruiting more doctors, retaining more presence and going from what the situation was to a better situation. I am also happy that we have been able to deploy a lot more ambulances, including in that area to areas adjacent to the Sandy Bay First Nations community. I think we have to have the same—

An Honourable Member: No, it is the wrong side of the province. I am not near Sandy Bay.

Mr. Doer: The whole issue of doctor recruitment—

An Honourable Member: Why do you not talk about Emerson, too?

Mr. Doer: The whole issue of doctor recruitment is a real challenge for us, and I agree with the member about the tourism realities of Erickson. I said that when actually it was kind of an anniversary I think I was at. It was not kind of a political event. I do not think I spoke at the event, and I would have been there no matter whether there was an election or not. I was in Cabinet when we actually approved the capital for the Erickson hospital. I know it was opened by the members opposite. I think when the member opposite goes back in his memory, when he and I were just wet-behind-the-ears rookies, I think that capital was approved.

This one was built. You cut the ribbons. We built that one and you cut the ribbon. *[interjection]*

There is a huge number of people, there is growth in First Nations communities in and around Erickson as well that have raised issues. We are, and I know the minister is trying to deal with this whole issue of doctor recruitment and retention in some of these communities. The member opposite raised the issue of Russell. It is a challenge for us.

Secondly, the Rivers hospital. I did make comments there, and there is no question that we would like to keep those commitments.

Mr. Derkach: Just one quick follow-up on that one, Madam Chair. The Premier says, "We want to fulfil our commitments." Is that a yes? Can I tell people in Erickson that in fact their hospital will be returned to a hospital that does handle emergency situations as well as regular patients?

Mr. Doer: We do not have the ability to tether doctors to hospitals. You could show them the Hansard, and you and I both talked about our visit to that community. We both acknowledge the issue. You acknowledged the issue of tourism, and I acknowledged also the issue of First Nations that are in around that community. I know you have raised it before when you have raised questions in the House. We have a challenge. I acknowledge what the member has said, and I also acknowledge the challenge that we have to implement that. We were successful in Gladstone.

The other issue of Rivers is another issue. I have not been briefed lately on it, but I probably have to be. There is no quote. We try to keep the commitments we made to those people, and I did make a commitment in Rivers. It is in your colleague's constituency. There is a lot of pressure in rural Manitoba. We know that there are numbers and there are doctors and there are retention issues. The member opposite has gone to meetings with the Assiniboine—is it called the Assiniboine now?

Some Honourable Members: The Assiniboine Regional.

Mr. Doer: The Assiniboine Regional Health Centre. He has acknowledged the challenges in meetings about retaining doctors, and I actually think this is bigger than partisan politics because we have had more doctors graduate, we are retaining more doctors, but the challenge of recruiting them to communities is tough, and we have got to keep working at it. What are the ingredients that allow doctors particularly—I mean, part of it is getting more doctors in medical school. We are doing that part. Part of it is also getting more rural students from rural communities into medical school. Part of it is also having the incentives, forgive debt if they locate their practices in Manitoba. We are doing that too. There are communities that are underdoctored right now, and I will be the first to admit it.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Madam Chair, I just have a couple of questions for the Premier before he leaves. Certainly he is saying it is difficult, that there are some very serious issues in rural Manitoba, in other areas, and in the cities of Winnipeg and Brandon when it comes to health care, but we have had unprecedented increase in federal transfers to this province.

* (17:00)

Mr. Harry Schellenberg, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

This Premier (Mr. Doer) and the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) continue to make promises that they cannot keep, and then come back and say, "Oh, well, it is tough. It is tough. We have to make these tough decisions." Well, do not make the promises if you cannot keep them. That is what I would say to that, but my specific question is for the Premier.

We are discussing here today, I have some serious concerns when it comes to the budget itself, and I know the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) and the Premier today are asking for the ability to spend 35 percent more in 20 percent of the time, 35 percent of the budget for next year in 20 percent of the time. I guess I just have some concerns surrounding that when it comes to health care and specifically when it came to some comments that the Minister of Health made back in December of this year with respect to the budget for last year.

You know, the minister did say at the time, and I quote, "We really had no intention of ever meeting the budget for Health." It is in April and you know I have some serious concerns when they are asking to spend 35 percent more of a budget. I mean, which budget are we talking about? Are the numbers that are in this budget correct, or are we going to be finding out in December of this year that they deliberately were not good enough, that they deliberately fudged the numbers and so on.

So I guess I would ask the Premier of this province did your colleague the Minister of Health misspeak at the time, and, Mr. Premier, were you aware that the Minister of Health and, I guess, the Minister of Finance never had any intention of meeting the budget for Health.

Mr. Doer: The issue of health care budgeting, I would point out to the member opposite, the largest overexpenditure in Health was in 1999-2000 and the year previous, the two largest increases. Part of it was due to a doctors' arbitration, and part of it was to do with volume of medical procedures, part of it, and also drug costs in terms of utility and cost of drugs.

I cannot see anything in Hansard, if the member opposite can show me anything in Hansard, but those are a couple of the variables in health care. There are also issues of settlements in collective bargaining. You know, 80 percent of costs in health care are bargaining costs. You had members, even on your own side, the former critic, standing up and asking us to fix the pension liability mess in health care that they had left to us from the spring of 1999 and we just write a cheque here, write a cheque there, so there were some variables in that Health budget.

One of them was the pension liability. One was a major number of groups that were bargaining, and 80 percent of the costs, I think, are in collective

bargaining. I believe in the '04-05 year we had nurses. We had health care support staff. We had doctors. We had specialists. We had some lab staff. I think we had a lot of bargaining in the '04-05 year, and so some of these numbers, both volume and drugs—I think if you look at Hansard, you will look to see, when you look at the overall budget, that we outperformed what our predictions were last year in terms of the macro budget.

We outperformed on GAAP. We outperformed on balanced budget legislation. We outperformed on how much money we could put in the rainy day fund. On a macro basis we did better than we predicted on some individual items, and I am sure that in the minister's Estimates—you will go through them—there are various items, some of the items that were even decried by members opposite, some of the drugs that we changed from requiring an automatic prescription to a doctor reference prescription, if you go back and look at it, the minister, the former Minister of Health, two of those drugs are under investigation by the Food and Drug Administration in the United States.

I think in terms of Hansard predictions, we are not as high as being over-budgeted from previous years, '98 and '99 being two in question, but we are hopeful that some of the utility of drugs, or pharmaceuticals, rather, and volumes on medical procedures will be consistent with what we predicted, but those are the two variables, along with salaries, that worry us. We have more predictability of salaries now because we have more settlements.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Chair, well, I guess you know the concern that I have here is that this Minister of Finance and this government has a bill before the House now, that we are debating, asking for the ability to spend 35 percent of their budget for next year within the next few months. I guess, my concern is that, certainly, with the Department of Health last year the minister, himself, stated that they never had any intention of ever meeting the budget and, I guess, I would be concerned about this budget this year, which has been tabled, and what they are asking to spend 35 percent of.

I know the member, the Premier (Mr. Doer), the member opposite has been a member of this Legislature for a very long time, including having spent a fair amount of time in opposition as well, where he and members opposite relied on budget estimates to do their job in this Legislature. I guess, I

would question, you know, when we cannot trust the documents that are put before us, how can we do and serve Manitobans to the best of our ability, and how can we have appropriate debate and so on in this House if we cannot trust the budget estimates that are tabled in this House?

The Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) made it very clear that he had no intention of ever meeting the budget for Health last year. I guess, I would ask the Premier, again, was it his intention as the Premier of this province to allow that to happen, and did your colleague misspeak, or is this something that you are aware of that your government never had any intention of ever meeting the budget for Health last year.

Mr. Doer: Well, the majority of years we have outperformed our overall budget numbers. We have outperformed the overall macro numbers. So you will find that, in even the last two years, we have not budgeted money to come from the rainy day fund to make the debt payment. So you will find that on a macro basis, in terms of the bill before the House, which, by the way, we have had a few occasions to deal with Supply bills like this when the budget was presented in March by the previous government. We, certainly, knew that after the budget was presented it was better.

You know, I just want to say to members opposite, if you do not bring a budget in by the end of March and do not sit, then you sign a special warrant without a budget. So this is a much better way, I think, democratically, of having a full budget first with the Interim Supply bill before the Legislature. The old way of doing it—we did it a few years, in fact, many years—was to have the budget in April. So we have really worked hard to try to get it in on time this year and have an Interim Supply bill, which usually takes, is superior for Cabinet, in terms of Cabinet signing a special warrant.

The macro numbers last year were maintained, and we exceeded them. I think, three out of the 5 years we have actually exceeded our revenue expenditure items on the whole. There were some monies forwarded by the federal government during the year. September 14, I believe, we had a First Ministers' meeting, and there were some funds to flow in this fiscal year from the money from Ottawa; that was one of the conditions. So part of that did

flow, consistent with that, but part of it was also wage increases that, obviously, are not.

You will find, if you want to go back in '98 and '99, and you will talk to former members of the Treasury bench, they did not put all the wage increases in the budget before they started negotiating. That was former Minister Stefanson when he was the Minister of Finance in '98 and former Minister Gilleshammer, with Minister Stefanson as Minister of Health in '99.

* (17:10)

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, we are clearly not getting an answer from the Premier as to whether or not his colleague misspoke, and I would gather from him that he did not, and that they did deliberately mislead the House when it comes to the health care budget for last year. I find that extremely unfortunate when we are just trying to do our jobs here and make sure that this government is held accountable. We can only go with the numbers that are put before us, Mr. Chair, and I think it is rather unfortunate that when it comes to the numbers that are put before us, if those numbers are in question, which they are, I think it is a question of the credibility and the integrity of the government as well.

I guess I would ask the Minister of Health, then, if he could answer the same question. Was it his intention as he stated to the *Winnipeg Free Press* reporter that he and his government never had any intention of ever meeting the budget for Health it set in April? He went on to say, "We had reduced the budget for Health to an absolutely unattainable level in terms of reduction." Is the Minister of Health saying that he was misquoted there, or is this an actual fact that this government fudged the numbers?

Mr. Doer: I think I got dismissed.

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Health): I think that the First Minister has answered this question very well in terms of the number of the things that happened during the '04-05 fiscal year in terms of collective bargaining issues. We certainly did not run a deficit that was anywhere near the size of the one that we inherited from the previous government in that year in which we formed government.

I also reject the statements of the member. I do not think she will find in the *Free Press* article any

of the preamble that she put on the record. I certainly made no statements about misleading or any of those other kinds of things that she has kind of quietly read into the article. So I reject those.

I think I explained very fully in one set of Question Period that the situation in which we found ourselves going into the '04-05 year was a situation in which we had had no increases from the federal government that were sustainable. We had a situation where we were still recovering from SARS; BSE was in full flight in terms of the impacts on our economy. We were in the process of weathering the worst drought since the 1940s, and in terms of the impacts on our farm community we had a very serious situation on our hands.

So I think I recalled in that same Question Period the fact that beginning in 1985, the Mulroney government, for whom the now Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Murray) was a spear chucker at some points in the various election campaigns that he was involved in, reduced the funding to health and higher education first by 1 percent, then by 2 percent, and then froze it in 1990 budget. The hatchet job on health, higher education and social services was completed by the now-Prime Minister in 1994-1995 when he reduced the funding to all the provinces by \$7 billion.

Thankfully, due to the work of our previous Health Minister, the Member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) and our Premier and our team, we were able to take part in a historic beginning of the righting of the wrongs in September of this past year in Ottawa in a pretty marathon encounter in which we came out of that, if not with a large bucketful of money, at least with some certainty for the first time in, actually, 20 years.

We now have formula that provides for a floor that is a little more reasonable, and that certainly is reflected in last year's increase of some \$76 million which came in year, I would remind the member opposite. We did not know that money would come when we set the budget in the fall and winter of 2003-2004 when we were setting the '04-05 budget. We certainly had no certainty, no knowledge that \$76 million would indeed flow later in fiscal year '04-05.

Now, we were delighted that happened, but the member opposite may not realize that in that same

year we lost approximately \$96 million in federal funding, which had been some of the one-time or short-term grants which had been put in place for things like Primary Health Care Transition Fund and the Medical Equipment Fund and the one-time gap closure, all sorts of one-time and short-term money.

So, as we went into that budget year, we were faced with a very difficult situation in terms of our revenue base, and we planned accordingly, Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker. Our budget was a correct reflection of what we knew at the time. The member will probably realize that, as our Premier (Mr. Doer) said, in any situation where you have federal revenues as a major part of your budget, history is replete with examples of federal revenues shifting dramatically throughout the year. We were pleased to receive \$76 million that we had not budgeted for.

In fact, the real shortfall in Health turned out to be about \$20 million or so. That is a pretty good record considering what other provinces have faced over the last few years and what, although she was not part of the government, her government left to us in 1999 where they essentially spent and committed something in the order of \$200 million that they did not put into the budget and we had to find. So I think that she should just reflect on some of that history.

Mrs. Stefanson: We have asked the Premier this question because I see this as a very serious issue. If numbers are put forward in this House with respect to Estimates, we would expect that the government lives up to those numbers they are putting forward, that they know at the time that those numbers are their numbers that they know to the best of their ability.

What this Minister of Health said is that, and I quote right from the article. It says, "We had reduced the budget for Health to an absolutely unattainable level in terms of reductions." Prior to this, it says, "The Province really had no intention of ever meeting the budget for Health it set in April because it expected the federal government would bail it out."

I am just concerned about the numbers that are being put before us. When we are debating the numbers, we expect that those numbers are correct. I guess I would ask the Minister of Finance today whether or not he feels that his colleague was misquoted in this article in the *Winnipeg Free Press* or if, in fact, he worked with the Minister of Health

and knowingly put forth Estimates documents in this House for health care in our province.

Was his minister misquoted, or was this something that deliberately took place in this House where, as it says, as the Minister of Health said, the Province really had no intention of ever meeting the budget for Health?

Mr Selinger: The dichotomy the member puts forward is a false dichotomy. The budget that was printed last year was the budget that the government believed was adequate and sufficient to deal with the health care challenges, even though the federal contribution had been reduced by \$105 million.

As to whether or not the media is accurate or not, I have no idea. I do not take responsibility for what the media prints, but we all have to deal with it.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I would like to ask the Minister of Education why he is refusing to meet with the Manitoba Teachers' Society to discuss their concerns about their pensions.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): Well, quite frankly, I am not refusing to meet with the Manitoba Teachers' Society. I do meet with all stakeholders on a regular basis. They have met with me to discuss their pension issues, and certainly we are aware of their concerns.

* (17:20)

Mrs. Driedger: It is interesting that the minister is making that comment because right now the teachers are in the process of sending around all of these cards. We are all receiving hundreds of them, including letters and e-mails, and they are indicating that they care about their pension plan. They want to be sure that it is there for them when they retire, but they are also saying that their pension plan needs attention and legislative reform to stay healthy, and they have said that this provincial government, the NDP government, refuses to talk about it. So, with the minister's comment that he just made, can he indicate why it is different from what the teachers are saying, because the teachers are saying that the government is refusing to talk to them about their pension?

Mr. Bjornson: Mr. Chair, certainly, our record is quite clear with respect to what we have done on

teacher pensions. First and foremost, we have already opened the act three times in our five years, pardon me, six years in office. As far as the meetings are concerned with respect to the teachers, I have been meeting with them on a regular basis. The last time we met and talked about the pension issue was December of '04, when their issues were raised. I have since had conversations with them, but I do meet with the Teachers' Society on a regular basis. Again, our record is very clear with respect to the pension.

As far as our commitment, we have started funding teacher pensions, which is something that has not been done in the past, of course the \$3.2-billion millstone that was hanging around our neck with regards to the unfunded liability, as well as the fact that we are funding pensions of new teachers at a full government contribution to new teacher pensions, so our commitment is very clear with respect to our dialogue with the teachers and our concerns around their pension and the viability of the program.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, could the minister then explain because the Manitoba Teachers' Society and the teachers involved in it are indicating that the provincial government refuses to talk to them about it, but he is in here right now saying that he has talked about it? Could the minister then please explain why there are these differences because in essence based on his comments right now in the House, he is saying that the teachers are not telling the truth?

Mr. Bjornson: What I have said, and I will say it again, is that on December 10 of 2004, we met with table officers from the Teachers' Society. They raised their concerns around pension. We talked to them about their concerns and how we would commit to addressing those concerns. I have had a conversation with the president of the Teachers' Society, a telephone conversation where that was reiterated to the president and, as I said, we will stand by our record with respect to how much we have done for teacher pensions. We certainly intend to work and address this issue.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Chairperson, the Manitoba Teachers' Society said that they did a presentation to the minister two years ago, and in that presentation they demonstrated how, at the current rate of teacher retirement with baby boomers starting to retire now

and current contributions, they are saying that the pension plan will be in trouble in a few years, and that they have not heard anything from the government since then.

Basically, Mr. Chair, from the comments I am hearing from the teachers, they are indicating to me that the government is refusing to talk to them about this issue. They have launched a massive card campaign, e-mails, letters and phone calls indicating on the cards that the NDP government refuses to talk about it. Now, this is somewhat troubling because the minister is indicating he has spoken to them about it. He has discussed this issue of concern to them, but that the teachers are indicating that the provincial government is refusing to talk about it. Could the minister please explain then why there could be these differences in comment?

Mr. Bjornson: Again, I will reiterate our record on this issue. As I said, one of the first things that we did to address issues around pension was start to fund the unfunded liability that was hanging around Manitoba's neck since the 1960s, the \$3.2-billion liability. We have been funding the entire government contribution for pensions for teachers, for new teachers, that is to say, as well. We have opened the act three times, and we are, certainly, prepared to open the act once again to address these issues.

We have been meeting with teachers, as I meet with every stakeholder. I know that my previous critic used to say that you do not consult enough. Well, rest assured, we consult with all our stakeholders on issues of mutual concern. The viability of the pension is a concern for us and we will continue to work with Manitoba teachers to address that issue.

We have a process that we are engaged in, and that involves the teacher Pension Task Force among others, and meeting dates have been set to address this issue.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Harry Schellenberg): Order, please. Too many conversations.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister give us an idea of when those dates are where meetings are set up with MTS to discuss this issue?

Mr. Bjornson: Well, once again, we are engaged in a process, and I will take that on notice, because I do not have the dates available in front of me.

Mrs. Driedger: Could the minister give any indication if those meeting dates are in the near future? I do not need specifics, but can he indicate are there meetings scheduled for March or April?

Mr. Bjornson: I believe I have a few meetings lined up in March and April with the various teacher groups, yes.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Chair, the Manitoba Teachers' Society said that they have raised concern about their pensions at every opportunity. They have said, and I am reiterating what I am hearing from teachers, whether I am meeting them on the street or reading the cards and letters that are coming in, they are saying that the provincial government has not only refused to act, but refuses to even discuss it. Now, I cannot imagine they are going to go on this major campaign and put out information indicating that the government is refusing to discuss it, and now we sit here with the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson) who says he is discussing it.

This is somewhat disturbing, Mr. Chair, in terms of the information that the minister is putting forward. He is indicating that he has spoken to them, and they are saying no, he has not spoken to them on this specific pension issue. Can the minister indicate here who, then, is telling the truth?

Mr. Bjornson: Mr. Chair, as I have said, when we met with the Teachers' Society on a number of different occasions, they have raised a number of issues with us, and, certainly, they have raised the issue of pension with us, and, certainly, we have said that we would take their concerns forward and address their concerns. I recall being a part of a lobby back in the 1990s around the funding of the unfunded pension liability. I was part of that lobby back in 1994, but it was this government that acted on that particular issue. It has everything to do with it as we were looking at an unfunded liability and talking about the sustainability of the pension.

So, yes, I have been meeting with the Teachers' Society. I meet with MAST, I meet with all stakeholders. We take their concerns forward. We assess those concerns, and we work with them to try and find resolution, and as I said, we met in December of '04. I have had conversations with the executive, and telephone conversations. We are meeting in March. We are meeting in April, and we

intend to move forward to work with them for resolution.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, I will just take a moment to read the cards. We have received hundreds and hundreds of these cards.

An Honourable Member: Thousands.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, it could be thousands by now, and I would like to read the card to the minister, and it starts out, "I care about my pension. As a public school teacher in Manitoba, I educate the next generation of literate and productive citizens, and contribute directly to the quality of life and economic well-being of this province. Like any other employee, I care about my pension plan. I want to make sure it is there for me when I retire, but the teachers' pension plan needs attention and legislative reform to stay healthy, and this provincial government refuses to talk about it. Like all teachers, I am willing to invest in my own future by contributing my share. That has never been an issue, but we need the Government of Manitoba to do its part. We want government to talk to us about our pensions."

Can the Minister of Education please tell us why teachers are having to go to this extreme to send out thousands of cards to try to get the government's attention, when, in fact, this minister is saying he does talk to them about their pension issues? He has spoken to them, and, yet, they said they met with the government two years ago, and they cannot get the government's attention on this issue since the government refuses to discuss it. That is why they have gone this route of putting out these cards.

Can the minister please explain why they would feel they have to go this length—

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Harry Schellenberg): Order, please.

Committee rise. Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Speaker: The hour being 5:30 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow (Tuesday).

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, March 21, 2005

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