

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 29, 2010

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 31—The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2010

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Finance):

Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the First Minister, that Bill 31, The Budget Implementation and Tax Statutes Amendment Act, 2010, be now read for a first time.

Motion presented.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, this bill implements the measures of the 2010 Manitoba budget and makes various other amendments to tax and financial legislations and also implements the fiscal management measures as part of Manitoba's five-year economic plan announced in the budget.

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

PETITIONS

Mount Agassiz Ski Area

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

And these are the reasons for this petition:

For several decades, the Mount Agassiz ski area, home to the highest vertical between Thunder Bay and the Rocky Mountains, was a popular skiing and snowboarding destination for Manitobans and visitors alike.

The operations of the Mount Agassiz ski area were very important to the local economy, not only creating jobs, but also generating sales of goods and services at area businesses.

In addition, a thriving rural economy generates tax revenue that helps pay for core provincial government services and infrastructure which benefits all Manitobans.

Although the ski facility closed in 2000, there remains strong interest in seeing it reopened and Parks Canada has committed to conducting a

feasibility study with respect to the Agassiz site and future opportunities in the area.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the appropriate ministers of the provincial government to consider outlining to Parks Canada the importance that a viable recreation facility in the Mount Agassiz area would play in the local and provincial economies.

And to request that the appropriate ministers of the provincial government consider working with all stakeholders, including Parks Canada, to help develop a plan for a viable, multiseason recreation facility in the Mount Agassiz area.

And this petition is signed by C. Glover, M. Mulligan, F. Lesawich and many, many other fine Manitobans.

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

Multiple Myeloma Treatments

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Health Canada has approved the use of Revlimid for patients with multiple myeloma, a rare, progressive and fatal blood cancer.

Revlimid is a vital new treatment that must be accessible to all patients in Manitoba for this life-threatening cancer of the blood cells.

Multiple myeloma is treatable and new innovative therapies like Revlimid can extend survival and enhance quality of life for the estimated 2,100 Canadians diagnosed annually.

The provinces of Ontario, Québec, British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Alberta have already listed this drug on their respective pharmacare formularies.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

That the provincial government consider immediately providing Revlimid as a choice to patients with multiple myeloma and their health-care providers in Manitoba through public funding.

And the petition is signed by D. Votto, D. Amey, J. Premak and many, many others.

Waste-Water Ejector Systems

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition:

Manitobans are deeply committed to protecting the environment, and they want to be assured that the provincial environmental policies are based on sound science.

In early 2009, the provincial government announced that it was reviewing the Onsite Wastewater Management Systems Regulation under The Environment Act.

Affected Manitobans, including property owners and municipal governments, provided considerable feedback to the provincial government on the impact of the proposed changes, only to have their input ignored.

The updated regulations includes a prohibition on the installation of new waste-water ejectors and the elimination of existing waste-water ejectors at the time of any property transfer.

Questions have been raised about the lack of scientific basis for these changes, as a Manitoba Conservation official stated in October the 8th, 2009, edition of the *Manitoba Co-operator*, "Have we done a specific study? No."

These regulatory changes will have a significant financial impact on all affected Manitobans.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the Minister of Conservation to consider immediately placing the recent changes to the Onsite Wastewater Management Systems Regulation under The Environment Act on hold until such time that a review can take place to ensure that they are based on sound science.

To request the Minister of Conservation to consider implementing the prohibition on waste-water ejector systems on a case-by-case basis as determined by environmental need in ecologically sensitive areas.

To request the Minister of Conservation to consider offering financial incentives to help affected Manitoba property owners adapt to these regulatory changes.

And this petition, Mr. Speaker, is signed by S. Glenn, K. Wozney, D. Drul and many, many other Manitobans. Thank you.

Multiple Myeloma Treatments

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

And these are the reasons for this petition:

Health Canada has approved the use of Revlimid for patients with multiple myeloma, a rare, progressive and fatal blood cancer.

Revlimid is a vital new treatment that must be accessible to all patients in Manitoba for this life-threatening cancer of the blood cells.

Multiple myeloma is treatable, and new, innovative therapies like Revlimid can extend survival and enhance quality of life for the estimated 2,100 Canadians diagnosed annually.

The provinces of Ontario, Québec, British Columbia, Saskatchewan and Alberta have already listed this drug on their respective pharmacare formularies.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

That the provincial government consider immediately providing Revlimid as a choice to patients with multiple myeloma and their health-care providers in Manitoba through public funding.

And Mr. Speaker, this petition is signed by C. Sarna, L. Wozny, L. Koscielny and many, many others.

Ophthalmology Services—Swan River

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I wish to present the following petition to the Legislative Assembly.

These are the reasons for this petition:

The Swan Valley region has a high population of seniors and a very high incidence of diabetes. Every year, hundreds of patients from the Swan Valley region must travel to distant communities for cataract surgery and additional pre-operative and post-operative appointments.

These patients, many of whom are sent as far away as Saskatchewan, need to travel with an escort who must take time off work to drive the patient to his or her appointments without any compensation. Patients who cannot endure this expense and hardship are unable to have the necessary treatment.

The community has located an ophthalmologist who would like to practise in Swan River. The local Lions Club has provided funds for the necessary equipment, and the Swan River Valley hospital has space to accommodate this service.

The Minister of Health has told the Town of Swan River that it has insufficient infrastructure and patient volumes to support a cataract surgery program; however, residents of the region strongly disagree.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Health to consider rethinking her refusal to allow an ophthalmologist to practise in Swan River and to consider working with the community to provide this service without further delay.

And this is signed by J. Carriere, M. Blazenko, D. Mills and many, many others, Mr. Speaker.

PTH 15–Twinning

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

* (13:40)

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

This is signed by E. Cook, O. Fouillard, N. Newlove and many, many Manitobans. Thank you.

Medical Clinic in Weston and Brooklands Area

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

Community-based medical clinics provide a valuable health-care service.

The closure of the Westbrook Medical Clinic has left both Weston and Brooklands without a community-based medical clinic.

We petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

To urge the provincial government to consider how important it is to have a medical clinic located in the Weston-Brooklands area.

Mr. Speaker, this is signed by N. Waagenaar, M. Fleury, A. Wheeler and many, many other fine Manitobans. Thank you.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Minister of Conservation): Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table the 2010-2011 Estimates for the Department of Conservation, as well as the 2010-2011 Estimates for the Manitoba Sustainable Development Innovations Fund.

Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table the 2010-2011 Supplementary Information, the Estimates for Aboriginal and Northern Affairs.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us today, we have Colette Gentes-Hawn and Graeme Gardner, who are the guests of the honourable Minister of Labour and Immigration (Ms. Howard).

And also in the gallery, we have the following members of the Winnipeg Dance Preservation Initiative: Stephanie Ballard, director of Winnipeg Dance Preservation; Rachel Browne, founding artistic director, Winnipeg Contemporary Dancers; Nicole Owens, director, Dance Winnipeg; Robyn Thomson Kackirlo, member of the Kaha:wi Dance Theatre; and Debra Zoerb, representing the Royal Winnipeg Ballet.

And also in the public gallery we have from Kelvin High School, we have 30 grade 9 students under the direction of Mr. Gerry Urbanovich. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard).

And also in the public gallery we have from Dakota Collegiate, we have 23 grade 9 students under the direction of Jordan Bronsdon. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Minister for Education (Ms. Allan).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Provincial Debt Increase

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): For months now, the Premier has been saying in this House and to Manitobans that we're in the midst of the worst recession since the Great Depression, Mr. Speaker.

The numbers that have come out this morning tell a completely different story. Once again, Mr. Speaker, the facts are at odds with the Premier's rhetoric. The facts are that Manitoba escaped from the recession last year. We're not currently in a recession. It was essentially flat for 2009.

And yet in the context of all of that, Mr. Speaker, this government is proposing to run up more than \$2 billion worth of deficits over a five-year period, add \$2.3 billion to the debt this year alone, the biggest increase in debt in the history of Manitoba over a one-year period.

I want to ask the Premier, Mr. Speaker, if he has manufactured a fake economic crisis in order to justify an NDP experiment at the expense of the next generation of Manitoba taxpayers.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): The only people that manufactured this global recession were people that follow his political philosophy out of New York,

Mr. Speaker. They're the ones that put in place a series of financial instruments for which there was no accountability, no understanding where the risk laid, and when this financial system melted down in the United States, it infected the entire global economy, including Manitoba which did very well in the midst of that global recession.

And he is correct. Essentially, he is correct in this sense. The economy was essentially flat last year. The reality is, however, we have obligations to Manitobans, obligations to provide teachers in classrooms, obligations to provide nurses at the bedside, obligations to put police on the street for neighbourhood security, and we have taken those obligations seriously in the way we have designed this budget.

This budget will pay \$600 million down in debt. This budget will fund teachers' pension liabilities and civil service liabilities with operational money every single year, and the members opposite will vote against it.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. McFadyen: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again, only in NDP land can they call a \$2.3-billion increase in debt a pay down in debt. It's the same former Finance Minister who said Crocus was strong, the same former Hydro minister who's running Hydro into the ground, the same minister who goes from one disaster to another. Now he says that rising debt is falling debt. He's got severe problems with credibility when it comes to the finances of Manitoba.

Will the Premier today apologize for the phony crisis that he was trying to sell? Will he apologize for \$2.3 billion in debt for his stadium deal and his bipole and his advertising on *Desperate Housewives*, Mr. Speaker, and will he get his priorities straight by focussing on front lines and living within his means?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, last year, Canada lost 420,000 jobs and the member wants to say it's a phony crisis, and I say, shame on him for sticking his head in the sand and ignoring reality.

We are generating—with our stimulus program this year, Mr. Speaker, we are generating 29,000 additional jobs in Manitoba; 29,000 additional jobs to build schools, to build hospitals, to build personal care homes, to build roads, to build water treatment systems, to build sewage treatment systems, to build recreation facilities, to educate young people and new educational facilities at the university.

Just this week, we announced Project Domino. We will contribute 47 million. It will be a \$150-million investment in the University of Manitoba, the largest capital project in the history of the university.

Members opposite will vote against it. We will move Manitoba forward; they will take it backwards.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, debt is the fastest rising expenditure in the provincial budget today. It's resulting in programs being closed for adult education in Portage la Prairie, the cancellation of programs for kids who are hearing impaired in Transcona. It's resulting in the cancellation of addiction facilities in downtown Winnipeg. It's resulting in the delay or the cuts to schools in Manitoba, and it is resulting in a legacy of debt for the next generation of Manitobans.

His ideological cousin, Gordon Brown, who oversaw the financial mess in the U.K., Mr. Speaker, he's the one who's bringing those financial practices to Manitoba. It's wrong for Great Britain; it's wrong for Manitoba.

Will he today apologize for the fact that today in Bill 31 the highlight is protecting his salary and the salary of his NDP cronies?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, when the members opposite were in office, they spent 13 cents on the dollar for the debt. Under us, this year, we are spending 6 cents on the dollar for debt.

* (13:50)

The members opposite, they would say they would balance the budget this year. They would lay off teachers. They would lay off nurses. They would not fund police services properly. They would negatively impact social services, Mr. Speaker. They would hack away at cultural programs.

We are continuing to support these activities because they keep Manitobans working. They keep Manitobans providing services. And, yes, we have a stimulus program that will generate 29,000 person-years of employment at a time when employment across this country is down. This will be to the benefit of Manitoba. This will be to the benefit of our economy, and we will do it in a fiscally responsible way, with half the debt responsibility on a per capita basis.

It will be better than it was when they were in office, at 6 cents on the dollar versus 13 cents on the dollar. The member opposite is blowing smoke.

Provincial Debt Increase

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is, had this government properly managed the finances of this province over the last 11 years, they would have paid down the debt and used—and, thereby, decreasing the debt-servicing cost. That money could have gone towards more social programs, to the most needy people in our province. They chose not to do that.

Mr. Speaker, yesterday, Stats Canada came out with a report indicating that Manitoba economy fared well compared to other provinces across Canada. Well, if it fared so well, why did they increase the debt by more than \$2.25 billion, and why are they running a deficit?

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite wants to know why we are spending money during this downturn in the economy. We are spending money so that nurses will be at the bedsides in the hospitals. We are spending money so teachers will be in the classroom. We are spending money so that police officers will be on the streets. We are spending money so the amount of child care can increase.

Mr. Speaker, the member opposite talks about the amount that we have paid—that we are not paying off the deficit. I want the debt—I want to set the record clear. In over 10 years, we have allocated nearly a billion dollars towards reducing the debt and pension liability, pension liabilities that no one ever addressed on that side of the House.

Mrs. Stefanson: The minister said in Estimates, and I quote: "nobody anticipated the economic downturn that was coming." According to Stats Canada, Manitoba's economy fared better than every other province across Canada with the exception of P.E.I.

Will they admit, Mr. Speaker, that the problem is not a world-wide recession? The problem is the fact that they have a serious spending problem.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite wants to be in denial that there is no recession or there was no recession, she should look at some of the statistics. Look at the numbers of jobs that were lost in Canada. Look at the—what's happened to economies around the world. She may not want to believe it, but there is a recession.

And Manitoba has fared reasonably well, but they are—we are faring well because of our

investments: investments in stimulus, investments in training, investments in technology. It is because we have an NDP government in Manitoba. It's because we have a stable economy that we are faring better than others. But we are feeling the impacts, Mr. Speaker, and we are working on it.

Mrs. Stefanson: Under that logic, Mr. Speaker, why don't—why doesn't the government just borrow another 23 point whatever billion dollars and pay down all the debt? Pay it all down. It's an unbelievable argument.

Mr. Speaker, last year's budget, the most recent forecast expenditures indicate that spending—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. We need to be able to hear your question here. Let's have some co-operation, please. We have a lot of guests in the gallery to come hear the questions and the answers, and I'm asking the co-operation of all honourable members.

The honourable member for Tuxedo has the floor.

Mrs. Stefanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

And, Mr. Speaker, last year's budget, to the most recent forecast in expenditures, indicate that spending last year was up by 4.1 percent, a significant increase in expenditures over last year, even though they claim that we were in a worldwide recession.

Will the minister just admit that the problem has nothing to do with a worldwide recession, but has everything to do that this NDP government has a significant spending problem, Mr. Speaker?

Ms. Wowchuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, the member opposite says we have a spending problem, and I say to her—I say to her to listen to what her colleagues have asked for. Every second time they ask for a question they asked for more spending. They don't say don't build a hospital in my constituency. They don't say don't fix the road in my constituency. They have seen the benefits of the stimulus money that we have put in. But we also have to look at our record, and I would encourage the member opposite to look at the budget, as she has said, and Manitoba's per capita expenditure increase is lower—second lowest in the country, lower than almost all—every other jurisdiction besides B.C.

We are prudent, Mr. Speaker, but we are making sound investments. We ensure that our economy works, and to ensure that we are protecting those front-line services—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Western Provinces Partnership Agreement Premier's Attendance

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Western Canadian provinces are working together to build the economy of the future, and the focus in Saskatchewan, Alberta and B.C. is to work together in order to create more jobs and more income for their people to support health care and other initiatives going forward.

I want to ask the Premier if he can confirm that he'll be in Regina tomorrow for this exciting announcement regarding co-operation among western provinces.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, we were in Yorkton, Saskatchewan, in January to have the first ever joint Cabinet meeting between the government of Saskatchewan and the government of Manitoba, a historic first for two provinces, which have been side by side for so many decades in this country. And at that meeting we talked about things that we could do to improve transportation. We talked about what we could do to help each other with clean energy. We talked about education strategies. We talked about how we can continue to co-operate together to further the prospects for our citizens in both Saskatchewan and Manitoba and, of course, for all Canadians, and the member knows that.

We will continue to work with Saskatchewan. We're working with Alberta on matters of securities regulation. I was in Copenhagen with the Premier of British—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Come on. It goes the same for questions and the answers. We have a lot of people here trying to hear the questions and the answers. We don't need any yelling in the House here. Let's have some co-operation, please, all honourable members.

The honourable First Minister has the floor.

Mr. Selinger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was in Copenhagen with the Premier of British Columbia where we were working together on climate change issues. We work with all provinces in Canada and

many states in the United States. Just this coming week, next week, I will be in Chicago for Bio 2010 with the Premier of Alberta.

Mr. McFadyen: He makes reference to meetings in Yorkton and Copenhagen, Mr. Speaker, but Manitoba's economy is dependent on trade with Asia to the tune of \$1.8 billion, which is \$6,500 for every family in Manitoba, \$6,500 for every family in Manitoba dependent on this trade.

I want to ask the Premier: What did he say to the—to his fellow western premiers in Copenhagen and Yorkton that was so offensive that his invite to tomorrow's meeting was revoked?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the member references our trade with China. Our Asia-Pacific trade is \$2 billion. We have had a trade representative in China for over 23 years. We have Manitobans who—people who have come to Manitoba and been educated here, have gone back to China and act as honorary representatives for Manitoba there.

We do trade with China. We do trade with Japan. We do trade with Hong Kong. We do trade all over the world to the benefit of Manitobans, and we will continue to do that. We have excellent plans going forward to further our trade agenda. not just in the Pacific region, but with Europe as well. We do 53 percent of our trade with eastern Canada. We do 47 percent of our trade with western Canada. We do a substantial—and, of course, our major market remains the United States as it does with all provinces in Canada.

* (14:00)

We look to work together with all provinces to further the prosperity of all Canadians, including Manitobans.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, the provinces getting together tomorrow are creating a trading bloc of over eight million people in order to better position those three provinces. And the news story that came out this morning indicates that this is a partnership that will position western Canada as a major trade and investment hub. Now I know that they have trouble between east and west on hydro lines and a whole range of other issues, but we are part of western Canada. We should be at the table.

I want to ask the Premier: Why is it that he is so unable to get to the table with the rest of western Canada to protect the \$6,500 for every Manitoban

that's dependent on these important trading relationships?

Mr. Selinger: As I indicated earlier, we do co-operate with British Columbia on climate-change initiatives through the Western Climate Initiative. We co-operate with Alberta on matters of security regulations to strengthen our local economy and, of course, on matters of health care where we exchange best practices and also have a—for world-class opportunities for Alberta patients to come to Manitoba and world-class opportunities in Edmonton for Manitoba patients to go there.

We have an excellent relationship with Saskatchewan with respect to issues related to transportation, energy and education, and as well as food production. We have a good relationship with the government of Ontario on the UNESCO World Heritage Site. We have an excellent relationship with Québec on matters of trade. Premier Charest will also be in Chicago with me early next week. We were in Copenhagen together as well. We have an excellent relationship with New Brunswick. We also have a good relationship with Prince Edward Island. We work with every province in Canada to make Canada a better place to live. We don't believe in blocs, we believe in one country for all Canadians.

Addiction Treatments Wait Lists

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Can the Minister of Healthy Living tell the House: When Manitobans with an addiction go to an addictions treatment facility for help, why is the wait time for an initial assessment more than five weeks long and why isn't this a priority for his government?

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Healthy Living, Youth and Seniors): I thank the member for that question, and remember, Mr. Speaker, that's coming from a party that's voting against the 9.4 percent increase in addictions service funding this year. We have increased the amount of support for addictions. We look at it when people come and call us at the AFM or different groups. We try to assess their needs. If they need services right away, they can get access to services right away. We actually have out-patient services, we have residential services, we have prevention services, and we're going to continue to work with the community and the providers to continue to enhance those services.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Speaker, obviously throwing money at a problem without any strategic plan isn't

working. Wait times for an assessment are at least five weeks long. Wait times for residential treatment are three to four months longer for women. There are no supports in place for addicts who have gone through detox but are waiting to get into a residential program. And because there is virtually no second-stage treatment or support available after 28 days, many people who have gone through these programs fall off the wagon and are back in the system within days.

Can the Minister of Healthy Living explain why, facing these huge challenges, he has chosen to delay the Magnus Centre project and break his government's promise to add 60 new beds to the system?

Mr. Rondeau: Mr. Speaker, we're committed to moving forward with the plan. It's to build a better system. It's improving access. It's increasing residential capacity. We're enhancing services, and may I remind the member opposite that if you want to know what we're doing, just a few days earlier, the Minister of Housing (Ms. Irvin-Ross) announced a program with the Bell Hotel to enhance services. We also are enhancing services to the AFM treatment system in Thompson. We have addiction recovery service. We have Esther House. We have Tamarack. We have 210 Sinclair. Those are all facilities that do the transition from the initial treatment—residential treatment and transition out into the community.

And Mr. Speaker, those are investments that our government continues to make and your opposition party, the Conservative Party, vote against year after year.

Mrs. Rowat: The minister can crow about the money he's throwing at a problem, but what is he getting for it? Wait times are through the roof, services are fragmented, and addicts and their families are suffering while they wait for treatment.

Mr. Speaker, I asked the Minister of Healthy Living for details. I asked—I'm sorry—I asked the Minister of Healthy Living for details on the Magnus Centre project three weeks ago, and he had no answers and no information about the project—how many beds would it have, what services it would offer—nothing to show for two years of planning and money, all a waste.

Why is this government—why can this government agree to shovel a ground at a stadium in less than three months, but after two years the Magnus plan is back to square one? When is the

Minister of Healthy Living going to stand up at the Cabinet table for Manitobans with addictions? Please, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Rondeau: Mr. Speaker, I'm waiting for the opposition to actually support addictions and support our budget. I am looking.

Today we have 449 residential beds to have treatment. They vote against that. We have out-patient services. They vote against it. We have youth addiction programs, we have residential programs, we have transition programs and, Mr. Speaker, a 9.4 percent increase in funding, more staff, more programs and more support for addictions.

And Mr. Speaker, there's only one word for a group that continue to harp for something but vote against it.

Domestic Violence Programs Funding Decrease

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the minister that when they were in opposition in the '90s, they voted against almost every budget then too.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable member for Charleswood has the floor.

Mrs. Driedger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, women's organizations in Manitoba recently released a report card, and in the section on domestic violence, the author, Jane Ursel, wrote, and I quote: In the past five years, the Manitoba government has cut back critical programs and made announcements that they have failed to follow through on. End quote.

I'd like to ask the NDP if they could explain: Why have they cut back on critical programs in domestic violence?

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): For the information of the member opposite, first of all, we all agree that domestic violence is a very, very serious issue in this province.

I'm very pleased with the work our government has done. We have actually tripled the funding to combat domestic violence in our communities, not just in Winnipeg but across the province. We are spending three times as much as was being spent in 1999.

We're supporting housing for women who are leaving domestic violence. We have new measures in the court system to make things stronger, and we are investing in our communities to make sure there are more alternatives, more options, and safer places for women getting away from domestic violence situations, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, cutbacks to the domestic violence programs are very troubling because Stats Canada found that Manitoba women are at a higher risk of being murdered by their male partner than women in any other province in the country. In fact, the rate was 50 percent higher than the Canadian average, and that comes from Stats Canada.

Despite that, I have been told that the government cut the specialized domestic violence unit in the Headingley prison. I'd like to ask the government to explain: Why in the world would they cut such a program at Headingley prison?

Mr. Swan: Mr. Speaker, I can't say more strongly than Manitoba takes a hard line on domestic violence. And if I can point to a real report, the 2008 Family Violence in Canada report notes that Manitoba is a pro-charging and pro-prosecution jurisdiction, which causes increase in arrest rates.

Manitoba used to have the highest average domestic homicide rate at 16.1 per million. That was from 1974 to 2000. I can advise this House that this most recent report in 2008 now shows, despite the incorrect information the member puts on the record, that Manitoba now has the lowest rate of domestic homicide of all provinces in western Canada.

*(14:10)

There's more to do. There is more work to be done, but we are on the right track from the investments that we are making, from supporting police, from supporting Crown attorneys and supporting women in crisis, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, I cannot believe that the minister would stand up here and discredit a report that was put together by women's groups. And the section on domestic violence was actually put together by Jane Ursel who is a respected expert on the area of domestic violence.

Mr. Speaker, another cutback that she brought to my attention was in the area of probations. I was told that the Criminal Organization and High-Risk Offender Unit has, for a number of years, had two

staff handling domestic violence offenders. I was also told that one of these positions was cut.

Can the minister tell us today: Did he cut that position and why?

Mr. Swan: Well, if the member wants to talk about investment in services, I'm quite happy to do that any day, Mr. Speaker.

Through victims services there are counsellors available, there's assistance available. A woman can be seen within a week if she is escaping domestic violence, whether or not criminal charges are laid. Those services are out in the community and not just in the five communities back in 1999 when our government took power. Those services are now available in all 63 court and circuit court locations across Manitoba. Women anywhere in the province can get help because of the investments that our government has made.

In 2005, we amended The Domestic Violence and Stalking Act to make sure that more victims of domestic violence are eligible for protection orders. We've allowed designated people other than lawyers and police to assist victims to apply for orders. Approximately 70 people have been trained across the province. We are making those investments because it is a very serious issue, Mr. Speaker.

Revlimid Medication Pharmacare Coverage

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): To the Premier, Mr. Speaker. For Manitobans who are suffering from multiple myeloma, there is available to them a new drug treatment called Revlimid. For people with this condition, which is life threatening, Revlimid presents an opportunity for treatment.

To date, going from east to west, the provinces of Québec, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia have all listed Revlimid on their formularies to provide support for those patients who require it. The only province that's missing is the one that we're standing in here today—standing here today: Manitoba.

I just want to ask the Premier: If he's got money for his west-side bipole, money for his stadium deal and money for an extra NDP Cabinet minister, why no money for people who are suffering with blood cancer?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Premier): Mr. Speaker, just to put the record straight, we have expanded the

Pharmacare formulary by over 2,000 drugs since we've been in office. We have dramatically increased the amount of treatments available to Manitobans through various forms of drug therapy. And we do it in a professional way through our joint oncology drug review process. And where they indicate that this drug will be a helpful treatment to the benefit of Manitobans, it will be brought forward and put on the formulary.

And that is the process under which we are going right now. We're not shy about improving services to Manitobans, including drug therapies, but we like to do it in a systematic way with the proper professional consultation advice. And that's the approach we will take here. And once that review is done, if it's indicated to be a useful benefit to Manitobans relative to other alternatives, then it will be considered.

Mr. McFadyen: That is not a very helpful comment for the members of the—people in the gallery who are here today, who are dealing with this issue, who are looking for something a little bit more than just meaningless rhetoric from the government.

Provinces already around us have listed the drug. Health Canada has approved it. We've had decisions made within Québec, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia, and yet here in Manitoba, this government is dragging its feet.

Will the Premier today, confirm that this drug will be listed so that people suffering from this rare disorder can get the same level of care and treatment as people in neighbouring provinces?

Mr. Selinger: This drug is made available in Manitoba on a case-by-case basis as recommended by doctors, and that will—that process will continue. We will respect doctors' professional advice on this. When the joint oncology drug review has completed its work and they indicate that it's the kind of drug that we should make available to Manitobans, we will do it. But in the meantime, if there's a specific case indicated by a doctor where this drug should be made available to the Manitoban, we will make it available.

Mr. McFadyen: Well, Mr. Speaker, the—we're aware that there's a separate category for those discretionary cases, but it puts in place roadblocks for many patients. It's more NDP red tape getting between patients and the care that they need.

Why not just do what other provinces have done around us, Québec, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta,

British Columbia. The only province they hop over is Manitoba in terms of providing this drug on their formulary?

We've got a poor track record already in Manitoba of listing products that can improve health care. Why not show leadership on this issue? Do the right thing. We don't need more talk. We don't need more studies. We just need action. Will we see it today, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question. I think it's important that we continue to look at these matters.

I'm pleased to know that doctors in Manitoba can recommend it and do recommend it on a case-by-case basis, and when that occurs, certainly it is funded through the Manitoba Pharmacare program. And we will continue to examine the validity and the efficacy of this drug to be listed on the formula, but we will not deny doctors' advice where somebody is indicated to need it, based on a doctor's recommendation. We will not—certainly not deny that drug in Manitoba.

It will be made available in Manitoba on a case-by-case basis until the professional review process is completed. And that's the way we proceed, as we have with 2,000 additional drugs that we have already added to the formulary, Mr. Speaker.

Youth Criminal Offenders School Attendance Records

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, in the last two weeks there's been a lot of attention to two youth who have been repeat offenders, and not just repeating once but stealing cars and committing other offences more than 20 times each. One youth began at age 14 and is now 16. The other youth began offending at age 13 or 14 and is now 17. Many of the offences occurred before these youth were age 16.

In Manitoba, Mr. Speaker, there's a legal requirement that children attend school until they're aged 16.

I ask the Minister of Education (Ms. Allan) to tell this Legislature today what the school attendance record of these two children was up until they were 16.

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): You know, I'm actually quite shocked that the member for River Heights would want to talk about situations of case which is—cases—

ongoing in the courts and asking us to reveal confidential information about young offenders in this House.

The member for River Heights should know that matters that are before the court cannot be discussed in this Legislature for a number of reasons. First of all, for confidentiality, but, second of all, to make sure we don't prejudice a case and potentially impact the ability of our Crown attorneys to do their job and get an appropriate disposition for a young offender.

It's difficult enough with the Liberal Youth Criminal Justice Act to do that without members standing in this House and trying to prejudice our Crowns, our law enforcement, from doing their jobs.

So, shame on the member for River Heights.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, in fact, I am hearing more and more from people about the failure of the current Education Minister to ensure children who are legally required to be in school are, indeed, in school.

In Estimates, the minister said that absenteeism was being reported on-line, but all I found was a report of no unusual absenteeism. I think that was related to the H1N1 flu? [*interjection*] Yeah, and it was no—it was not clearly a meaningful breakdown of actual absentee numbers.

You know, quite frankly, the Minister of Education has been failing.

Can the minister explain why the education rates among high-risk offenders are generally low, with youth roaming the streets instead of being in school, when the minister has the legal authority and the mandate to make sure that these kids are in school?

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Education): Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to be part of a government—and I've said this over and over and over again—I'm proud to be part of a government that has made historic investments in our public education system.

*(14:20)

And, you know, I don't know—you know, I'm not sure why the member opposite is confused and raising these kinds of issues. Perhaps he'd like to talk about the success, Mr. Speaker, that we've had in increasing our grad rate over the last six or seven years. Our grad rate has increased by 8 percent and our grad rate is now 80.9 percent, and that is a huge significant increase in a graduation rate, and that means that what we are doing is we are having

children come to school and providing them with programs that make them succeed.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, but I have a report that says that 90 percent of the students who are at high risk are not graduating. This minister is letting the province down and letting the young people of this province down. Education is the key to youth learning the basic skills so that they will become productive citizens instead of getting into trouble repeatedly again and again with the law.

You know, her failure of the minister to do her job is—the direct result of her failure is young people getting into repeated problem, reoffending, reoffending. What's remarkable is that even when the children are in custody, as in the Remand Centre, the Education Minister is not always ensuring that they are in school and catching up with their learning.

Why is the minister doing such a poor job of making sure high-risk kids are in school and learning?

Ms. Allan: I'm pleased to have the opportunity once again to talk about some of the innovative programming that we're doing in Manitoba in regards to making sure that children attend school and graduate. I don't know if he's had the opportunity to attend Neelin school in Brandon, but maybe the next time he's out and about in the community he could drop by and find out what's happening there.

And in regards to what's happening at the Remand Centre, Mr. Speaker, I want him to know that our deputy minister, Gerald Farthing, has actually visited the Remand Centre recently and we're very concerned about what is happening with young people that are in the Remand Centre and we have actually a project that we are going to be announcing very soon.

St. Joseph Wind Farm Project Status

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): Thanks to leaders like—visionary leaders like Ed Schreyer, Manitoba is the leader in renewable energy, including hydro, wind-power, geothermal and bioenergy. Along with Manitoba Hydro, our government has shown leadership in the renewal and green energy.

Today at the town of St. Joseph in southern Manitoba there was a groundbreaking ceremony for a new wind farm that will bring many economic

advantages and environmental benefits to our society.

But I ask the Minister of Finance to elaborate on that particular project, which is very exciting for us, entire Manitoba.

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act):

Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased to be at St. Joseph's today with Pattern Energy and the municipality representatives to do the sod turning for the St. Joseph's wind farm. This is a very exciting investment and, although the members opposite don't think there was an economic downturn, this is one of the reasons that there has been a delay in getting this project started. But they will be producing 138 megawatts of power from this wind farm. There will be over 225 construction jobs and 15 permanent positions. This is good news because we are producing green, clean energy, and it is helping the farmers because they are now getting a payment for the land where these towers are going and there are new jobs being created. I hope the members opposite will recognize the value of it.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Time for oral questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

International Dance Day

Ms. Marilyn Brick (St. Norbert): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize International Dance Day in Manitoba. Dance is one of the most widely understood and celebrated art forms in the world. Varying across cultures, regions and styles, this is one activity that has been able to bridge differences and bring people of all backgrounds and ages together.

The Manitoba dance community is a vibrant and unique group that combines the preservation of heritage with constant innovation. It is recognized in Canada and throughout the world for its artistic excellence in cultural diversity.

Manitoba is home to two pioneering professional dance organizations, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet and the Winnipeg School of Contemporary Dancers. Our province also has many smaller, very successful dance troupes in various genres. We are known worldwide for our many Ukrainian dance ensembles, including Slava! Ukrainian Contemporary Dancers and Rusalka Ukrainian Dance Ensemble which rival even those from the Ukraine.

In recognition of Manitoba's vigorous dance culture, our province proclaimed April 29th as International Dance Day in Manitoba. Earlier today, many of us had the pleasure of witnessing a wonderful celebration put on by the Winnipeg Dance Preservation Initiative, whose director, Stephanie Ballard, is with us in the gallery today. Featuring dancers from the School of Contemporary Dance, the Chai Folk Ensemble and the Asham Stompers, this was truly a wonderful event.

This year also marks the 30th anniversary of the Manitoba professional Dance Festival, which takes place May 9th to the 22nd, featuring performances by more than 1,600 dancers from across the province. This festival is a high-profile, non-competitive opportunity for dancers and teachers to develop technically and artistically and experience working in a professional environment. It is also a great opportunity for Manitobans to sample the range of diversity of dance talents in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the many people involved with dance troupes, schools and organizations in Manitoba for all their work to ensure dance flourishes in our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

YMCA-YWCA Women of Distinction Awards

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): It is with great pleasure that I rise in the House today to recognize the outstanding women who were celebrated at last night's YM-YWCA Women of Distinction Awards. These annual awards recognize women who selflessly give their time and energy to improve the lives of those around them. Last night was the 34th time the awards were presented, and 10 women were recognized for the important ways that they contribute to their communities. A total of 45 women were nominated this year and each one of them deserves to be celebrated for the work they do.

I was honoured to attend the gala last night at the Winnipeg Convention Centre, along with a number of my colleagues. The evening was a wonderful opportunity to celebrate these women who come from different walks of life, but share a desire to make their communities and this world a better place. Every year, I'm amazed at the talent, ingenuity and imagination of the women I encounter at the awards. They have accomplished so much and continue to dedicate themselves to those around them.

It is important to hold events like the Women of Distinction Awards because many of the honourees carry out their work of mentoring, coaching or volunteering without fanfare or celebration. They are selfless in their dedication to their communities and the work often goes unrecognized. It is important that we celebrate the achievements of these outstanding women who are role models for young women across our province. Indeed, their spirits of service are an inspiration to every Manitoban.

I want to applaud the YM-YWCA and all those who helped plan the event on co-ordinating this celebratory evening. I also want to congratulate all the nominees as well as the winners. They were: in Arts and Culture, Marie Bouchard; Business and the Professions, Janet Ingersoll; Community Volunteerism, Vi Hilton; Creative Communications, Nancy Chippendale; Education and Training, Linda Bulka; Health and Wellness, Dr. Patricia Martens; Research and Innovation, Dr. Karmine O; Young Woman of Distinction, Tito Daodu; the Gerrie Hammond Memorial Award of Promise, Kaitlin Alexander; and the Prairie Award of Promise, Sarah Ens.

Last night, it was made clear that an enthusiasm for bettering our communities is alive and well in our province, and for all of those involved last night at all levels, we are very appreciative of their efforts.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski (St. James): Each year, some of our province's most remarkable women are given the recognition they so deserve when YMCA-YWCA Winnipeg holds its annual Women of Distinction Awards.

This year marks the 31st anniversary of this inspirational celebration of talent, achievement, imagination and innovation. This award ceremony recognizes women of all ages, backgrounds and creeds for the skills, care, knowledge and impact they impart upon their communities.

Comprehensive in its understanding of what truly constitutes a meaningful contribution to society, the Women of Distinction Awards acknowledges 10 women who have inspired and motivated change in others in areas such as academic excellence, physical fitness and well-being, arts and culture, and volunteerism, to name but a few.

* (14:30)

I am delighted that this award ceremony provides women who have made tremendous contributions to our communities and province with the admiration and the respect they have earned. In particular, I would like to note the winner of the Community Volunteerism category, Gudrun Viola Bjarnason Hilton. Vi, as she is known, hails from my community of St. James, where she has been instrumental in raising funds for the Canadian Cancer Society, the Heart and Stroke Foundation and a popular Icelandic newspaper. Vi is also a major supporter of arts and culture in city and is an integral part of Icelandic-Canadian Frón, an organization that strengthens Icelanders' commitment to each other and their community.

In their altruism and unwavering commitment to their causes, Vi and all of the other Women of Distinction Award recipients are vigorous advocates for our province and its people. I am proud to share a province with such remarkable women. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask leave to have the names of this year's Women of Distinction Award recipients and the awards they have won included along with this statement in *Hansard*.

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave for the names to be included in *Hansard*?

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Mr. Speaker: The leave has been granted. They will be included in *Hansard*.

Marie Bouchard, Arts and Culture award recipient; Janet Ingersoll, Business and the Professions award recipient; Gudrun Viola Bjarnason Hilton, Community Volunteerism award recipient; Nancy Chippendale, Creative Communications award recipient; Linda Bulka, Education and Training award recipient; Dr. Patricia Martens, Health and Wellness award recipient; Dr. Karmin O, Research and Innovation award recipient; Oluwatomilayo Daodu, Young Woman of Distinction award recipient; Kaitlin Alexander, Gerrie Hammond Memorial Award of Promise award recipient; Sarah Ens, Prairie Award of Promise award recipient.

James Wilson

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, it's a great pleasure that I rise today to thank one of Manitoban's education leaders for his years of service. Over the past three years, James Wilson, or as his friends refer to him, Jamie, has dedicated

himself to improving the quality of education for the Opaskwayak Cree Nation as director of the Opaskwayak Education Authority.

With the amount that Amy—or that Jamie was able to accomplish, it is difficult to believe that he was to accomplish it all in only three years. From rewriting the authority's mission and vision statements, to securing funds for the construction of the new Oscar Lathlin Collegiate, to reversing a decade-old decline in provincial test scores, Jamie was able to improve on all aspects of education.

For nearly 10 years, provincial test scores have been declining at the authority, but under Jamie's leadership, and through the implementation of best practices in curriculum advances by the wonderful and dedicated department facilitators, staff and teachers, and the last—the last two years have seen a reverse in the decline and the growth of the scores. And congratulations to the students in doing that.

In order to help bridge the gap between the administrators and the teachers and to create a better understanding of the daily needs and challenges facing teachers, the authority's staff spent a day substitute teaching in the school. Jamie and the administrators recalled the day as an opening eye—or an eye-opening experience and a reminder that their support—their role is to support good instruction and facilitate good teaching in the classroom. The teachers and staff at Joe A. Ross School have made the school a model to emulate, and I wish to congratulate them for always striving to reach a higher standard.

I invite all members of this House to join me in thanking Jamie for his years of service, and wish him the best in his future endeavours. Jamie and I have had numerous conversations, mostly focussing on his passions, which focus on improving the quality of education for Manitoba's Aboriginal peoples.

I remember the first time I met Jamie. We were enjoying a Guinness and talking about family. And he joked about how he is qualified, as an underachiever in his family, as he is only—as he only holds his Master's as everyone else in his family holds a doctorate.

But I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that I am so proud of Jamie and his family, and the accomplishments that Jamie has made to the education system within our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Seniors Programs Funding

Mr. Matt Wiebe (Concordia): Mr. Speaker, in Manitoba, as in the rest of the world, we are moving into a period of significant demographic change as our province's population ages. Over the next 20 years, the number of senior citizens living in Manitoba is expected to increase by 43 percent. Even by 2021, senior citizens will account for almost one fifth of our province's total population.

This shift in demographics brings many challenges, but I believe it also presents unprecedented opportunity. Manitoba has both the opportunity and the responsibility to ensure that all senior citizens in our province have access to the resources and programming necessary to live their lives comfortably and to the fullest extent possible.

I am proud that this provincial government acknowledges its responsibility, and greets this opportunity with imagination and dynamic action. The recent Budget 2010 demonstrates this government's refusal to compromise the foundation of front-lines services upon which healthy communities are built.

The budget's investments in health care and housing were made with an aging population firmly in mind. Further, knowing that financial security is an integral part of a person's wellness, the budget's five-year plan has placed emphasis on keeping Manitoba among the most affordable provinces in the country.

Just as importantly, Mr. Speaker, the province's Age-Friendly initiative, launched two years ago by the Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat, sets out a vision for what all of our communities can become. These communities will recognize the diversity that defines older Manitobans, encourage healthy, active aging, engage all stakeholders in the building of age-friendly communities, create accessible, safe environments for older adults and treat people of all ages with respect. So far, well over 60 communities are on board and working with the initiative to take concrete steps towards realizing these stated goals.

I'm delighted that this government continues to prioritize seniors in our province, and to see them as an asset and a vital part of our community. I would like to commend our government on its action to

make Manitoba the best place in the country for seniors to live. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**ORDERS OF THE DAY
(Continued)**

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

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

House Business

Hon. Bill Blaikie (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, this is the intention, that the House will consider Estimates this afternoon and tomorrow morning. But I think if you canvass the House, you would see that there is an agreement considering room 255 to set aside the Estimates for Infrastructure and Transportation, with that department to resume consideration on Monday. For today and tomorrow, room 255 will continue on with the next departments on the list.

Mr. Speaker: Is it the intention the House will consider Estimates this afternoon and tomorrow morning?

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement in room 255 to set aside the Estimates for Infrastructure and Transportation with that department to resume consideration on Monday? For today and tomorrow, room 255 will continue on with the next departments in—that are on the list. Is there agreement? *[Agreed]*

* * *

Mr. Blaikie: Well, Mr. Speaker, with that understanding, then, the House will now resolve itself into Estimates.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, we will move on to Estimates, and in the Chamber will be Education, followed by Culture, Heritage and Tourism; and 255 will be Labour and Immigration; and 254 will be Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives.

Would the respective Chairs please go to the appropriate rooms they'll be chairing.

The House will now resolve into Committee of Supply.

Madam Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

**COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
(Concurrent Sections)**

**AGRICULTURE, FOOD AND
RURAL INITIATIVES**

* (14:40)

Mr. Chairperson (Mohinder Saran): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives.

As has been previously agreed, questioning for the department will proceed in a global manner. The floor is now open for questions.

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Yeah, I promised to get back on at least three different items yesterday and the day before, so we've got some information I can get back to people on.

There was a question about what of the Premier's travel we had covered under Agriculture in the last year, and I can confirm that there was no travel of the Premier that this department picked up. That should deal with one question we had.

There was some talk about Manitoba's support for Country Meat and Sausage in Blumenort, and the Province has provided just over \$120,000 in support overall. It's gone towards equipment, a waste-water hookup, materials and feasibility studies. It's broken into a number of—over a number of different years and a number of different projects: ruminant meat processing feasibility study in '05-06; a ruminant meat processing project; the sewage hookup that took place in '07-08. In '08-09, we contributed some money through the Manitoba Specified Risk Materials Initiative. There was a truck and some containers for that, for a total of around \$100,000, and then \$21,000 for a feasibility study program. That's from ET and T.

An Honourable Member: You can expand that?

Mr. Struthers: Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade. I say I can expand that, see.

The member for Carman (Mr. Pedersen) asked yesterday about a couple of different programs that we're involved in. One was the alternative—alternate energy loan program. There were two loans, totalling \$895,000 in '09-010. In '08-09 there was two loans, totalling \$509,000, and that's to the end of January 2010.

He had also asked about the environmental enhancement program. There were four loans, in '09-010 for \$166,000. And in '08-09 there were three loans for \$166,000, and that, too, is to the end of January 2010.

I think that's everything that we have that I can bring back now.

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Chairperson, the Growing Forward agreement of April 2nd, 2009, it had four components: AgriInvest, AgriStability, AgriInsurance and AgriRecovery. The budget 210 contains a \$7-million list for risk management credit and income support programs, including 5 million less for AgriInvest. Can you explain the rationale for this type of a cut in a pretty important risk management tools that are available to the agricultural producers and agricultural economy?

* (14:50)

Mr. Struthers: As we spoke the other day, these are the exact suite of programs that are being reviewed by all of my colleagues, right across the country. Many of the changes that my colleague sees in our Estimates book are reflections of the kind of discussions that we've had on a national basis. We—our goal is to make sure that each of these programs best suit the needs of the farmers within each of the different jurisdictions that sit at that table. And that's what's reflected in those Estimates books that the member has before him.

What it amounts to when you take AgriInsurance and AgriInvest, AgriStability, somewhere in the area of \$100 million that's made available to farmers. When you look at the AgriStability and in AgriInvest, that is a total of almost half that number, 48 million of—yeah, \$48.3 million, which is split into the AgriStability side, which is around the \$39-million mark, and the AgriInvest side, which is around the \$9-million mark.

What we try to do, is look at these in a global fashion. If we can have support within all of these business risk management programs that can flow easily to farmers that qualify; if there's—for example, if there's some need in the northern Interlake, which was brought up the other day in the House and here at the table at Estimates, then we do have that flexibility, both ourselves and the federal government, to make those kinds of decisions and make those kinds of shifts, so that—so that we can get the money to the farmers that need it the most.

Members will know that in the northern Interlake, there are farmers there who went two years without being able to take off a crop, and we did not want them to go a third year without taking off a crop. Oh, we're getting a little help today, I see, from Mother Nature, but if Mother Nature doesn't always co-operate, then we need to have the flexibility in these programs, these business risk management programs, to help to make sure those farmers can get back out on their land and do their seeding.

That's just one example of where we need to be flexible. And we need to be ready, boots on the ground—our staff, talking with farmers in all parts of our province, to make sure that we know, and in some cases, can anticipate, where the next request is going to come from. So it's essential that we be able to use these programs and have the ability to adjust these programs, to meet the reality that farmers face out there, as they seed and harvest. So our commitment is to maintain that kind of flexibility in our programming so they can be responsive to the needs of the farmer.

Mr. Graydon: The minister brought up an interesting point about the flexibility and dealing with the issue in the Interlake, and he's made announcements that they were going to be doing something for the Interlake. And I'm wondering under which program he was suggesting that that announcement would come from.

Mr. Struthers: The—credit to folks in the provincial Department of Agriculture and credit to the federal officials and, I think, the political leadership of folks like Minister Gerry Ritz. The—I think we've been able to move forward in—with something that can be considered through the AgriRecovery section of the programs we're talking about. AgriRecovery is one of those programs that as long as there's federal and provincial agreement that a problem exists, then we can address. I think you'll find in the not-too-distant future that that is one of the areas of our province in the northern Interlake that we have, both at the federal and provincial level, understood there is a problem and that both levels of government need to work at. So that would be a situation that would—we would deal with through AgriRecovery.

Mr. Graydon: Could the minister give me an update on Agri-Food and Rural Development Council? For example, who sits on this council? How many times do they meet annually? Are there annual reports made to the minister? And when was the last time an annual report was issued?

* (15:00)

Mr. Struthers: The Agri-Food Development Council is about two years old now. It met three times in the first year, partly to get itself organized and partly to do the work that my predecessor had asked them to do. It met twice, I believe, in its second year. Their goal is to produce a report for my consideration.

They're looking at the future of agriculture, try to provide some longer term thinking in terms of where agriculture could and should be going. It is an advisory group. It won't have—it doesn't have an obligation to report to the Legislature or anything like that. It's an advisory group to report to the minister.

I'm going to go by memory here a little bit and if I've forgotten any names I'll make sure I get them to the member for Emerson. This council is co-chaired by my very capable deputy, Mr. Barry Todd, and by the very capable David Gislason—Gislason, G-i-s-l-a-s-o-n.

Some of the other members are Kristy Guilford, Vic Martens, Dickson Gould, Gaylene Dutchyshen, Glenn Feltham, Brenda Gregory—sorry, Brenda Gaudry, Betty Kelly, Sid Gordon, and if there's any names that I've forgotten I will ensure that the member for Emerson receives those.

Mr. Graydon: If this council goal is to crystal-ball agriculture and if—and I might be just shortening up the answer, but that's basically what the minister said, could he share with us the recommendations that they have made to the government and what recommendations have been acted on?

Mr. Struthers: I could probably—I can add the name, I believe, Paul Gregory to the list of members as well, another fellow farmer from up in the Interlake.

I think we need to be clear about what it is we're dealing with here. I agree with the word crystal-balling. I used it quite often, and I think this is a group that is in a good position to do that, but it's not just agriculture. It's broader than just that. It's agrifood. It's agri-energy. It's sustainable agriculture. It's health initiatives that can spring from discussions that occur around health.

I really believe that agriculture can be a solution to a lot of the problems that we as society face, and I know that my colleague from Emerson agrees with that. Too often, I think, we see agriculture as part of

the problem and not the solution. I think we can vastly improve health outcomes in Manitoba by having a good food policy, a good policy that gets Manitoba-grown food onto the tables of Manitoba families. I think that will produce good health outcomes.

I think, and we've seen some examples already, of how agriculture can help, in terms of providing energy, whether it be energy that power the machines that we use on the farm or that be energy that heats our houses, all kinds of possibilities in terms of energy connected to agriculture.

I think we really need to be serious about rural sustainability and what role, not just agriculture, but rural development—what role that plays in helping to create stronger rural communities. And I don't think that's connected to—you know, the measuring stick doesn't need to be—you go from 5,000 to 6,000 in any particular community. I think we have to really look at the fabric of our communities, and see what it is and how it is that we can be successful. And I think this department, along with—in co-ordination with a lot of other departments, I think, can make a real positive difference in that.

We're not going to get, from this council, specific recommendations. It won't be like other reports that we've received. It won't look like a Clean Environment Commission's report or any other body that has specific recommendations. It's going to be more general than that. It's going to have advice that would be for me to consider as we move ahead and put together a public policy, as we deal with budgets down the road, all those kinds of things. So I want the member for Emerson to know that this is a lot more general, I think, than what he has in mind.

Mr. Graydon: When was the last time that this Agri-Food and Rural Development Council issued an annual report?

Mr. Struthers: As I just said a few minutes ago, there won't be annual reports come out of this council. There—when they're ready, they will come and sit down with me and show me the report—the work that they've done. They'll have in writing the thinking that they have done and the visioning that they've been working on, and they'll give that to me. There won't be annual reports. When they make that report to me, their task will be finished. It was simply put in place to provide advice to the minister.

Mr. Graydon: And how often do they provide advice to the minister?

Mr. Struthers: Well, when they're ready, they will phone Monique in my office, and they'll get an appointment, and they'll come in and they'll talk to me about the work that they've done. I have met—I've met—several weeks ago I met with the group because I hadn't met with them as the minister. I wanted them to talk to me about where they're at and where they are in their deliberations. But we had a very good meeting and they talked about energy and rural sustainability and health and those sorts of things, and they'll come back to me when they're ready, with their report.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Minister, what you've said to me is you've put together a group that people change, the names have changed on that group over a two-year period. Some of them aren't on there that were initially on the group. You may have added some to that group. They have no definite time frame as a mandate and whenever they're ready, they will make a report. Is that what I understand you've said to me?

Mr. Struthers: When they're ready, they will come forward and they will give me the advice that they have been tasked to give. I should just complete the number of people that have—are involved: Sean Crew out of Winnipeg, Beth Lelond out of Miniota; how could I forget a Dauphin guy, Chris Dzisiak from God's country.

* (15:10)

But the—this group is a group that's looking forward and is visioning, crystal-balling, as the member for Emerson has said. I'm not going to tell them if I, you know—you know, the second Tuesday of May they've got to come back and have their final report ready and on my desk. If they take their time and they think about rural Manitoba, and they think about agriculture, and they think about sustainability, and they think about energy and health, and all those things that I think are important, then I want them to be thorough. I want them to have the time that they need to bring in resources that they know of around the province. I want them to have some time to talk to people in their group about what it is that they can come and talk to me about.

I want—I do really want to say that this group is made up of people from all around Manitoba. I look at the number of farmers on the group, and I'm impressed with that. I see people who are—who I know who are very forward thinking. Chris Dzisiak. I know Chris. He's somebody who's involved with the—getting a hemp facility built in our Dauphin area. I'm really glad he's from the Dauphin area. He—a

very progressive farmer who understands that we need to grow our area through agriculture. That's our industry and, you know, in my constituency, we need to add value to the product that the farmer produces, i.e., a hemp facility that'll take a farm product and add jobs and produce a product that can be marketed. I see other people on this list who have got a, I think, quite a good background in farming, in rural living, in business. I—we've got the, I think, the academic community involved.

So I'm really confident that they'll come to me with some advice that I think will be forward-thinking and will help in terms of setting priorities, setting the priorities of this minister.

Mr. Graydon: One of the things that's been outlined in the budget is an emergency managing plan—management plan—or planning—such a specific emergency plans in the event of an outbreak of a foreign animal disease. Can you give me an update on this particular planning and where we're at with that?

Mr. Struthers: Yeah. We have—I think we have had some really good work done over a period of a number of years in terms of getting the emergency response together and the plan.

We've worked with a whole number of different people to do that. One of the strengths of any emergency plan, we've learned over the years, is that there needs to be a co-ordination between a whole number of agencies who each have a different role to play, given whatever the emergency is that we're dealing with.

In our case, we do a lot of work with the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, a number of federal agencies, the Emergency Measures Organization in the province, even other departments in the government like Manitoba Health who we work with a lot on these sorts of things.

We have a foreign animal—foreign—oh, my shorthand—foreign animal diseases eradication support plan—Foreign Animal Disease Eradication Support—I got to be careful how I say that. It's not foreign animals; it's Foreign Animal Disease Eradication Support. Okay. I got it right. We have that in place.

We've worked with the Manitoba Cattle Producers Association on this, who have a huge stake in this, and as we saw with the H1N1, you know, situation that we had here not so long ago, Manitoba Pork plays a unique role in this as well.

We also have, out at the University of Manitoba at the vet lab—our—at our provincial building out there, a fully equipped emergency operation centre that we've developed, that we think is very—I think very useful in this whole effort to be ready should we be dealing with some sort of emergency down the road. So that's where we're at so far.

Mr. Graydon: So the plan, then, in your mind, Mr. Minister, is complete?

Mr. Struthers: Well, we have to be careful with those kinds of statements. These plans—and anybody getting ready for an emergency will tell you they need to be ever green, they need to be always being thought about, being improved, being made responsive to whatever that emergency might be out there.

We don't—we can't afford—no government can afford to just put a manual together and stick it up on the shelf someplace and let it collect dust. And that's not what's happening with these or with any other emergencies that are being planned for right across this country.

* (15:20)

We've had a lot of discussions with the federal government on these types of issues. There's a traceability initiative—a national traceability initiative that's being under discussion now. A premises ID is a key component of that—of any kind of an emergency management plan that we have. We've been meeting, and I've been meeting with and continue to meet with groups like Manitoba Pork and the cattle producers so that we can come up with a system that works, that works for farmers in our province and gives society as a whole a level of comfort that these emergency issues are being dealt with effectively. We've put \$400,000 into a premises ID database. We believe we need to have that in place because it's important for all livestock premises to be identified. And we've been working with cattle producers and hog producers to make that initiative useful so that we can be ready to handle an emergency should it come forward.

Mr. Graydon: The plan, does it include the creation of a network of disposable facilities in the event of a large number of livestock or poultry to be disposed of?

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Speaker—Mr. Chairperson. Give him a promotion—he's doing such a good job I gave him a promotion. That's okay, eh? I'm sure my colleague will support us in that.

We—yeah, if an event occurred today, we would have places in which we could take—that we could take affected livestock. We have access to the Brady landfill here in Winnipeg. We have access to the—it's a regional landfill in Souris—commercial regional landfill in Souris. So, if we were facing something right now, we would be able to handle that and handle it in a proper way. We have been working on these sorts of issues to develop sites with a number of different people. There's some very key people in this. The feds, both CFIA and Agriculture Canada, big partners in this. Within our own government, we work a lot with the—with Manitoba Conservation to make sure that we have suitable sites, effective sites that we can use.

And I want to mention a very key partner in this, and that's the municipalities. We always, when we're looking at putting an emergency plan together and having facilities available for impacted livestock, we always have to have a close relationship with the municipalities in which there could be a site established to handle those livestock.

It's not unlike what I think we all saw happen with the specified risk materials and the challenge for this Province to handle those materials in a safe and efficient way. And I think this department, before my time—so, credit to those who were involved at the time—took a regional approach, took an approach that was—that worked well with the farm community. I know, just from speaking on behalf of the region that I live in, there was very good contact made between the local municipalities, local folks who wanted to be part of that solution, and the Department of Agriculture. So there were—there was funds put together. There was funds assigned—earmarked to this particular problems of SRMs, and a regional network was established to handle the SRMs that were—and you know, that was very important to do.

We have to have a system in place that works well for the farmer, and we have to have in place a system that inspires confidence in the consumer. If you look at SRMs, for example, part of what we had to do was get the message out to people that there was a professional, efficient, effective way to handle those materials, or it could have an impact on the market. It could have an impact on the consumer, which then would have an impact on the farmer,

So I think the stakes on this are—stakes, not the steaks you eat. My goodness, I should have picked a different word—that the stakes on this are fairly large,

and we need to have a well thought out, well co-ordinated approach. And that's what I see happening. I saw that happen with the SRMs, and I see it happening on this particular—with our emergency plan as well.

Mr. Graydon: I disagree with the minister that the Brady Landfill site is an optimum place—or any other landfill site is an optimum place—to be getting rid of animals that have a disease, a foreign disease, an outbreak, a serious outbreak. And that's what I asked about: a serious outbreak that would include large numbers of cattle, large numbers of birds, large numbers of pigs. When we look at the landfill sites, the terminology would suggest that we're filling a hole in the ground, when, in fact, we're putting it on top of the ground, which will become subject to leaching.

When I look back at what CFIA did in the days of the scrapie in sheep—when I look back at those days and the qualifications and the requirements that the CFIA had for the 500-plus sheep that were killed in southern Manitoba because of the scrapie disease, it wasn't a simple matter of hauling them to the landfill site.

That's what's taken place and has been taking place with animals—cows, bovines—since the outbreak of BSE in 2003, when the rendering companies refused to render the animals. They couldn't render them because of the prions that could possibly be there and then would be carried through that into the dog food, and so it was a banned situation.

And you're right about the SRMs. They had to be disposed of, but disposing of an SRM is very, very small portion of an animal compared to an 1,800-pound cow.

Now, a number of cows were buried and a number of horses have been buried in the Brady Landfill. I don't agree that that should be taking place. I believe that you should have a spot and it should be identified—a spot identified for that.

*(15:30)

The plan—the emergency plan shouldn't sit on a shelf and collect dust, but that would be the best place for it. Once the plan is put together, as long as it's sitting on a shelf collecting dust, that means we don't need it. So if a comprehensive plan is put together and areas are designated—qualified areas are designated for the burial and disposal of infected animals, then it should sit on a shelf. And so I would

suggest, from the answer I got from the minister, that there is nothing in place to complete the plan.

What I would like to do, then, is go on to page 27 of the budget, and there was a piece in there that's called a think piece on opportunities in agricultural and agrifood sectors and rural and northern economy in a no- or low-carbon economy.

I would ask the minister what they're hoping to achieve by this. Is there a reduction in emissions or a development of new technology to deal with greenhouse gases? Could he enlighten me on what that section is—what they hope to achieve in that particular section?

Mr. Struthers: I understand that—I'm going to just answer—finish off the answer on the first question in terms of an emergency plan if there is a disease, and then I'll—by then, my crack staff here will have all of the good answers for the second question that he has undertaken.

I don't want the member to leave on the record any doubts about our ability to deal with an emergency in Manitoba. I like the member across the way, and I do sometimes take his advice, but I will put my faith in the advice we get from people who actually operate landfills like Brady and Souris. I'll put my stock in the advice that we get from people who have a lot more experience than anybody around this table in dealing with the construction of a landfill for the purpose of containing the kind of diseases we'll be—that we'll be up against.

I don't want the member for one second to be suggesting that what—that if an 1,800-pound cow goes into the Brady Landfill that that is somehow—a dead 1,800-pound cow—that that's somehow going to be a threat to anybody that lives anywhere near the Brady Landfill. The Brady Landfill has been constructed in such a way that—and the processes they use contain that risk.

The member mentioned leaching. Well, they don't just run around the province digging big holes and throwing 1,800-pound cows in them. There's a lot more thought put into it than that and there's a lot more precautions taken than that, and I don't want him to leave those sort of comments on the record unchallenged. There's containment—there's technology they use to contain. There's measurements of clay; I know the member from Emerson understands the value of clay in containment. There's a process by which the carcass of an animal is treated when it gets to the Brady Landfill, and it's not haphazard. It's

not done in such a way that is careless. It's done in such a way as to contain and prevent the leaching that he is concerned about.

So I don't want people to think that there's an unsafe condition associated to this, either at Brady or Souris. We're not going to participate in something that would put people's health at risk or any kind—or create any kind of health issues.

What we do have, as I mentioned, with—and I think maybe I could've been more clear with this—Agriculture Canada, the municipalities, Manitoba Conservation, our department, CFIA, that is a committee of people that have come together to make sure that we have the same kind of a regional approach with sites in each of the regions much like what you saw with SRMs.

And I think the member does make a good point in pointing out that there's a difference between handling that 1,800-pound cow he was talking about and [*inaudible*] the specified risk materials from that cow. The people who work in this understand that difference, and I'm glad that he pointed that out. But we will—we are—that group has been tasked to come back with some—with a plan in terms of those—that same kind of a regional approach as we saw with SRMs.

It's an approach that's worked. It's produced a safe way to handle materials that need to be handled carefully. If—as I said, if a event occurred today, we would be very safely disposing of carcasses in the Brady Landfill, but we want to get to a point where there's not a lot of carcasses being transferred around to different places, so our approach will be a regional one.

I think there was—unless you have some more.

Mr. Graydon: When we talk about an 1,800-pound cow versus the SRMs, it's for an example purpose only. If you have a wreck, if there's an incident that requires the burial of a large number of animals and it will require them in a timely fashion, as took place when the scrapie eradication in southern Manitoba took place. Brady Landfill site is not prepared to handle that. There is no way in the world that they would handle 500 sheep. They couldn't then; they can't now.

There needs to be designated sites in this province that can be used for that type of disposal. That's what planning is. For the single animal, I agree with you, but if we were looking at 500 cows, if we were looking at 500 sheep or a disease in

horses that would take three, four hundred horses, you won't go to Brady Landfill site, and you're not going to split them up between Souris and Brady either.

That was the question. Is the plan complete for a catastrophe, and, obviously, at this point it's not complete. I agree that you can do one safely. You won't do 500 safely in the landfill site. So we agree on that. It's just—and now I understand that the plan is not complete.

Mr. Struthers: I mean, there are certain things I think the member for Emerson and I are going to agree to, like the difference between handling an amount of SRMs versus a whole cow that's got to be disposed of.

But I want him to understand and be very clear that the work that this federal and provincial and municipal group are doing is not based on handling one cow. They're totally seized of the fact that they have to handle large numbers of animals, and they, along with a number of other experts who've done some work both at Brady and at Souris, don't agree with the member for Emerson.

Their advice to us is that both Brady and Souris can handle a large outbreak of whatever the emergency might be. The examples that the member brings forward, I'm assured by people who are in the field, who are doing the work in this area, that that is sufficient. And I've indicated very clearly that we're continuing to work to get a regional network put together—which is the part that the member and I agree on—where you can have sites to take impacted animals and have them properly disposed of.

* (15:40)

We're working towards that. I don't want anyone to think that we are not in a position to handle an event of the magnitude that the member for Emerson is talking about, either at Brady or at Souris or a combination of the two.

Mr. Graydon: It probably doesn't pay to dwell on this much longer, other than the fact that I was involved when Brady Landfill site could not dispose of 500 sheep. So don't tell me, and don't try and tell the committee that they can do that. They're not in position to do that. CFIA came, asking us if we could find a site for them, and we did find a site for them. And there is a way to it.

So the plan's not complete. That's all we need to do is find the spots that are suitable for those types of

burial, and what it does take to do that. And Brady Landfill site is not one of those sites. I'm sorry. It will not work. CFIA is clear you will be 25 feet deep in solid clay. You will be four feet of clay on top, guaranteed packed to a density the same as a highway.

So, going back to the question that followed was on page 27, the think piece on opportunities in agricultural and agrifood sectors in rural and northern economy and in a no- and low-carbon economy. What does the department hope to achieve?

Mr. Struthers: Yeah, I mean, I realize that the—I realize the member for Emerson's kind of got his heels dug in on the whole Brady Landfill thing, but, again, I mean, we've had those discussions with CFIA. We've—they've been at the table through all of this. They know the lady—the Brady Landfill site. The folks we deal with with the City of Winnipeg know the Brady Landfill site.

Like I said before, I like the member for Emerson, but if it comes down to choosing between the advice I get there and the advice I get from him, then, you know, I'm going to go with the folks at CFIA who've been working with us on this.

But the member's made his point and I understand the caution that he gives us. And I think that that's—it's a good caution for all of us to keep in mind in terms of being able to respond the next time there is an event, and I appreciate that advice.

He asked about the no- or low-carbon vision that we have for agriculture. I think agriculture's come a long way. I think that the days of the environment versus the economy has—the days of the environment versus the rural economy and agricultural economy are history. There are lots of examples out there of farmers making the environment work for them in terms of green stuff in their wallets. It happens all the time. It happened, you know, generations ago when my great-grandparents went to the Swan River Valley for the first time. They made good decisions then. They've made good decisions in between and today, there are farmers out there making good environmental decisions.

And I think there's a good case to be made for the public helping in terms of helping a farmer transition into a program that's going to produce not just a good economy for that farmer but a good—a public good in terms of footprint on the environment, because that is a public good. I think we have to

make those transitions so that they work for the farmer. There's no sense, I don't think, working against generations of good farm environmental decision making.

We have some programs like—well, we've worked a lot with farmers in terms of best management practices. What kind of things are going on out on the farm site that the farmer should be—get some credit for but also, we can get from one farmer to the next, and, you know, when I go to Ag Days or if I'm at Capturing Opportunities or if I'm at the Royal Manitoba Winter Fair, I get tons of conversations with farmers and tons of conversations with farmers with farmers talking about what it is they're doing right out on their sites and the things that work and the things that don't.

Government has to play a positive role in helping those transitions. We're involved with biodiesel, which I think can be a real win for farmers. We're involved in wind and I mean, a lot of discussions come up in the House once in a while about wind and, you know, our Hydro minister was in, down at St. Joseph just this morning with an announcement there. That needs to work for farmers too and I believe that it will.

We have the MSAPP, the Manitoba Sustainable Agricultural Practices Program. We just made some announcements here last week, and, you know, one of the things that was very obvious was there's a good program that's helping farmers reduce the amount of tillage that they do. I used the example about a number of years ago where we had to shut down No. 1 Highway because of topsoil drifting across the No. 1, and yet a bunch of very good, productive topsoil in the ditches, just collecting there, being wasted. You don't see that now. You don't see that because farmers have taken it upon themselves to change some of the practices, and those practices that changed, it's good because it cuts down the number of times we have highways closed in the province.

I'll tell you what I get excited about. Those changes in their practices pay off for the farmer because now his topsoil isn't in the ditch. It's out on the field where he can make a little bit of money off it so I know every one of the members opposite remember those days and they were up in the Parkland as well and we saw it. We saw lots of examples where farmers' fields were ending up drifting across roads, and the farmers have, over the years, improved their approach and it's paid off for

them—and it's paid off for the farmers, and we should give them credit when they do something that's good.

* (15:50)

Mr. Chairperson, improvements that farmers have made to crop rotations—and they've made vast improvements in making decisions about what they rotate into their crops. When I was a kid in the Swan River Valley, you could count on one hand the number of Canola crops that have been—that were planted in those days, right? Rapeseed in those days, but I watched—and you could stand at the top of Thunder Hill and look over the valley, and you can see today a lot more yellow fields out there, farmers making good decisions to rotate into their crops.

Those are the kind of things that I think we can all agree we need to move further along to and have farmers make those good decisions, with some help from provincial and federal governments, like you've seen happen with a whole number of different programs.

So that gives the member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon) a little bit of an idea about where that statement is heading and the direction we're going in.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Well, Mr. Chair, I listened with some humour at what the minister was just pontificating on, but I have to tell you, I don't think the minister has any right to be lecturing or trying to give a lesson to the member from Emerson, or anyone around this table. I think they've spent a lot more years in sustainable agriculture than the minister can ever imagine. So we really don't need that kind of a generous education lesson, sir. What we need are some answers from you with regard to some specifics in—on—in the Estimate process.

I want to focus on the whole issue of Crown lands and they—it's a specific issue with regard to how Crown lands are sold. And I have a very—perhaps unique situation in my area of the province where an individual has been paying taxes on his yard site and his farm for 45 years, and he wanted to give this land—gift this—part of his land to his daughter. And, when he went out to do this, he found out that the land that all his buildings are situated on doesn't belong to him. It's Crown land and for years he has paid taxes on this land. He bought it, paid taxes on it, and now he finds out that somehow it belongs to Crown Lands.

Now he's been struggling for a significant period of time to try to sort it out through Crown Lands so that he can either acquire this legally, or somehow

get possession of the land so that his buildings and his farm site aren't just taken over by the Province. He has paid taxes on the land, and for whatever reason Land Titles—no one had ever notified him that this was Crown land. He—I don't know whether he got building permits or not for the land when he put up his buildings, I don't know that.

But it appears that—and his last name is—I could give you the last name. I think I should do it privately. But I'm just wondering, is there a process—and I guess there is more than one example of this where there can be some expediting of the process, if you like, in order for this family to be able to either purchase that piece of Crown land that they've been assuming is theirs, and have been paying taxes on for 45 years.

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Chairperson, well, as far as this minister lecturing—is calling from across the way, you need some help, and I'm willing to give it to you. I mean, if you don't understand sustainable agriculture and you have to learn from me, when you think I know so little about it, you're in pretty rough shape.

I would suggest that the better approach would be to ask some questions—

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. I would like to take a moment and remind all honourable members, on both sides of the table, to please address their question through the Chair.

I respectfully ask for the co-operation of all honourable members in this matter.

Mr. Struthers: Yes, Mr. Chairperson, through you to the member for Russell, I want him to know that I am here, available to answer questions. So is the department. It's obvious that the—my friends across the way need a little bit of help when it comes to understanding sustainable agriculture and that the approach that they might want to take is one of asking some questions and looking for some information. And I'm more than willing to help out—*[interjection]*—these members in their lack of information, their lack of knowledge.

Point of Order

Mr. Chairperson: Member for Russell, a point of order?

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Chair, I find that this dialogue is so useless. I asked the minister a question regarding Crown Lands. And, if the minister wants to know my record in agriculture, we can have that discussion at

another time. This is an Estimates process and perhaps my question is a little too pointed for an Estimates process, but it is, indeed, something that his department is responsible for. I asked the question about Crown Lands, and I would appreciate if the minister would answer that question and then let's get on with it. We're wasting time.

Mr. Chairperson: Minister of Justice, on the same point of order?

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): On the same point of order, Mr. Chairperson, I was listening carefully to the member for Russell (Mr. Derkach), and I did hear two distinct questions. I heard him, first of all, choosing to respond to what the Minister of Agriculture had said. He did put comments on the record, to which I believe the minister's entitled to respond. He then asked a particular question about Crown Lands, which I believe the minister will also get to, as he answers the questions today. So I don't believe the member has a point of order. The minister is responding to the comments of the member for Russell.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. I thank the members for advice on the point of order raised, but the honourable member does not have a point of order. This is a dispute over the facts.

I would like to remind the committee that a point of order should be used to draw the Chair's attention to any departure from the rules or practices of the House or to raise concerns about unparliamentary language.

* * *

Mr. Struthers: You know, if—I think if I was the member for Russell, I would want to move on, too. I'm not going to just sit here and allow him to come in, question my right or my ability to sit in this chair as minister. I'm not going to allow him to come in and do those sorts of things. I fully intend to answer all the questions that the members opposite come forward with, including—

An Honourable Member: Mr. Chairperson, point of order.

Point of Order

Mr. Chairperson: Point of order.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Chairperson, if he wants to address the comments that was made by the member from Russell, then address those. If he wants to

answer the question, then do that. But don't tell us what he isn't going to do—it seems like he feels that we're attacking him personally. That's not true, and we don't need that type of lecture here today. He's wasting time, and I think it's time that it was brought to order.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. I thank the member for the advice on the point of order raised, but the honourable member does not have a point of order. This is a dispute over the facts. I will request all the members come back to the point what we are discussing instead of going back and forth.

* * *

Mr. Struthers: Really what I want is for all members of this Legislature to understand that sustainable agriculture is something that's worth fighting for. Manitoba farmers have done it year after year, decade after decade, generation after generation. This isn't a lecture; it's a statement of the facts. If there's anything that members opposite have that proves that I'm incorrect in stating that, then they should put it on the record, but I don't think they'll do that because that'll show a lack of support for the farm community, Mr. Chairperson.

I'm addressing the question that came forward from the member for Emerson. I'm addressing the statements, erroneous statements that the member for Russell put on at the beginning of his statement. I think that I've answered that and I think that I'll continue on to talk about Crown Lands a little bit as the member for Russell has asked about. I think, as the member for Russell has said, he doesn't want to put a name on the record and I understand that. In terms of this Crown land, specific Crown land request that he has, but what I can say is, that staff would be willing to sit with him and investigate, make sure that all of the facts brought forward are accurate and make sure that his—if it is his constituent, that this person has been treated fairly.

There's—yeah, I think I'll leave it at that. The staff can review, once they get some information from the member for Russell.

* (16:00)

Mr. Derkach: Well, Mr. Chair, I had asked the minister whether or not there was a way, and let's set this example aside, where individuals who have requested the purchase of Crown land, to expedite that process where there has been an historic heir, if you like, made in the designation of the land or the ownership of the land in past years. Is there a

process, or does he have to go through the—or does every individual have to go through that laborious process of—which is extremely long and laborious—to acquire the land?

Mr. Struthers: Yeah, again, we—in terms of the specifics, I think the member should speak with—yeah, should speak with the staff.

In a general way, one of the things that has worked fairly well is a requirement not to establish a residence. And that has been able to keep these sorts of—I'm sorry, on Crown land, that's been able to keep these sorts of incidents from a lot of them happening. We know that there could be some historical reasons, some exceptions to that. Maybe that's what the member has his finger on here, and we can review those. And if there's a—if a mistake has been made, maybe through Land Titles—maybe a mistake has been made, heaven forbid, by somebody's lawyer—if there's a mistake that has been made along the way, we can try to expedite that and make sure that we move as quickly as we can on it.

Mr. Derkach: Yes, the first comment of the minister just doesn't apply in this situation. The house and the farmyard site was established under the premise that the land was purchased by the individual, and there was no knowledge of this being Crown land. This only became evident in the last few months.

But my specific question is: Is there a process that can be applied for, to expedite either purchasing the land or resolving the issue, and—or is it going to be a long-term resolution to something like this?

Mr. Struthers: There's no process out there that would short-circuit what's going on. And I know that the member isn't asking us to short-circuit anything. I know he understands we need to be accountable and transparent—all of those kinds of principles.

Given whatever the specifics of this case are, we could see a possibility, if there's extenuating circumstances, those sorts of things, where we could do our best, as a department, to expedite. If it's pretty clear that there is extenuating circumstances, and it's having an impact on the constituent of the member for Russell, then we could undertake to move these ahead as quickly as we can. Otherwise, it is that process, I suppose, that the member referred to earlier as long and laborious. But I clearly want to indicate, that once we can see some of the details of what the member has, then we could be in a much better determination to see if there are extenuating

circumstances, if there is a reason to move quickly forward with this.

Mr. Derkach: Is there a policy within the department that allows for the sale of Crown—agricultural Crown land, or is there an attitude or a policy, now, not to sell any Crown land, regardless of what the circumstances are?

Mr. Struthers: I want to assure the member for Russell there's no policy that says we're not going to sell ag Crown land. There's criteria that have to be met. If you've leased the land for a year, you can't sell it. If you've leased it for two years or more, you can—sorry, you can buy it. We can sell it to you.

* (16:10)

But there's no policy saying that we can't sell ag Crown land. And there is that circulation process that's in place, that's been there for a while. And when we deal with ag Crown land, there's a number of different interests on that Crown land. Could be—it could be an interest from the mining folks in terms of gravel; there could be interests from other departments, other agencies. It goes through that circulation process.

We made some changes, I think four years ago or so—about four years ago—to try to streamline and make it so that there was a lot more efficiencies in our system to make it so that all of these processes aren't as long and laborious, is what nobody around this table wants anyway, but still be accountable, still be transparent. So we made those changes, and there's been—okay, and there's been about 1,641 sales of Crown land, which—parcels sold, which includes agricultural parcels. So now, we—if you meet the criteria and you go through the circulation process, we can still sell ag Crown land to a farmer that's interested.

Mr. Derkach: Can the minister advise me what the process is in advertising Crown land and how, when Crown land comes up for either lease or potential sale—I guess in this case it has to be leased—what is the standard process for advertising Crown land so that all interested parties would then be able to access it, provided that the Crown land has been given up by a producer and there's no interest from anyone who's associated with that producer?

Mr. Struthers: Those sort of rules are set by the Crown Lands Property Agency, which is part of Manitoba Infrastructure and Transportation. When they receive a request, they are under requirement to get this advertised. They do it through various farm

media, including some local rural papers, I believe, the *Manitoba Co-operator*. Information's available through our GO offices. And what they have to do is they have to make sure that is advertised for a sufficient amount of time that everybody who could be interested would have a chance to respond.

Mr. Derkach: Are the requirements ever waived by—for advertising Crown land?

Mr. Struthers: Yeah. Generally, the answer is no. I want to give a couple of examples to the member for Russell. In family transfers, there isn't a requirement to do that kind of a go-around with the media and, in a very rare case where there may be some land that is landlocked and nobody else would have access to the land except one certain neighbour, then they waive the advertising, but, other than that, I think the answer is no.

Mr. Derkach: Can the minister tell me how many Crown land leases or requests for sale went to the appeal board in the past year, as compared to the number of applications that came in for selling Crown land?

Mr. Struthers: I'll give a number of numbers to the member for Russell—one we're short. So I have to get back to him on that. But there were, in '08-09, which is the most up-to-date numbers that I have in front of me, there were 304 advertisements for lease. There were 82 transfers, unit transfers, or in-family transfers; there was 82 in all. And there were two appeals.

* (16:20)

The figure that I don't have in front of me that I'll endeavour to get for the member is the—what he was asking about for the number of applications for purchase. I believe that's what he had asked for. I don't have that particular number, but I'll get it to him.

I think what he can see is that a significant number of activity took place, and then there was only two appeals. So that's not too bad an average.

Mr. Derkach: I know the minister doesn't have this information at his fingertips, but could I ask the minister if he would, either for concurrence or beforehand, get me the number of applicants—applications that came in for purchase of Crown land, agricultural Crown land, how many of these went to the appeal process and how many were successful in the appeal process.

If I could get that information, and that's all the questions I have. Thank you.

Mr. Struthers: Yes, we'll undertake to get that for the member.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Wonder if the minister could explain to me what the Nutrient and Manure Management grant assistance program is.

Mr. Struthers: That is a program that's designed to help Manitoba's hog farmers transition into the recommendations that our government accepted through the Clean Environment Commission's hearing—report. It's to help hog farmers handle manure, install systems that they need to be in compliance with the new regulations. It's a commitment that both myself and the former minister of Agriculture made a couple of years ago, and we've been looking to work with Manitoba Pork and others to put together a fund that can help with that transition.

Mr. Pedersen: On page 141 of the Estimates book, there's recoverable last year of \$200,000 and recoverable this year of just short of 3.1 million. Can you explain that?

Mr. Struthers: Yes, the amount that the member for Carman has put his finger on is recovered from the Rural Economic Development Initiative, it's recovered from REDI. That's part of the commitment that is out there for—to help in this transition; \$3.099 million is the amount that's being recovered.

Mr. Pedersen: So, if this is REDI money, does that mean that this—there will be \$3.099 million less available for REDI grants then this year?

Mr. Struthers: REDI is a fund that is made available to help in rural economic development. There's a whole number of very good ideas that fall under rural economic development that are being funded by REDI, and this is one of them.

Mr. Pedersen: So, then, let's—let me ask then. What was the budget last year for REDI in '09-10, and then the proposed budget for REDI in 2010-11?

Mr. Struthers: The total in '09-10 was \$24.4 million. The total in '10-11 is \$22.975 million, and that's because the Lotteries numbers are down and the REDI number is derived directly from the lottery numbers. So, as the lottery numbers go down, so does the amount that we get to spend on very good rural economic development programs in Manitoba. So there was a reduction. It's tied to revenues of Lotteries.

Mr. Pedersen: So how was manure management economic development?

Mr. Struthers: We want the hog industry to survive. We want the hog industry to flourish. We want the hog industry to supply all kinds of spinoff jobs in all kinds of communities all across rural Manitoba. I think it is very much tied to rural economic development. When I talk to Manitoba Pork, when I talk to individual hog farmers, they remind me over and over again how important the hog industry is to Manitoba's economy, how much the hog industry contributes to the province's GDP. I can't imagine an argument against this being a rural economic development initiative.

Mr. Pedersen: Right, then, you're the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives. Is it all one department or is Rural Initiatives a separate department?

*(16:30)

Mr. Struthers: We are all one department. Agriculture and Food and Rural Initiatives, I think, is a very good mix. It—one is dependent on the other. If we are successful in Agriculture, I think that's a positive for both Food and Rural Initiatives. If we're successful in terms of developing rural Manitoba, I think that works well with Agriculture. I think it was very wise for our former premier to put Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives together, and I think the people in that department have provided extraordinary leadership and extraordinary programming to rural Manitobans, whether they be interested in agriculture or food or rural initiatives.

Mr. Chairperson: Member for Emerson—I'm sorry, member for Carman.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

An Honourable Member: He's been called worse.

Mr. Pedersen: I definitely have. I've heard that, Mr. Minister.

On page 175, then, of the Estimates book, you have a decrease in Estimate of expenditures of some \$1.7 million in grants and transfer payments. So that would come out of the rural initiatives—Rural Economic Development fund also, then, correct?

Mr. Struthers: The member will notice that 1.015 money has been recovered from REDI, which, in the book, is less of a recovery than last year. This is for infrastructure support. For example, this is where money was accessed to provide for the

upgrades of the waste-water plant at Neepawa to help in the slaughter of hogs. It's, I think, at—I might as well brag about my own town here a little bit. We had a—we took some money to help in Dauphin at their industrial park to provide some infrastructure so that we could eventually open a hemp facility and provide farmers with a way to market their hemp and provide people in our area with some jobs to process that hemp.

So those are the kind of things that would come out of that recovery from REDI.

Mr. Pedersen: So, based on that, then, this year you'll be spending \$1.7 million less on projects such as waste-water treatment or waste-water recovery—whatever?

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable minister.

Mr. Struthers: Sorry. Yes. You've recognized me. Okay.

A couple of things that I think are important here. One, the nutrient management program we talked about earlier, the support that we're providing for hog farmers to make that transition that—a lot of that is, I think, should be considered in terms of infrastructure support, as well. It's on the farm, but it's infrastructure. It's manure-handling facilities that farmers would need to be compliant with regulations that will come forward.

The other point I think that's important is that this isn't the only place where you'll find, in the provincial government, support for infrastructure that deals with waste-water treatment and those sorts of endeavours. The Manitoba Water Services Board is another area, and that's why, in the times that we're facing, we thought that we could reduce to the number—by the number that the member has talked about here in the REDI program.

It's our intention that through being creative and being, you know, hooked up with other departments, that we can still meet the kind of priorities that Manitobans and Manitoba farmers expect us to.

But—the figures are there in front of the member. He can see a whole number of very worthwhile projects that are being funded, but he can also see the reduction that's there on that line.

Mr. Pedersen: So, based on your answer, then, Mr. Chairperson, through you to the minister, this REDI

money is being spent to comply with regulations for the hog industry, to comply with the regulations that your government has imposed on the hog industry for the better of the environment and all that good stuff.

Can you give me an example of how that creates economic development?

Mr. Struthers: Well, a hog farmer could access some money through our—from our government to construct a manure-handling facility which enables—which would spark some economic activity just in that action itself. But it would also enable the hog farmer to employ people at his facility. It would mean that the hog farmer could shop at the local co-op. It means the hog farmer could upgrade his equipment. It would mean that the farmer—the hog farmer could continue to purchase all those inputs and all the feed, all of those expenses that all of us believe are on the increase way too much. That's economic spinoff. That's economic activity.

I hear over and over again from the hog industry that they are a big part of Manitoba's economy, and I agree with that. And I think we have to do this in such a way that we support that economic activity all over rural Manitoba.

Mr. Pedersen: So, based on this, then, a hog farmer can apply for REDI money to upgrade, expand manure-handling storage for hog barns. Can this happen in the moratorium area?

* (16:40)

Mr. Struthers: A hog farmer in the moratorium area would be able to access this kind of funding. He wouldn't do it through REDI; he would do it through the Nutrient Management Financial Assistance program. Yeah. Just to be accurate. But, yes, he could.

Mr. Pedersen: So, even that—even though it may mean an expansion of his barn, because he will have expanded capacity? Upgrading a lagoon or a hog—or a manure-handling facility, if it means building more capacity, can he do that in the moratorium area?

Mr. Struthers: Well, I think maybe the premise of the question isn't quite right. There's no expansion in the moratorium. If you're a hog farmer and you're in the moratorium and you need to improve your current facility to meet the standards, then you can apply and you can get that without ever having a single more pig come through your operation. It's not absolutely linked to an expansion. So there wouldn't

be any expansion in the moratorium. You could apply to get money to upgrade your current facility. The only way—I think members opposite remember this—the only way you can expand within the moratorium is if you take on the new technology that would allow you to do that.

There was a clause in that Bill 17 that received much debate in this House, that specifically talked about new technology and an exemption that would be applied if you did that. So that new technology would need to be approved. It would need to be recognized by, I believe, recognized by the director over in—director of environment licensing in Conservation. If it met that approval, then an expansion would be able to occur. And they would certainly then, as well, qualify for money under the Nutrient Management Financial Assistance program.

Mr. Pedersen: So the Nutrient Management Financial Assistance program is in the budget. Is it up and running now? Is it—is there—who is in charge of the program? How much money is the Province putting into it? I'll leave it at that for now.

Mr. Struthers: The total amount that'll—the total amount of the funding is in the neighbourhood of \$6 million. What we're doing right now is working on some terms and conditions that need to be rolled out so that farmers know just what it is that they are getting into. It will be delivered through our Agri-Environment Branch.

What I really want to stress is that when I meet with Manitoba Pork and when I meet with hog producers, they've been very clear that this program needs to be moving forward quickly, because there are some hog producers out there who, if only for a little bit of support financially, can make those transitions before the—before, say, the 2013 deadline on winter spreading. There are—it is a challenge for a lot of hog farmers to meet that deadline and we're going to use this commitment that we've made to move along on that. At Manitoba Pork a couple weeks ago, it was a very much—a lot of advice that I got from farmers, in terms of simply helping them make that transition.

Mr. Pedersen: Well, now that you're comfortable with nutrient management, I want to do a 180 here, and because we're running out of time, and my colleague here would like to ask some questions too, I have one other question and then I'm going to turn it over to the member for Portage.

But the River Hills Railway, a wonderful stretch of rail line running from Rathwell to Nesbitt—a group of producers out there have put together some substantial money and they're dealing with CP Rail to buy this line. There was a REDI grant applied for, and the director—you know, the grant was in compliance, but we've not heard back.

When are my producers going to get their REDI grant for a lousy 25 grand?

Mr. Struthers: Well, I wouldn't use the word lousy because this is—I think, this is a very good program. It's a very good project with money coming out of a very good program.

Twenty-five thousand dollars will help the River Hills Railway folks do their feasibility study. I think the member for Carman is going to be very happy in a very short period of time.

Mr. Pedersen: I was told to be happy on the 1st of March, and here we are in the end of April. I'm still waiting to be happy. So, Mr. Minister, I'll hold you to that. I like to be happy and I know that those guys out in the River Hills Railway would be very happy too, but I will tell them to just hold their breath, because the cheque's in the mail.

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): I do believe the minister had another comment in regards to railway before—*[interjection]* Seeing not, I would like to ask from the minister a number of questions from what I'm very oriented in, and that's research and development and sustainable agriculture through innovation and technology.

Very dismayed with this year's budget and obvious cutbacks to the University of Manitoba, where a lot of research and development does take place. But I would like to commence, though, with the situation that exists at the Canada-Manitoba Crop Diversification Centre, Portage la Prairie. Do we have a long-term federal agreement now? What is the status of the diversification centre?

* (16:50)

Mr. Struthers: Well, I just made a comment about making sure the member for Carman (Mr. Pedersen) was happy and, of course, if he's happy, I'm happy. And the cheque isn't in the mail, but it's as close to being that as you can get. So we'll all be happy when that happens.

And I think I can endeavour to make the member for Portage la Prairie happy as well. He's—sometimes the opposition gets after us for, you know, spending too much and then, now they come along and they want to spend more. *[interjection]* Yeah. So the member for Portage la Prairie is correct. Through the past year, in trying to get an agreement put in place, you know, there's always ups and downs. But we have signed a 10-year agreement. We have increased our funding from 60,000 to 100,000—

An Honourable Member: Annually?

Mr. Struthers: Yeah. So—and this is a good example. We had a good discussion the other day here at this table about research and innovation and development. And I wanted—I want to make sure that, you know, the members opposite see the whole big picture when it comes to research and not go to one certain line here and there to show decreases.

There has been a continued commitment to research. It's a commitment that is based on partnership with the federal government and with industry, which I'm really pleased is happening in this case. And it's based on trying to stretch out, not just our dollars, but the federal dollars and industry dollars, university dollars, trying to stretch those out. So we make those kind of decisions.

The other thing that we've added is a staff. We have—and also we have four staff out of the GO Centre in Carberry, which I think plays into this mix really well. So, hopefully, the member for Portage la Prairie is as happy as the member for Carman on that one.

Mr. Faurshou: Well, I'm pleased that we do have a long-term agreement because it's been a long time coming. We've gone short-term, and it's good for job opportunities and staffing, equipment, amortization, everything is important for long-term agreements.

The—across the road from the MCDC, the Prairie Agriculture Machinery Institute, WESTEST—I see there is no anticipated increase in level of support for PAMI. Is that by design or is the sustainability of those operations able to—as I understand the number of years that the status quo funding—I'm wondering how the department views the ongoing operations of the Prairie Agriculture Machinery Institute.

Mr. Struthers: We are very supportive of what the PAMI does, what the prairie agriculture machine institute does. We—the funding—as the member can

see, the funding has remained level from last year to this year.

What I want to add to that, though, is that there are other individual projects that we fund in addition to what is listed on there. An example of that is the WESTEST project. It's a joint—it's a collaboration between us and the feds, \$100,000 through Growing Forward, the innovation suite that we have for that, and \$100,000 through my very kind colleague over in Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade.

So the funding has remained level and we continue to fund on a project-by-project basis a number of different projects that, I think, add to that institute, which I think is a very worthwhile institute to continue to show support to.

Mr. Faurschou: I concur in—with the minister in its value to the agricultural industry and, with the WESTEST, value to the manufacturing industry. They were testing a chassis for bus manufacturing here in Manitoba and—as well as a cultivator frame, and the ability for flexing and long-term usage, monitoring the metal fatigue.

Very dismaying to me, seeing the irrigation budget slashed to zero. To say that the department is going to facilitate and develop retention ponds, irrigation water distribution systems and related off-farm infrastructures in support of irrigated crop production—not going to get very much of that done with a zero budget, but the minister may want to comment. Are the resources going into other areas, because I—there's water and agriculture, hand in hand. One does not have any agricultural production without water, and this is fundamental province-wide.

And I believe I'd like to get into water retention, but the time is very short. In fact, we only have a—I don't believe the minister has time to even respond, but we'll be back here tomorrow.

Mr. Struthers: Yes, a couple of things. First of all, I appreciate his comments and his knowledge of what PAMI does and how important that is to agriculture and to his area, to his constituency.

The only point I want to make quickly, before we wrap up on irrigation side and on the water side, is that we'd love to sit down and speak with the feds about them pulling out of a number of projects that involve water.

I agree. I think water's very important to agriculture. As I look out the window now, I've got some happy farmers who were speaking to me up in the Dauphin area who said to me they wanted either rain or snow; I'm really glad they're getting rain rather than snow, but they want that moisture right about now, even though they're in—at the early stages of seeding and getting going.

So I take the member's point, and I look forward to more discussions about water and water retention throughout the Estimates.

Mr. Chairperson: The time being 5 p.m., I am interrupting the proceedings.

The Committee of Supply will resume sitting tomorrow morning at 10 a.m.

LABOUR AND IMMIGRATION

* (14:40)

Mr. Chairperson (Rob Altemeyer): Will the Committee of Supply please come to some semblance of order.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates of the Department for Labour and Immigration.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Jennifer Howard (Minister of Labour and Immigration): I do, just a short one.

Mr. Chairperson: Please proceed.

Ms. Howard: I want to start out by welcoming my critic. Both he and I are new to this portfolio, so I expect a enjoyable afternoon of learning together the many great things that the Department of Labour and Immigration is involved in. And I'm also always keen to hear members' suggestions for things that we can improve. I think that one of the things that we all are involved in in our constituencies is talking to our constituents, and that's where we get some great ideas for what they expect from government. So I'm always open to hear those.

This year the budget is looking at a 2.3 percent increase, and I'm just going to briefly go over some of the things that that increase will be going towards. One of them certainly is the hiring of five additional Workplace Safety and Health inspectors. In 2009-10, the Workplace Safety and Health division conducted more than 10,000 inspections of workplaces across

Manitoba. That's a significant increase from a decade ago when they were conducting about 1,500 in 1999.

In addition to strengthening enforcement, the Workplace Safety and Health division is working in partnership with the Workers Compensation Board on a joint injury and illness prevention plan. As a result of these efforts, Manitoba's time loss injury rate has decreased by about 30 percent since 2000, but, of course, as we marked yesterday, the Day of Mourning, I know we all agree that we would like to see no injuries in Manitoba, and we continue to work towards a province where that could be possible.

The hiring of the five additional safety and health officers this fiscal year will complete our commitment in 2007 to add 20 new safety and health officers, and I think it's interesting for the committee to know that when those officers are hired, that will bring the number of safety and health officers to 74, which is more than double of what it was in 1999.

Moving on to discuss immigration for a moment, immigration, I think, is one of the great untold success stories of Manitoba over the last 10 years. We have seen an incredible influx of newcomers into our communities, and we've seen an influx all throughout the province. In 2008, there were 11,230 immigrants that came to Manitoba, three times as many as 1999 and the highest level of immigration since 1957. Of course, to sustain the increased immigration and the settlement services for newcomers, we'll see increased funding to that department and that will be going towards settlement and English as an additional language programs.

I think the key to the success of the Immigration division is the Manitoba Provincial Nominee Program, which is known nationally and which receives attention, often from the federal minister who often states that the Manitoba program is a model program, and that's the key driver of our growth. So, to handle increasing numbers of provincial nominees, the Immigration division has been working on a streamlined application process. They've made tremendous strides in streamlining that process so it can be as efficient as possible with the goal, of course, of reducing processing times.

The Office of the Manitoba Fairness Commissioner was established to support self-regulatory bodies to comply with the fair practices outlined in The Fair Registration Practices and Regulated Professions Act. The work of this office will be supported by the addition of a permanent, full-time position to help administer that act and to continue

working with regulators, educational institutions and employers on projects that improve the assessment and recognition of internationally trained individuals. I would say, when I meet with newcomers, the issue of getting their credentials recognized so they can work in their fields is a top-of-mind issue, and I'm very proud of the work that the Office of the Fairness Commissioner is doing with regulators to help remove some of those barriers.

I'm also pleased to be the minister responsible for people with disabilities. The Disabilities Issues Office is a new addition to the Department of Labour and Immigration. That office works across government in consultation with Manitoba's disability community to ensure that provincial policies, programs and opportunities are inclusive of Manitobans with disabilities. Last year, the office launched the Opening Doors, Manitoba's commitment to persons with disabilities initiative. The goal here is to develop a new, long-term, cross-departmental disability strategy to remove barriers that prevent the full participation of people with disabilities as citizens in our society.

Now, the Disabilities Issues Office is a small, lean, mean operation that does incredible work with very few staff, very dedicated staff. I was privileged to work with them before I became minister, and I'm very privileged to continue to work with them. They will receive a modest increase this year to help continue their work.

The Employment Standards division is the place that helps enforce the Employment Standards Code. They have seen an addition to their work with the implementation of The Worker Recruitment and Protection Act, also known as WRAPA. They will be receiving additional funding to support that work with additional positions and other costs that they incur. I should say that WRAPA is one of the pieces of legislation that Manitoba was first on, remains unique in Canada, and is one of those pieces of legislation that I frequently speak about to other ministers of Labour and that our officials are asked about from other officials in other provinces. We hope that other provinces will also look to that legislation for ideas of how they can also protect the rights of temporary foreign workers.

I would just like to say, in closing, that the transition for me to this portfolio has been made all the easier because of the tremendous staff in the department, in all levels of the department. They're

committed to their work. They are passionate about bringing excellence to the delivery of services to the public, and I have only confidence in their ability to carry out the mission of the department.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

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

Does the opposition critic have an opening statement? Recognizing the honourable member for Pembina.

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): Well, thank you, Mr. Chair, and I, too, want to thank the minister for her opening comments, and I also wish her well in her new portfolio. As she indicated at the outset, we are both new in these areas of responsibility, and so I do wish her well as the year goes on.

I don't have any formal opening statement. I do have questions that we will be getting to eventually, and so also there's other colleagues who will be dropping in and asking questions as well. So, with that, I would just encourage us to proceed.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the opposition critic for those comments as well.

This won't be news to anybody, but I'll say it anyways. Under Manitoba practice, debate on the Minister's Salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply. Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of line item 11.1.(a) contained in resolution 11.1.

And, at this time, we invite the minister's staff to come join us at the head table and, Minister, perhaps when they are settled, you'd be kind enough to introduce them to the committee.

Ms. Howard: Okay, I'll introduce the staff. We're going to hope that I remember all their names—

An Honourable Member: Uh-huh, you better.

Ms. Howard: I'd better, is right. I am joined by Deputy Minister Jeff Parr; the assistant deputy minister with responsibility for Immigration, Ben Rempel; the policy guru of the department, Victor Minenko; and the numbers guy, Ken Taylor.

Mr. Chairperson: Very good. At this time, I'll ask the committee, is there a wish to proceed in a global manner or line by line?

Mr. Dyck: Yes, I would like to proceed in a global fashion and, if that's acceptable to the minister, that's the direction I'd like to go.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you for that.

Ms. Howard: I would agree with that approach.

Mr. Chairperson: Very good. It's therefore understood that the consideration of Estimates for this department will proceed in a global manner.

And the floor is now open for questions. Scanning and seeing the honourable member for Pembina.

Mr. Dyck: Okay, thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and, yes, at the outset you did introduce your staff. I want to thank you for that and, also, I am pleased that—have an opportunity to meet them in this manner.

And so with that in mind, I will just move to some very specific questions that I have here.

Can you give me the number of staff that are currently employed in the total department?

Ms. Howard: Yes, we have 331.25 positions in Labour and Immigration.

Mr. Dyck: And could you provide a specific list of all staff in the minister's and the deputy minister's office?

Ms. Howard: I'd be happy to provide you with that list. I don't know if you want me to read out the names now or just get a list to you?

* (14:50)

Mr. Dyck: If I could just get that list that would be great. Okay, and, proceed—the names of the staff that have been hired in 2009 and, of course, now, as well, this year, including whether they were hired through competition or appointment.

Ms. Howard: Okay. The staff hired by competition in the last year. I've Larry Anderson, he's a boiler inspector. We've got the following safety and health officers: Darren James, Michael Langridge, Crystal Baldwin, Murray Roy, Michael Santez [*phonetic*], Marty Danielson, Rodney Jervis, and administrative assistant in Workplace Safety and Health, Jessica Bazin.

In Employment Standards, we have Cindy Murdoch, who is an Employment Standards officer. In the Disabilities Issues Office there are two term policy analysts, Rhonda Wiebe and Colleen Watters. In Immigration we have policy and program co-ordinators Greg Reader, Paul Vieira, Catherine Cooke and Rebecca Hiebert. In IT we have Kurt Penner. In Mechanical and Engineering we have Evelyn Quesada, who's an administrative supervisor.

In Workplace Safety and Health, we have Randy Olynick, senior safety and health officer. At the Manitoba Labour Board we have Florence Bruce, who's an administrative officer; Jose Barroso, who's a Labour Board officer; Anita Rondeau, the assistant to the chairperson; Monique Racine, who's an administrative assistant.

In Employment Standards, we have Barbara Korman and Mike Blackburn, Employment Standards officers, and in staff hired by direct appointment, we have Jeannine Kebernik, a special assistant to myself; Jennifer Nembhard, who is an executive assistant to myself; Rachel Morgan, who works in Cabinet Communications. We have Diana Stanek and Larissa Mazur, who work helping agency boards and commissions. We have Carol Wenaus, who's an executive assistant that was transferred to Education with Minister Allan as a result of the Cabinet shuffle.

In Financial and Administrative Services, we have Tchin Nevado [*phonetic*], who is an administrative assistant. That was a term hired to cover leaves. In Workplace Safety and Health, we have Megan Phillips, who's a STEP student. We have Antonio Bonilla, who is hired on a term to cover off sick leaves. We have Christine Mousseau, who is an administrative assistant, hired on a part-time basis to cover for an employee that had returned to school, and in Immigration we have Colin Lemoine, who is a policy and program analyst—that's a short-term appointment that will be moving to a competition. Oh, and in the Disabilities Issues Office, we also have Ross Eadie.

Mr. Dyck: I'm not sure if I missed it or not, but did you give a description of any of the positions that had been reclassified in the past year, or have any of them been reclassified?

Ms. Howard: We have three reclassifications. Jeff McCulloch, who's a policy analyst, moved from being in the Workplace Safety and Health division to a policy analyst. We have a reclassification,

Benjamin Amoyaw, who moved from a PM2 to a PM3. He's a senior policy and program analyst because of increased duties, and we have a reclassification in the Office of the Fire Commissioner, a director position there, Brenda Popko, a long-time employee who also had some increased duties, and she's responsible there for the College of the Fire Commissioner. And then there was—there's currently a vacancy in the Office of the Fire Commissioner that as a result of the move of Brenda Popko was also reclassified.

Mr. Dyck: You mentioned a vacancy. Are there any other vacancies in your department that need to be filled?

Ms. Howard: Yes, as of March 31, 2009, there were 17.5 vacant positions in the department. Most of those are planning to be filled by June 1, 2010.

Mr. Dyck: Okay, just to recap. You say that you expect to have those vacancies filled by June the 1st of this year.

Ms. Howard: We expect to fill most of them. Some of them are being held for employment equity initiatives. Those might take a little longer but I would expect most of those to be filled.

Mr. Dyck: Okay. Have there been any impacts on the department as a result of these vacancies that you have?

Ms. Howard: I'm told that it's not unusual for us to have this level of vacancy. There's always gaps between when people leave and when people are hired, and I'm informed by my staff there's been no difficulty experienced with these short-term vacancies.

Mr. Dyck: Okay, so I understand then from the minister that as a result of the vacancies, there's been no delays in any projects or anything that need to take place as a result of that.

Ms. Howard: I see lots of head shaking in my officials, so I would say that's a no.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you. How many positions have been relocated in the past year, '09, from rural Manitoba or northern Manitoba into Winnipeg or vice versa? Could you just give me a listing of those?

Ms. Howard: We've moved one person from Winnipeg, a safety and health officer, to Thompson.

Mr. Dyck: Okay, thank you. I take it that's all then that you have moved, just the one—

An Honourable Member: Yes.

Mr. Dyck:—one person. Okay. Thank you.

Okay, what is the department's annual advertising budget?

* (15:00)

Ms. Howard: The budget for the coming year is about \$394,000. It goes for things like reminding people it's Remembrance Day and things will be closed, advertising when the minimum wage is being increased; there's advertising within the Status of Women for some of the things that they produce, different booklets and guides and advertising around events like Women's History Month and International Women's Day.

I'm told that number of \$394,000 also includes printing costs for the department, so it's not exclusively advertising.

Mr. Dyck: Okay. Could you break that down, like what would be advertising and what would be the printing costs?

Ms. Howard: We can get that information for you.

Mr. Dyck: And if she could also give that to me for the years '07-08 and '08-09. That'd be the last two years. If that's possible, I would appreciate that.

Okay, then moving on—then okay, that information will be coming later on then, I take it. In due course, as someone has aptly said. Okay, then, the status update of any new departmental initiative that has been announced or undertaken in the past year. I mean, there have been a number of news releases that have come out, but I'm just wondering, were there any new initiatives that you had that you could give us the information on?

Ms. Howard: That's a very broad question. It's going to take me a moment to get that information. I don't know if you have anything specific you want to know about or—

Mr. Dyck: No. I guess the highlights of it, if you could give those to me, that would be helpful, please.

Ms. Howard: I'm not going to give you an exhaustive list, but I can give you some of the highlights.

We've been—one of the things that we've been involved in is getting The Pension Benefits Act regulations done and proclaimed, and that was a monumental piece of work that I think will help protect people's pensions into the future.

We had the Labour Management Review Committee take a look at minimum wage and make recommendations. Unfortunately, they couldn't come to a consensus, so we had to go forward and make a decision on the increase to the minimum wage.

We had more work done on the processing times in the Provincial Nominee Program. The nominee application centre opened. The new immigrant centre has sort of a one-stop shop to help immigrants apply to come here and to be successful.

We rolled out The Worker Recruitment and Protection Act, which I spoke about briefly, earlier.

We were able to increase settlement funding to areas that have seen increased immigration, like, for example, Brandon and Westman.

We're doing work with the Office of the Fire Commissioner and others on looking at the Farm Building Code, consultations with producer groups and others on that. We're also continuing to do work on the building codes in a few areas, energy efficiency being one, water efficiency being another and accessibility being a third part. As well, the Office of the Fire Commissioner has been working closely with municipalities on the designation for building inspections, and that work has been completed and now signed off, which will make some municipalities very happy.

And those are some of the highlights of the last year.

Mr. Dyck: Thank you. Just coming back to—and I won't proceed on each one of these; I may come back to some of them later. But on The Pension Benefits Act, is that now completed? Like, is that totally dealt with and completed now? I know that the minister had an announcement on that just a while ago.

Ms. Howard: The announcement was announcing the proclamation of the regulations of that act. Those regulations will mostly come into effect May 31st of this year, with the exception of pension committees, which we've given an additional year for workplaces to set up at their request, and some other measures to do with the security of pensions that had to come into effect at the end of the last fiscal year, March 31st.

So the work that was begun in 2005 has been completed. We have asked the Pension Commission to take a look at some further issues with pensions

that they are working on, those issues being things like solvency, especially in private-sector plans, and also looking at how we make it easier for people to transfer their pensions between employers. So they are now taking a look at those issues, and I expect to hear back from them, hopefully sometime this fall, and that may require additional regulation changes.

But the big piece of regulatory work, which was made necessary by the changes to the act, that has been completed. All of those regulations will come into effect either this—end of this May, with the exception of pension committees, which will be in effect by next May.

Mr. Dyck: Okay, thank you. Just further to that, when you're meeting with different groups, and I take it as to what you said, this is ongoing. Like, the regulations are in place, but you are still continuing to meet with different groups, employer groups, employee groups? Could you name some of the employee and employer groups that you are meeting with, in order to try and fine-tune this and put it in place?

* (15:10)

Ms. Howard: Well, I have a very long list here of people that were involved in consultations on The Pension Benefits Act regulations. I'm not going to read them out to you, but we can make that list available. But it includes financial institutions, credit unions and banks. It includes employers, some very big employers and some smaller employers. It includes representative organizations, like the Manitoba Employers Council, like the Manitoba Federation of Labour. It includes groups that represent seniors, like the Manitoba Society of Seniors, and it includes individuals who have an interest in pensions, as well as experts in pensions, actuaries, accountants, people that work on pensions. So we can certainly make the list of people who made submissions in that consultation available to you. And, as we go forward, those are the types of organizations that we would continue to consult with.

Mr. Dyck: Yes, if I could have a list of that. I'm just looking at the pages you had there. I appreciate the fact you didn't read them all off, because that could have taken a little while. So, anyway, yes, as long as I can get some of the information, that would be helpful.

I want to move on to travel, and I'm just wondering if there was any travel by the Premier (Mr. Selinger) or delegation led by the Premier that was paid for through your department.

Ms. Howard: No.

Mr. Dyck: Yes, and any ministerial travel, like out of province and so on, while you've been at conferences, if you could just indicate those as well in the last, in the past year—and the dates and who paid the costs and so on.

Ms. Howard: Yes, I've been on two out-of-province trips since becoming minister. One was at the federal-provincial-territorial ministers meeting for ministers of Labour. That was in Ottawa, February 21st and 22nd. I travelled with the deputy minister to that, and then I was honoured to represent the Premier at the Paralympics in Vancouver, and that was March 17th to the 22nd, and I had no staff with me on that trip.

Both those trips were paid for through the department.

Mr. Dyck: Okay, thank you. Just hang on a minute here.

Okay, yes, I'm going to go to a different area now, but my colleague here from Portage la Prairie has a few questions. I'm just going to give it to him at this point.

Mr. David Faurschou (Portage la Prairie): Mr. Chairperson, I do appreciate the opportunity to participate in the committee of Estimates, the honourable Minister for Labour and Immigration, and thank you very much to my colleague from Pembina.

The area of concern I have I'd like the minister to officially respond on the record is the departmental progress towards the issuance of the part 3 building inspector code as it pertains to personnel that are working for the various planning districts throughout the province.

My understanding is that certain jurisdictions do have the part 3 eligibility for inspection of commercial buildings under construction, and yet other areas do not and which service is provided for by the department through the Fire Commissioner's office.

In Portage la Prairie it has been over five years that the part 3 function of inspection has been provided for within the city limits. But the—for the five years I speak of, it's been in existence, the planning district which encompasses not only the city of Portage la Prairie, but the Rural Municipality of Portage la Prairie.

And as, I believe, the minister appreciates that division still exists within her department, because the building inspectors can inspect part 3 code inspections in the city but cannot in the rural. So even though it's the same inspector and highly qualified inspectors which the department recognizes, so I'm hoping the minister will be able to provide an update as to when she is going to be able to initiate the necessary changes to legislation or regulation that would take down this barrier between the rural and the city of Portage la Prairie.

Ms. Howard: Well, I'm pleased to let the honourable member know that I signed the regulation last week. So people will be getting notice of that, and my understanding from his question is that this is the issue with the R.M. of Portage. So they will be able to apply for that designation, and they can apply now. The regulation is completed, and it will lay out the process in how those inspectors will be evaluated, and I would hope that if this is someone who's already doing inspectors—inspections in Portage, that that should be a very straightforward process.

The reason that we took some time to do this was we didn't have, previously, a system of standards for our building inspections—for building inspectors, some very qualified excellent work, but there wasn't a set standard. And so there was concern about, you know, that those inspections were being carried out and that people were doing it correctly and once a building was approved that it was meaningful approval.

So we've taken some time, worked with the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, the Manitoba Building Standards Board, and the Manitoba Building Officials Association to come up with a process and some standards so that people who are interested—municipalities who are interested in doing those inspections can apply and be able to do those. So that work is complete, and so it's now available to that R.M. to make an application.

Mr. Faurchou: I do appreciate the minister's response, and it'll be very good news to the councillors that—of the Portage la Prairie rural

municipality who have been quite anxious to have this ability.

Now, the standards to which the minister speaks, is this a harmonization of qualifications for building inspectors with other jurisdictions, as well as, let's say, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta, just to name a couple, or is there still a fragmented across-the-nation type of qualifications for building inspectors?

Ms. Howard: Yes, I'm going to let the honourable member know that we did consult with other jurisdictions about what was required. One of our concerns in moving forward was that, you know, Manitoba is different than Ontario. We have lots of small towns, lots of places with smaller populations. I think when we looked at the Ontario standards, the conclusion was that if we adopted them wholesale, there may be very few small centres that would be able to carry out those inspections. You know, some of it is volume, the number of inspections that one has to do to qualify. So we certainly looked to other jurisdictions.

I think at the end of the day, we took the advice of the Manitoba Building Officials—building inspection officials group—who do that work, and we've come up with a list of courses that has to be taken with a number of inspections that people have to complete so they keep their skills sharp, and we hope that that will fit the Manitoba reality.

* (15:20)

So it may be a little different than other provinces, but I think that that's probably fair, given the kind of population and the kind of population dispersement we have in this province. We certainly didn't want to set the bar artificially high so that, you know, only large centres could carry out these inspections.

Mr. Faurchou: I truly appreciate the minister's response because it is important to remain proficient, and obviously the changes in building materials and engineering, one has to be active in order to be able to keep current.

On that point then, will the building inspectors, once they are qualified—let's use Portage la Prairie once again as an example—would the building inspectors, once qualified, be able to be employed by other rural municipalities that perhaps would not have the necessity of the number of building starts to warrant a full-time building inspector? Would then the building inspector from Portage la Prairie perhaps be able to go to the R.M. of Cartier or the

R.M. of Headingley or St. François Xavier to carry out those duties?

Ms. Howard: I think that's a very good point the honourable member makes and certainly that's the practice now we try to do through planning districts, where a planning district, municipalities, towns could come together, formalize that relationship and could have—employ an inspector as a planning district and have them do those inspections.

Certainly, I think that's an approach that is much more efficient and encourage that approach to planning generally. I think that makes better use of resources.

We're also, you know—I think we're very fortunate in that we have a fire commissioner who has been very open to working with all kinds of officials and we look for solutions. So, if there are other kinds of working-together solutions that towns want to propose, we definitely look at. And when we met with some of the officials from the north, we talked about the planning district model as also being something that they may want to look into because of this issue of having enough inspections to keep your skills current and sharp.

But we're definitely open to those kinds of solutions where towns and municipalities get together to employ an inspector, a qualified inspector. I think that's a good way to go.

Mr. Faurichou: Once again, I agree with what the minister's saying, but the question I come back to, though: Can the building inspector in the central regional planning district of Portage la Prairie—correct terminology, the Portage and district planning area—will those building inspectors that are employees of that district be able to provide services to adjacent or other R.M.s?

Ms. Howard: So I'm just taking a look at their regulation here. Their requirements for a municipality to be designated as being able to carry out inspections, they have to employ one or more qualified employees, either directly or by agreement with another municipality.

So I would translate that—in my own brain—mean that as long as they have an agreement—there has to be some kind of formal agreement between municipalities that that would be able to—the scenario that the member describes would be able to happen.

Mr. Faurichou: By the wording of the regulation which the minister read—basically would say that

there would have to be a long-term, ongoing agreement rather than a case-by-case type of building inspection.

Ms. Howard: Well, the regulation doesn't speak to the length of the agreement. But I think what the expectation would be is that there is some systematic approach to inspection, that it's not, sort of, an agreement for one day, to do one-off inspections. I'm not sure that anybody is well served by that kind of agreement.

So, I think, you know, we definitely will work with municipalities. I think, you know, this is a new system, and, like all new systems, you roll it out and you see how it works. And if there are scenarios like the member describes that come up, that can't be accommodated within their regulation, then we'd be open to discussing that with the municipalities.

But I think what we have put in place would allow for, with an agreement, with some formalized structure, for a municipality to have a building inspector that could work with another municipality. I don't think anything prevents that in their regulation. But, I think, you know, for added clarity, if the municipality has those questions, be happy to have them talk to some of the officials, so they understand exactly what system they're trying to set up, and, we can avoid misunderstandings at the beginning, if we talk about it. So that would be my approach on that issue.

Mr. Faurichou: Everything about the minister speaks is common sense oriented, and I do appreciate that she is interpreting—[interjection]—this particular regulation, to be specific. I know projects, you know, are ongoing and multiple inspections are required through the construction phase. So, for instance, Headingley is seeing the inspection of—a series of inspections for the new women's correctional facility, which is taking upwards to two years to go through.

So, an agreement—I'm trying to drill down into what the minister envisions the agreement being. Would it be a global type of agreement, which would encompass multiple construction sites or, would you see that it would—could be very specific to one construction undertaking? And has the department developed some type of template as to—which would be acceptable to the department, which municipalities could, effectively, put on loan their building inspector to another smaller municipality, for the duration of the construction period, for a hog

barn or for a large potato warehouse project, or something to that nature?

Ms. Howard: I'm not sure that the idea of having a sort of inspection on one building or one project or for one time only, I'm not sure that's kind of the system that we're hoping that this regulation achieves. I would be concerned about an approach where you would kind of lend an inspector, or have an inspector, on a contingency basis, that doesn't have a long-term relationship with the municipality, that doesn't have some accountability to that municipality.

I think our goal in this is having well-qualified inspectors who are doing the work of making sure the buildings are going to be safe and where there's clear accountability lines—where they know who they're working for. So I think those were the goals.

* (15:30)

Now I think the idea that the member raises about templates and helping municipalities come up with those agreements—absolutely the Office of the Fire Commissioner has a good record of working with municipalities, works with the Association of Manitoba Municipalities. I know they have a lot of template agreements that they make available to those members, so I'll definitely take that suggestion back and see if that's some work that can be done.

But, as I, you know, said, this is a new approach and we'll evaluate how it goes. We're not going to, you know, close the door completely on possibilities of municipalities working together. But I will say, you know, the goal here is to create a systematic approach to inspection, well-qualified inspectors and the ultimate goal is safety.

But I appreciate some of the questions the member has had. It's good food for thought.

Mr. Dyck: Just to pursue that a little further, for these inspections, is there a standard fee that you pay, like throughout the province, or is it—for instance, I'm thinking back of the area that I represent—that's MSTW, which is the Morden, Stanley, Thompson, Winkler area—and I'm just wondering if that is—those fees are consistent with the Portage la Prairie area, for instance. You know, are there huge differences?

Ms. Howard: The information that I have is that municipalities are allowed to set their own fees for inspections. Now, I think the reality is that they stay fairly close together.

The few examples—and they're very interested in maintaining that power to set their own fees from the municipalities that I've spoken to.

I'll just give you some examples of some of the fees. So, if it's a provincial matter, we charge \$6 per \$1,000 of construction costs. It's the same in Morden and Selkirk. Brandon's a bit higher at \$8 per \$1,000; Winnipeg's at 7.50. You look at some of the other provinces, both British Columbia and Saskatchewan have a cost at \$7; Ontario's the highest at \$12 per \$1,000 worth of construction.

So Manitoba's fees, I think, definitely, compared to other provinces are very competitive, and from what I see before me, at least in some of the larger centres, they all seem to be pretty close together.

Mr. Dyck: Okay, so those comparisons that you're giving and the dollar values, are they the same whether it's residential or commercial?

Ms. Howard: So this is for the part 3 building codes, so these would be commercial buildings.

Mr. Dyck: Okay, so what are they—how do they then relate to the residential if these are the commercial?

Ms. Howard: We don't have that information with us, so I'll get that to you.

Mr. Dyck: And I'm going to move on now to immigration. I've got some questions there, and the member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) has some questions as well.

So I'll start off with a few questions that I have here, and I'd just like to know what is the total number of landings, to date, in the past year of immigrants who have come in, and I think you indicated that at the outset as well.

Ms. Howard: In 2008, we had 11,218 permanent residents, and that's the last year we have a final number for. Those numbers usually get finalized in the fall, some late summer, fall, so we don't have a final number yet for 2009.

Mr. Dyck: And sorry to break this off, but I had forgotten the member for Ste. Rose had just one or two questions, so I'm going to turn it to him and then we'll come back to Immigration again.

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): My question revolves around the apprenticeships and I—Assiniboine Community College and, I expect, Red River College and the university of the north all do kind of outreach programs with courses into some fairly remote communities. And the example I'm

going to use is the Ebb and Flow First Nation where they had an electrical course there and there was 14, I believe, took the course; 13 of them made it through the course, but from there on, you need a journeyman to move ahead in the apprenticeship programs. And in these more remote areas, it's very difficult to find a journeyman for an apprentice to work with. I want to know if the minister's aware of this problem and what action she may be taking on it.

Ms. Howard: Well, I'll let the honourable member know that apprenticeship actually falls under Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade. I don't know if they've had their Estimates yet, so you're going to get better information there. I can tell you that I am aware of this issue. I've heard of this issue, of the difficulty in finding journeypersons to complete apprenticeships. But, at the same time, I think it's also, you know, the journeyperson plays an important role in that apprenticeship, both in a teaching role but also in a safety role. So we have to sort of balance that. But really the best information on apprenticeship is going to come from the Minister of Entrepreneurship, Training and Trade (Mr. Bjornson).

Mr. Briese: I appreciate that answer. I was so sure it was here that I'm really rather disappointed. But, no, I agree with you on the—but the shortage is that there are no journeymen in these communities for the people that took the course, and so, really, providing the courses kind of lapses and I think it's a major problem. And I think there has to be some further thought on providing journeymen into those communities in some way, shape, or form.

Mr. Dyck: Switching hats again, we're going to go back to Immigration. Okay, so we know the number of landings that we had in '08, and obviously the minister, and through the department, keeps track of the number of people. I mean, I guess what I'm getting at is what is the net gain to the province, because if I look at my area, for instance, there is mobility, and we've had a lot of immigrants coming into the area that I represent, but there's also a number that have left.

So I'm just wondering if you could give me the actual number—I guess for '09 you wouldn't have it, but '08 you would—of what the retention rate was of those who actually did stay or move through. So, really, and I guess my question is twofold: Of the immigrants that came, can you track to see who is—how many of those have left the province? And then

the other question would be the net gain that we have as a province in numbers here and in population.

*(15:40)

Ms. Howard: So the retention question is an important question because I think we do want to know how many people are staying here. And the numbers I have for the honourable member are from 2004-2005 because the way that we track this information is through the census data. And that's the last available census data that we have access to.

So, between 2004 and 2005, the people who came in 2004 were still living in the province in 2005. We were retaining about 82.8 percent of newcomers. Now, that is a good rate for one year and we're currently working with the federal government on evaluation tools so that we can do better tracking of retention. That work is ongoing this year.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Yes, just to, I guess, kind of pick up on that particular question, I do have a series of questions I would like to ask the minister, all related to immigration so it could take a bit just to kind of go through them.

There is an obligation on the sponsors that the individuals coming to the province are obligated to stay in the province, continue to work even though it will be—our Constitution says that once you land in Vancouver, you can go and do anything you would like in terms of mobility. But we do put that obligation, and that's an important obligation in terms of the sponsor.

The question that I have is in relation to if the sponsor has a family, and we'll just say a nephew that arrives in Manitoba, after being in Manitoba for two months, decides to go to another place. No real good reason, it's just—just doesn't necessarily care for Manitoba and he feels that he wants to move out to Saskatchewan or Alberta or another province, what impact will that have in the long term?

I know in the short term, within a year, that sponsor will not be able to sponsor someone else. How long before that sponsor would actually be able to sponsor another family member? Will that sponsor be allowed to sponsor someone in the future? How does that work?

Ms. Howard: So I think, as the member knows, there's lots of criteria in the Provincial Nominee Program in an application, and that criteria is designed to measure the likelihood of success of that

person who's coming. We want them to come here. We want them to stay here. We want them to be successful here.

So we do look at their attachment to the community, and that's one of the ways that we gauge the probability that they will stay here. But those kinds of decisions are made on a case-by-case basis. So there's not—I don't think it would be accurate to say that, you know, if someone brings somebody here and they leave, they may leave for legitimate reasons. They may get a job somewhere else that they have to go to. They may have to go and be with a sick family member somewhere else.

So I don't think, you know, that we would automatically say, that's it, you can't bring anyone else. I think if it was seen that there was a pattern of people bringing in folks who didn't stay here, that would definitely alert the folks within the Provincial Nominee Program. But those decisions are really made on a case-by-case basis.

Mr. Lamoureux: That does cause some concern, I must say, and that's the reason why I had posed the question in the way of someone that doesn't really have a good reason. They just come to the province of Manitoba and they just made the decision to move outside of Manitoba. You see I would argue that individuals that have good reason, that there needs to be some sort of discretion.

The issue in terms of going by case-by-case is that there needs to be, I believe, some detailed clarity on that. This way, there is no assumption that one might get any form of preferential treatment, and it's not to make an accusation. It's more so to build something that has a great deal of integrity, and if I—and I use myself as an example—if I sponsor a nephew and my nephew comes to Manitoba, and then—I won't talk about compassionate reasons—just my nephew decides to leave Manitoba. Am I to, then, put in an application and—should I not be putting in an application in the next year? What do I compare it to? Like, is there any sort of a listing? Here are the types of things that would allow you to apply. Like, what do you tell someone that walks into your office and says, well, I had a nephew that left. Am I still eligible to be able to put in an application?

Right now, I would tell that person there's only one way to find out, and that's to put in the application. But is there not a better way of providing advice, whether it's going to the Web site and here's a list of the types of—a listing of the types

of things that would allow someone to say yes, I would still qualify even though my sponsor relocated to another province. Here are the, you know, the types of incidences that would allow that to take place.

*(15:50)

Ms. Howard: I think—trying to add some clarity to the Provincial Nominee Program, it's not a sponsorship program. It's a program—a skilled-worker program. So what—the evaluation that happens when people look at those applications is of the applicant, of the skilled worker. So the kinds of things they look at are the skills they have. Are those skills that are required in Manitoba? And they look at their strong connection to Manitoba, and that's where I think things like family attachment, if they have family here, if they have a strong connection to this province or if they have a strong connection to other provinces. I think that's also part of the equation that when those applications are being evaluated.

So I think that's important to add some clarity to what the member's asking. So we are evaluating the strength of the applicant, and certainly one part of that is their connection to Manitoba, and one way to demonstrate that is by having family members here. But it's not the only thing that we're looking at.

The other thing I would say is the member made reference to the integrity of the Provincial Nominee Program, and I do want to tell him that in my brief time as minister working with that program—and I went for a tour of that program and talked to the people who work in it—there are many, many safeguards in place to ensure the integrity of that program, and I want to be crystal clear about that, because I think it is important that that program have credibility. The people know when they're making an application that their application is being assessed fairly, and I am assured by the safeguards that have been put in place in that program that that is the practice of the Provincial Nominee Program.

Mr. Lamoureux: And I share the latter comments of the minister, and that's the reason why I think it's important to have these types of discussions.

If I was to give a specific example, and this happens and is brought up with me on—quite often, where someone will approach me and they'll say, well, my brother has been offered a job in another province, but if he goes, am I going to be able to sponsor someone in the future?

And there are many individuals within the communities that believe that if that individual does leave the province that they will not be able to sponsor someone into the future, and that's why I think it's a critical issue that does need to be addressed or needs to be more clarity around it.

I don't know if the minister would be able to—like, you know, she could simply just agree to what it is that I'm referring to and then maybe look into what could be done into the future in regards to it, or if she wants to add comment, otherwise I'm going to go into a different area.

Ms. Howard: Yes. I'm happy to take a look at what the member is saying. I think that is important to have clarity about the program. But I want to be clear that it's not the case that people are banned from putting in applications. Those applications, as I said, are evaluated on a case-by-case basis, and I think, you know, all things are taken into consideration in those applications. So if there is a belief out there that you're banned from making applications or being listed as a family connection to someone, I think that's not accurate. We accept applications and we evaluate them on their own merits.

Mr. Lamoureux: That's wonderful, and I appreciate the minister's response to it.

Another area that I want to raise is in regards to the issue of money. There is this—generally speaking, it's \$10,000 for the principal applicant; \$2,000 for the—each dependant. So, if it's a family of four, you're looking at \$16,000. It's often referred to as a show-money type of thing.

The question that I have is: the way the program works is that you don't have to have \$16,000 in your bank account—and we'll use the country in the—country for examples that I'll use will be either India or the Philippines, but it applies to any country—you don't require to have that \$16,000 there. What I wanted to find out from the minister is: here's a situation—I'll give a specific example, and if she could provide an answer whether or not that is correct, or modify it so that, in fact, it would be correct.

My understanding is is that there needs to be a basic level of cash of sorts somewhere in the neighbourhood of between, let's say, 6,000 to \$8,000, even for a family of four. That would be located in the country of origin so that they would be able to pay for the processing fees, the landing fees, their airfares and so forth. Then, if they have a relative, an

immediate relative under family support stream, for example, that they could actually put some money to the side and sign an affidavit, which would then allow them to come to the province of Manitoba.

That's my basic, general understanding in terms of what they need to do. A question that I always receive is how much money does the principal applicant have to have? And that's basically what I would be telling them. Is that fair for me to be saying that, or how should I be modifying it?

Ms. Howard: So my understanding of this is it's a federal requirement under the immigrant refugee protection act, this requirement to have some funds available to you. It's a requirement for economic immigrants so they can demonstrate their ability to establish themselves, and, of course, provincial nominees have to follow the immigrant and refugee protection act.

I think, as the member knows, immigration is not even really a shared responsibility; it's a responsibility of the federal government, and they designate to us, through agreement, participation in that. The funds have to be in the applicant's name, I'm told, and I think the numbers that the member has quoted are accurate.

Mr. Lamoureux: So, again, if I have a brother who's in the Philippines, and I want to sponsor him, but my brother has a family of two children and a spouse, but has no money, can I send my brother \$16,000 so he can put it into his account because there's just—he just doesn't have the money? Can I do that?

Ms. Howard: So my understanding is the federal rules state that the federal government has to believe that it would be his money. So, under the scenario that you've painted, that would call into question whether it was his money by the federal government's rules. So that could pose an issue.

*(16:00)

Mr. Lamoureux: Now, you know, if I write an affidavit or even make a, you know, legal gesture of saying that I don't want this money back, it's a gift to my brother, I want to help his family, that's the only thing that's preventing him from being able to come, is there anything within the Provincial Nominee Program that would deny him the opportunity to be given a certificate?

Ms. Howard: Well, again, I'll let the member know that, ultimately, it's the federal government that

decides who comes into Canada as an immigrant. And so, you know, there could be a situation, I suppose, where the Provincial Nominee Program could be convinced that an applicant meets all of their requirements and the federal government may disagree with that. That happens from time to time, and they may be denied based on the rules of the federal government. And their ruling is what decides whether someone can come or not.

So that's the advice I get from my officials, that this requirement to have money that is in the name of the applicant, that is their money, is a federal government requirement. And so I, you know, if he's asking me what kind of advice to give to people I would, you know, say that you need to be very cautious about the advice that you're giving because if the federal government suspects that that is not really the money of the applicant they may well say that that is not following the letter of the immigrant refugee and protection act and they may be—their application may be denied.

So that would be my advice but, again, these are rules of the federal government not rules that either myself or the federal—or the honourable member are in charge of, at least not yet. So I would suggest, really for greater clarity, that might be a discussion he would like to carry on with some federal immigration officials.

Mr. Lamoureux: I do believe that it is a very critically important point. To the best of my knowledge, I understand—and if I was to guesstimate, I would suggest to you that 80 percent—and that would be a conservative guesstimate—of the individuals that come to Manitoba through the Provincial Nominee Program receive some form of financial support from their sponsors.

Now I could be wrong on that. It would surprise me but I could be wrong on that. And I think that there needs to be some further dialogue with Ottawa possibly in just trying to resolve that because, again, it's an area that needs more clarity. It would help all the stakeholders involved in this particular process.

If the minister wants to comment on that, she can, otherwise I'll go on to the next area.

Ms. Howard: Yes, I would agree with the honourable member. I would love more clarity from Ottawa and perhaps in his next career move he would be able to assist in getting that kind of clarity.

Mr. Lamoureux: I'm somewhat optimistic, but we'll wait and see the people of Winnipeg North might have to say about that.

In regards to the appeals, there—or before I go into the appeals there's another issue regarding English as a second language and the individual's ability to speak either English or French. What I have found is that as time has been going by through the program, that the nominee program seems to be wanting to put more emphasis in terms of having the IELTS, which is the International English Language Testing System, as a requirement, as proof of being able to speak English, in this case. I'm wondering if the minister can just provide some clarity on, not the general streams, but on the priority streams and the need for that particular exam or any international English exam.

Ms. Howard: Well, I know that the honourable member is very aware of the goals of the Provincial Nominee Program and, being an economic program, one of the important things of that program is that applicants can demonstrate their job readiness, their employability. And, certainly, one of the things that I hear from employers when we talk to them about their desire to hire more newcomers and bring in more newcomers, one of the highest concerns they have on their list is bringing people in who have strong English skills. And we also put in place a lot of programs to help people improve their English once they get here.

The test that the member refers to, the reason that's being used is it's an independently verifiable test of language ability. It also helps us in our relationship with the federal government. It helps them be assured that applicants are bona fide applicants, that they—in the English level that they are claiming to have is a bona fide level. I would say that, you know, the federal government has shown increasing desire to get results that they can verify, that they can verify independently, and so using that kind of instrument helps us do that.

But, again, the Provincial Nominee Program is an economic program. We want to bring in people who can be employed in Manitoba, and certainly language skill is key to that employability.

Mr. Lamoureux: What I have found is, the more people that I talk to, the more I hear that what we need to get the IELTS exam, and especially if it's going through an appeal in order to prove language capabilities. Yet, if you take a look at the supporting documents which is inside the booklet that's provided

to would-be applicants, there is a part there for English and language ability. And, if the Province is moving towards that, again, then I think that they should look at putting that or incorporating it into it if that's what the government is looking at doing.

And the reason being is, someone poses the question: Do I need to get an IELTS test? And what do you say to the person? Because if you say no, and then they put in their application and then it's rejected, and it's in the explanation, we require you to get the—that exam, then you've given bad advice. And that's why I'm wondering in terms of is there—is the government, you know, taking the position that this is going to be a requirement in order to substantiate ability to speak language—of English?

* (16:10)

Ms. Howard: So I thank the honourable member for that suggestion. We're always seeking ways that we can be more clear with applicants.

I want to be clear about the IELTS exam. We don't require that for an application. We do recommend that as one way to prove English proficiency, and I believe that recommendation, I'm told, is on the Web site for the Provincial Nominee Program.

But there are other ways that people can prove their English language proficiency. We wouldn't say that, if someone's coming from a predominantly English-speaking country, that they need to take the IELTS. If they've taken their education in English, for example, that they need to take that test. So it isn't a requirement, but it is, I think, in our experience, a widely available exam. It's used by the feds. It's something that we can verify, so it is recommended.

But, of course, I'll take the honourable member's suggestion. If there's ways for us to make that more clear that applicants, we'll definitely take a look at that.

I will share with him sort of my own approach. You know, having been Minister of Immigration for a short period of time, I get lots of questions from people who have someone in their family that they want to bring here. And I generally defer those questions to officials in the department, or ask them to call the Provincial Nominee Program, or go on-line and take a look because I don't have confidence that I have all of the answers that I know each line of. And I would never want to be in a position of telling somebody something that they

then base, you know, having a family member apply to come here for.

So that's kind of how I try to deal with those questions, is to tell the person, you know, this is the little bit I know, but, really, you should talk to an official in the Provincial Nominee Program, or go on-line and they'll give you the best advice direct from the department of what you need to be doing.

Mr. Lamoureux: There's often families that will come, and when they started the process of putting in their application it might have been dated two, three years. And I'll use an example of a married couple that has a 19-year-old, and by the time they get a visa issued, the 19-year-old is now 22. And, at times, because that 22-year-old is no longer going to a publicly accredited educational facility, that individual will, in fact, be not issued a visa.

And my question to the minister, and, again, it deals with the whole issue of consistency, my understanding is, is that in situations of that nature that the family, upon arrival, should look at putting in a request for a nominee certificate.

Would that still be the case today?

Ms. Howard: Well, Mr. Chairperson, should the honourable member get to Ottawa, I hope they put him on the immigration committee, so he can ask all of these questions of the federal minister.

This is, again, a requirement of the federal legislation about age, and I sympathize with the scenario that he's discussing and the kind of onus that's put on families.

The short answer is, yes, that person should apply as—under the Provincial Nominee Program and they will be evaluated under the requirements of that program.

Mr. Lamoureux: Another issue that comes up consistently is the whole area of appeals, and, again, I'll give an example where an individual is given a Provincial Nominee certificate, based on information that has been provided to immigration—to Labour and Immigration. Then, when the file goes to the country of origin where the immigrant is, for whatever reasons one of those documents is found to not be verifiable or they believe it to be fraudulent, my understanding is that the certificate would then be voided. And the issue then becomes—because I've had the discussion with embassies both in India and the Philippines on this particular issue—is that it goes

back to the Province because there is no certificate. The certificate has been voided.

And then it begs the question in terms of well, how do you appeal it? I've heard individuals that have given some pretty good responses to that allegation of misrepresentation. So the issue is is that how or what does that individual do in order to get a new certificate, and what sort of a time frame would they be looking at in terms of getting the issue resolved?

Ms. Howard: So the requirements of the federal legislation are that if somebody applies and they pass our process, and we send that certificate on, and the federal government believes they've fraudulent documents, the feds will interview those applicants and discuss that with them. If they're found to have fraudulent documents by the feds, our agreement with the feds says that they cannot reapply—that applicant cannot reapply to us for two years. We can't just resend their certificate for two years if the feds believe that the documents are fraudulent.

* (16:20)

The appeal process then, because of—it's a federal rule, would be at the federal court level on the discussion of fraudulent documents. And now, if they're found not to have fraudulent documents but it's just rejected because the documentation isn't sufficient, they can reapply with better documentation and we would be able to resend their certificate.

Now I will say to the honourable member that the issue of fraudulent documents is an issue that the federal government is increasingly concerned about. Certainly, in my discussions with the federal minister, this is an issue that he has raised, that some of the documents that come out of some countries, that are found to be fraudulent, look better than the real documents. And, there is a tremendous global market in selling those fraudulent documents to people who are very desperate to leave and come to a different country. So the federal government is very much cracking down on this issue.

We try, I think, in discussing with applicants about what is considered documentation, what is considered suitable documentation, to try to, you know, to get—have them have the best documentation possible. But if they are found to be—if their documents are found to be fraudulent, by the federal government, we can't just resubmit their certificate.

Mr. Lamoureux: I think that one of the things we, I guess, watch out for, maybe is, if it's fraudulent versus misrepresentation, and I would have thought that they were one and the same, myself. I did not know that the Province could not issue, by law, another certificate. They have to wait two years. That would be new to me.

I could give a specific example of an individual that, back in the '90s—and I'm not going to refer to names, I just use it just so the minister is aware. An individual, back in the '90s, that went through a labour program course at a local community centre and was issued a certificate upon graduation of it. It would be the equivalent of, let's say, a Red River College going to Tyndall Park community club and providing something for a three-week period of time and then they issue a certificate of sorts. So, in this particular case, the individual included the certificate. Why? Because he was instructed to include all the certificates then, when it—to the Provincial Nominee Program. Whether the person would have included the certificate or not, the person still would have qualified. It was absolutely irrelevant as to whether or not the person would qualify, but he believed that he had to submit all information, and that's what he did. Then it goes to the Philippines and the Philippines was not able to confirm this program back in the '90s. And as a result, it was misrepresentation. Because it's misrepresentation, the certificate, the Provincial Nominee certificate, was voided. And I truly believe that there was nothing intentionally done here and it would have been an injustice to have seen this family denied based on something that was, in my opinion, appeared to be completely innocent in its nature.

And that's why—and the reason why I bring it up, is not to look into the particular case, but suggest to you that we need to, maybe through your discussions with the Minister of Immigration, to raise the issue where there are situations that could be—where someone is not necessarily being treated as fairly as they could be. And we need to have some sort of a mechanism that would ensure more of a natural justice in the case.

And I can assure the minister that it's not a isolated thing. I've, over the years, ran into a few, of a very similar nature. So I raise it again. She can feel free to comment on it if she likes.

Ms. Howard: I take the advice of the honourable member seriously. I think he's—I don't doubt that there are folks who get caught in these rules, that

they're not designed for them and they get caught, unfortunately, in those rules.

I would just clarify that the rule about reapplying for two years is a federal rule so you can't reapply to the federal government for admission for two years if you're found to have had—be fraudulent or misrepresented your application. Now, I mean, I suppose, theoretically, we could reissue a certificate, but it would be meaningless because it would be rejected by the federal government and would, in fact, jeopardize our relationship with the federal government, so I just want to be clear on whose rules those are.

Our officials, you know, do take these situations very seriously, and they do advocate and raise issues with Canadian officials at embassies when cases like this come forward, but it is—and, you know, they don't win all the time. So I do want the member to know that the officials in my department, there's an ongoing discussion with Canadian officials about issues like this.

Ultimately, the decision by a visa official is final and nobody can overturn that, so that's the reality of the process, but certainly in cases like the member describes, if our officials are aware of the circumstances of that and convinced of the merits of that, they will go to bat for that individual.

Mr. Lamoureux: And what will be my final question, and I do appreciate the patience of the member from Pembina who knows how important this particular issue is to me.

There is two things that I would make reference to. The divorce certificates: When you ask for copies of things such as divorce certificates, in some countries—and, again, I'm going to go to the Philippines because I know for a fact that's where we do most of our immigration services—that they don't acknowledge divorce. There's a fairly lengthy process in terms of having to get any sort of legal documents that would be proof of separation, and quite often, there is abandonment that takes place.

And I'm wondering if the minister could just provide a comment on that in terms of what would, in her opinion, suffice in terms of being able to appease the people at the Provincial Nominee Program where a single parent has been abandoned and they've been abandoned. They don't know where the spouse is, could be anywhere in the world, and they haven't seen or heard from that person for a year

or more. So I'd be interested, because, as I say, you can't get a divorce.

The second part is the certified translation; when you ask for documents related to educational documents, that there is certified translation. So, if you can just explain what is meant by certified translation, and because this will be—I won't be asking another question, I'm just going to make reference to the fact that I do have a deep amount of respect for the individuals that are working within her department, and, in no way, should any of my comments be interpreted as being that it's less than professional. I have found that office to be very professional in its handling of PNP cases.

* (16:30)

Ms. Howard: I appreciate the honourable member's comments about the respect for the staff. I agree they're extraordinarily professional and committed to the work that they do.

The issue of proving divorce—the officials of the department are well aware of the difficulties with different countries having different rules, having different documentation. I think probably the best thing for individuals who are facing that issue is to refer them to someone from the Provincial Nominee Program, an officer there. They have lots of experience; they have lots of knowledge of what each country—what kind of documentation is in the different countries. They have a lot of experience with the situation in the Philippines, as the member referenced, and those folks will work with the applicant to help steer them through and help them know what they need, what kind of paperwork they need.

You know, ultimately, we want applications that are complete, that can be processed quickly, so people can come here. So we are committed to working with applicants to get those.

On the issue of a certified translation, what I'm informed is that what we require is that that be stamped or sealed by an official translator, that it have some kind of verification—so someone who has a notary status. But I'm also told that one of the things at the Nominee Application Centre that we've set up, is that we do have these kind of official translators available.

So, if folks are looking for a place where they can go, they should be referred to the Nominee

Application Centre, which is in the new Immigrant Centre, which is in the Exchange District, and they can assist them there.

Mr. Dyck: Okay. I've got a few more questions under immigration as well, and then I'm going to turn it over to my colleague from Morris. And she was the former critic, so I think she's got a few questions as well.

Anyway, just further on this. Is the employer direct stream still suspended?

Ms. Howard: So that stream is up and running. That's how temporary foreign workers come into the province. While we were working with The Worker Recruitment and Protection Act, we had to temporarily put that on hold while we looked at that act and brought it in. But that act is in and up and running, and that stream is also available.

Mr. Dyck: Okay. How many are coming—the immigrants, are coming through the international student stream? Do you know?

Ms. Howard: So in 2008 there were 1,732 international students.

Mr. Dyck: Okay. Thank you. Do you have a sort of a target as to how many you would like to see come through that program?

Ms. Howard: I'm told we don't have a firm target but we certainly take as many as we can get.

Mr. Dyck: You've mentioned the federal government a number of times, and I'm just wondering what amount of money has come from the federal government to the Province for settlement services to date.

Ms. Howard: So this year we'll receive \$30,000,763 from Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

Mr. Dyck: Okay. I'm assuming, then, that those dollars that you get are all used in that area of recruitment.

Ms. Howard: Absolutely.

Mr. Dyck: Another question. What is the current wait time for the various streams in the PNP program, like the processing and everything else?

Ms. Howard: We have worked very hard to get the processing times to within six months. That is the goal and the target, so different streams of different averages. I would say that, again, you know, to be sensitive to the fact that when you're processing an application we are only part of that processing. So

we process it. The federal government has work to do on it. The country of origin has to do work on it. So I'm always cautious when I talk about processing times, that I don't want people to think that that is the time from when they applied to when they arrive, because there's lots of other factors that impact on that.

For international student applications, to date in 2010, we're looking at a processing time of three months. The family support applications, we're looking at a processing time of about six months. The general stream for the Provincial Nominee Program, that has a target of six months; some are processed in less time. And, yes, those are the streams.

Mr. Dyck: Okay, then, just for clarification, that would be the amount of time that basically these files are sitting on your desk or in the department's desk. Like, you indicated that you don't have total control of that, but that would be the processing time that you need within the province here.

*(16:40)

Ms. Howard: Well, they're never sitting on my desk, because I don't approve those applications personally. But that is the amount of time—and I want to say that six months is an outside time, some of them are processed in less time. It depends a lot on the completeness of the application and the work that has to be done to verify the application. So, but that's the time that they're worked on within the Provincial Nominee Program. So they receive them, they verify the information, sometimes it means that they have to talk to the applicant, they have to talk to other people to verify that information. We also have a process where more than one officer looks at an application and makes sure that the process is fair. So the outside time that takes is six months. And I do want to commend the folks in the Provincial Nominee Program because they worked very hard to streamline that process.

Mr. Dyck: Before I turn it towards the member for Morris, I just want to indicate, too, that from my understanding, within the last—even within the last year, that the time that it has taken to process these has certainly been, you know, come down, or it's just sheer months, or it's taking less time. So, anyway, they're appreciative of that, and, you know, I think that's great because these people—and I've met many of them—once you've made the decision that you want to come to Manitoba, it's like anything else, then you want to come right away. Then the waiting

gets to be the obstacle. And so I just want to just encourage the department. I know they've done what they can, but, certainly, I've been told that it's taking less time now, so that's good.

Anyway, I'll give it over to—

Mr. Chairperson: Honourable member for Morris.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): I hope I am not asking questions that have been asked already, but just in regard to Workplace Safety and Health officers, my understanding is there's five new Workplace Safety and Health officers in this year's budget. Are these paid through the Department of Labour, or is this through monies received from Workers Compensation Board for the salaries for the Workplace Safety and Health officers?

Ms. Howard: So those five positions—and they haven't yet been filled. Those five positions in the Workplace Safety and Health division, Workplace Safety and Health officers—as is the case in every jurisdiction in Canada, those positions are funded from monies received from the Workers Compensation Board. The Workers Compensation Board, I think, believes that making that kind of investment in enforcement of the rules of Workplace Safety and Health is a wise investment for them. We know that having that kind of enforcement capacity is one of the things that's helped us bring down the time-loss injury rate in Manitoba, and bringing down the rate of injuries is also one of the things that allows the Workers Compensation Board to keep their premiums low.

Mrs. Taillieu: That was my next question, whether they'd been filled or not. So they have not been filled. There were, I think, five added last year to the budget. Are those ones filled?

Ms. Howard: Yes, the five that were added last year are all filled.

Mrs. Taillieu: I have a question in regard to—just on the top of page 45, it's—talks about: increase reflects enhancements and maintenance to the LINK system. Can you tell me what the LINK system is?

Ms. Howard: I'm informed that that's the information system that's used in Workplace Safety and Health. It's a database system, a computerized system. So, when Workplace Safety and Health inspectors come in, that's how they can file their inspection reports. So you put it all into a system and helps them be able to find that information more quickly. It's different in some provinces that's still

relying on paper-based systems. We think this kind of system helps find that information more quickly.

Mrs. Taillieu: I noticed that in Employment Standards, there's a claims tracking system, in worker advisor officers, a worker advisory system, and there's a LINK system in Workplace Safety and Health. Are these all systems that are linked up together then, and who is the supplier of the software for these systems?

Ms. Howard: Yes, so the LINK system, which is the Workplace Safety and Health information system, was customized in-house based on Lotus notes, I'm told. The claims system was provided by EDS, and the worker advisor system—that information I'll have to get to the member about where that system came from.

Right now, there's not the ability for those systems to mesh together and work together. I think that could be a worthy goal and something we could certainly look at for the future.

Mrs. Taillieu: Is all the data, then, from the Workers Compensation Board available within the Department of Labour, on-line?

Ms. Howard: Well, I know the honourable member knows that the Workers Compensation Board, of course, is an arm's-length Crown agency from the government. We do have an agreement with the board to get information that's relevant to injury rates so we can track those that's relevant to types of injuries. And we also have an agreement with them to get the kind of information that's required in Workplace Safety and Health to be able to track a claim's history of a certain firm. But it would not be accurate to say we have access to all the information that they keep in their data base.

Mrs. Taillieu: Thank you. On page 68 and 69 of the Estimates book, the Office of the Manitoba Fairness Commissioner, there's been an increase in total expenditures, and the footnote explains that as amortization expense. And it represents the department's share of assets or applications developed by Better Systems Initiative. What exactly is Better Systems Initiative and what—how long is this amortized over? What does this mean, amortization expense?

* (16:50)

Ms. Howard: So the—on page 69, that is amortization for costs for the whole department. It's

not just for the Office of the Fairness Commissioner, if that's what she's—if that's what the member is asking about. And those are costs—the amortization costs there are for the LINK system that we were just discussing, and it's been amortized since 1998.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, I'm just—it falls under the heading of the Office of the Manitoba Fairness Commissioner, on the top of the page, on page 68, and as you go down under total expenditures, it's 86. So you're telling me that's for the whole department? There's a footnote, No. 2, relates to that on the next page, on page 69.

Ms. Howard: Okay, so on page 68, at the top where it says subappropriation 11-3B, that's the Office of the Fairness Commissioner. So—and when you look at total other expenditures—and there's a 2 next to it—then the note below that 2 refers to that.

On the next page it's a different appropriation number. That's appropriation 11-4, and that refers to amortization and other costs related to capital assets for the entire department. So the explanation notes under that that are numbered 1, 2 and 3 have to do with those amortization and other costs for the whole department.

I can see how it'd be confusing with the headings, but that's how I understand the Estimates book.

Mrs. Taillieu: Okay, thanks for clarifying that.

Can the minister tell me the name of any polling companies that Labour and Immigration may have used within the last 12 months to do any surveys or polls?

Ms. Howard: I'm not aware of any surveys or polls having been done in the last year.

Mrs. Taillieu: I'm just going to ask a question on the Office of the Fire Commissioner, my last question, because I did ask some questions around this last year. There was a report that was done after the fatal Gabrielle Roy fire in which unfortunate circumstance—where two firefighters lost their lives. But there were several recommendations—I believe there was 22 recommendations—came from the report that was done, and I'm wondering if all of the 22 recommendations have been followed up on and completed.

Ms. Howard: So I'm informed that most of those recommendations had to do with the City, and so those were forwarded to the City. The recommendations that had to do with provincial building codes had to do with garages, and those have been acted upon.

We can, for the honourable member, attempt to follow up with the City and find out what's happened with those recommendations that were forwarded to them.

Mr. Dyck: I know that the minister and the departments are going to be very saddened by the comment that my House leader has said we need to finish today. So I'm going to go straight to line by line and I'll give it over to the Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you very much for all involved.

Hearing no further questions, we will now proceed to calling the relevant resolutions for this department. First is:

Resolution 11.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$22,916,000 for Labour and Immigration, Labour Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2011.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 11.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$33,790,000 for Labour and Immigration, Immigration, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2011.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 11.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$540,000 for Labour and Immigration, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2011.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates in this department is item 11.(a) the Minister's Salary, contained in resolution 11.1. At this point we'll ask the minister's staff to please leave the table so we can consider this final item.

Recognizing the honourable minister.

Ms. Howard: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I have a motion for the committee.

I move that item 11.1.(a) Minister's Salary be reduced by 20 percent, or \$9,000, to \$37,000.

Mr. Chairperson: It has been moved by the honourable minister that item 11.1.(a) Minister's Salary be reduced by 20 percent, or \$9,000, to \$37,000.

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

Ms. Howard: This is just for added clarity for members. This reduction has already taken place and we just put it forward here to make sure that that is clear in the Estimates process.

Mr. Chairperson: Thank you. Any further questions or comments on this issue? Seeing none, is the committee ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Mr. Chairperson: Shall the motion—is it the pleasure of the committee to adopt the motion? *[Agreed]*

The motion is accordingly passed, and at this time we will now go back to resolution 11.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$809,000 for Labour and Immigration, Executive, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2011.

Revised resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates of the Department of Labour and Immigration, and as was previously announced in the House, the next set of Estimates to be considered by the section of the Committee of Supply tomorrow will be for the Department of Advanced Education and Literacy.

What is the will of the committee?

An Honourable Member: Committee rise.

Mr. Chairperson: Can't technically rise being Thursday, but if we wanted to see the—

An Honourable Member: See the clock as 5 o'clock.

Mr. Chairperson: Yes, all right. I am hearing that the committee would like to see that it is 5 o'clock. That being the case, it is now officially—recognizing the honourable—the hour now being 5 o'clock, the Committee of Supply will resume sitting tomorrow

morning at 10 o'clock in the morning. Thank you very much all.

EDUCATION

* (14:40)

Madam Chairperson (Marilyn Brick): This section of the Committee of Supply has been dealing with the Estimates of the Department of Education. Would the minister's staff please enter the Chamber.

We are on page 62 of the Estimates book. As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Welcome back, everyone, for the last hour of Education Estimates.

If we could, I just want to go back where we had a little discussion a couple of days ago. This relates to the allocation of funds, which is found on page 9. And, in particular, there's a transfer from the Civil Service Commission. I guess this is the human resources services of Education. I'm assuming this is the same thing that we talked about previously.

How many staff are we talking about, in terms of the transfer out of the department over to the Civil Service Commission?

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Education): This is because of our reorganization of the human resources services provided to the Department of Education. And those resources were centralized in the Civil Service Commission, and it was part of the reorganization of the human resources that provided services to all of the departments, not just the Department of Education.

So that was a transfer of staff that traditionally had been in the Department of Education that moved over to this centralized unit that now provides service—that did provide services to all of the government departments, and now they're all in one spot with the Civil Service Commission. And it's approximately 15 staff—one-five.

Mr. Cullen: Okay, I thank the minister for that response. In terms of the Education budget, obviously the Education budget is increasing on an annual basis, and I know the minister's probably familiar with a news release the Canadian Taxpayers Federation put out a little while ago. Their concern was the rate we're paying into the education is

growing fairly rapidly, but the other concern is, of course, we have less students. So, obviously, our cost per student is escalating fairly substantially.

And it's a similar situation we're facing in health care, where health care and education are becoming a more increasing percentage of our provincial budget. I just want to get the minister's evaluation on, you know, on where we're heading in that regard.

Ms. Allan: Well, you know, I know the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) said in the last election campaign that he didn't think that funding for education should go up.

An Honourable Member: Who said that?

Ms. Allan: The Leader of the Opposition in the last election campaign, and he said he didn't think it should go up because of declining enrolment. Well, I'm glad to hear, you know, the MLA for Russell (Mr. Derkach) say that that's nonsense because I think he's probably—he and I are on the same page. I think, you know, that we would agree that, you know, it's our responsibility to provide increased levels of funding to our school divisions because, let's face it, they have got cost pressures on them in regards to delivering quality education to their students, and anybody who's been a school trustee knows what those cost drivers are.

I mean, it doesn't cost any less these days to—you know, utilities aren't any less, maintenance costs, salaries for teachers—I mean, innovative programs for those kids that are at risk. I mean, we want to build a quality education system in our province and we stand behind the belief that we should be increasing funding to education. We've always said that we believe that providing sufficient and sustainable funding to our public education system is what is going to create good quality and innovative education for our young people in the education system, and we want those students to participate in our economy.

So I disagree with the Canadian Taxpayers Federation on this file, and I believe that at the same time we're putting considerable amounts of money into our education system. We're also working with school divisions so that, you know, we're working with them in a collaborative way, so that we can mitigate tax increases to homeowners. So I think, you know, I think what we're doing is we're getting a

really good quality education with that money, and I think it's accountable and it's transparent.

Mr. Cullen: Well I don't think we disagree with the minister in terms of it being very important that we provide adequate resources for education, and, obviously, education, as I said in my opening statement, is going to play a vital role here in the province of Manitoba.

I guess they're begging the question, and we, too, want to make sure that the funds that we are allocating to education and we're putting into allocation—we want to make sure that we are getting the best bang for our dollar. And, obviously, it may be hard to evaluate that, but I think we do—we do have to seriously evaluate making sure that we are getting value for our dollar and making sure that we are providing our youth the education that they need to carry on in this society.

* (14:50)

And I just want to make sure that the minister is comfortable, you know, in terms of establishing what the evaluation is going to be for those children at the end of the day, and that we are actually getting, you know, good value for our dollar here in the province of Manitoba.

Ms. Allan: Well, once again, first of all, I don't believe that just because enrolment is declining that you have to—you should put less money into your system. I mean, you and I both know that just because your enrolment declines doesn't mean there's any less pressures on your system. And, depending on where and how that enrolment is declining, because you've got a couple of less students in a class doesn't mean you can get rid of the teacher at the front of the room.

And, furthermore, in regards to outcomes, I don't know if the MLA for Turtle Mountain has had an opportunity to look at the profile of student learning and performance in Manitoba that is on our Web site. And we publish this guideline, and it is a performance guideline, in regards to how our students are doing across this province. And it's based on assessments in grade 3. It's based on the provincial standards exams in grade 12; it's based on school achievement indicators. And it's also—national testing and international testing results have said that Manitoba is doing very, very well. And I—and we

also have just told Manitobans that our graduation rate has increased to 80.9 percent and our graduation rate has increased by 8 percent since—in the last six, seven years.

And we're doing that in partnership with our stakeholders, and I think that's what's important. I think we have to do that in partnership with absolutely everybody in our public education system. We all have to work together. This isn't just one individual's responsibility or one stakeholder's responsibility.

It's absolutely everyone's responsibility. And one of the things that the department did recently, in the last year or so, was they decided that what they were going to do was, they were going to—officials from my department were going to go out to each and every one of the school divisions and interview the officials in those school divisions and say, have a discussion. How are the—what's going on in your school? How are the students doing? How, you know, what can we do to help you? What do you think will make a difference in your school? And that is a very, very important dialogue, and it's a dialogue that has never happened before in the history of our province that we know of.

And that's what we're here to do as the Department of Education. We're here to help those school divisions, that are getting funding from us, to make sure that we have funding in place so that we can help them in regards to teaching their students in their school divisions.

Mr. Cullen: Well, I would concur with the minister that discussion with our stakeholders is very important, and I certainly look forward to having that discussion over the course of time. And I guess part of that discussion with our stakeholders and some of the feedback I've been getting—and I know the minister is looking at addressing it—is the whole idea of the school—the moratorium on school closures. And I know the minister has talked about having a discussion with stakeholders.

I just wondered if the minister could give me a time line in terms of when she's going to undertake these discussions, and then when she's going to be able to report back to us on a decision.

Ms. Allan: Well, I am talking to all of the stakeholders now about that, and individual school divisions, and it's not going to be formalized and there's not going to be a report. It is a dialogue that I am having with those individuals in our education

community, those stakeholders that want to talk to me about it. I have to—that is something that they want to talk to me about, and that's what I'm doing.

Mr. Cullen: So I'm assuming by those comments, then, the minister is not thinking about any changing—changes to the existing legislation.

Ms. Allan: Well, I think I said yesterday—I'm pretty sure yesterday in my response to the MLA for—I'm not sure which MLA—that in one of my discussions with the stakeholders, a very important stakeholder in our community, they said to me, do not just take this moratorium and lift it.

And I have to take that into consideration as one of the things that we're going to do right now. I mean, I have been very honest and I have told the media and I have told the opposition that I am in discussion and in dialogue with anyone who wants to talk to me about this as a new minister, as I would have that discussion, a discussion about any other education issue that anyone wanted me to talk about. That's my public responsibility.

There is—at this time, there is no change in the legislation; the legislation stands as it is. And I'm still in discussion with stakeholders who want to talk to me about it.

Mr. Cullen: Well, I guess, as a result of the legislation, obviously the funding of smaller schools is pretty critical and I know the department has set aside some funding for small schools.

Would the minister explain to me how that formula works? I understand—and correct me if I'm wrong here—it's a payment to the respective school divisions and then the respective school division would make the decision in terms of where the funds are allocated. Is that correct?

Ms. Allan: There are actually two grants. One of them is the Small Schools grant, and it's based on enrolment and it's obviously based on enrolment where there are not a lot of students in those schools. And it's a formula that is used to allocate the money, and then, on top of it, there is a new grant that was developed in 2009–2010, which would have been last year's funding announcement, and that grant is called Additional Instructional Support for Small Schools and it's base—a base amount of \$125,000.

Mr. Cullen: So the \$125,000 is—that's per school, or how is that allocated?

* (15:00)

Ms. Allan: It's calculated on a per school basis.

Mr. Cullen: Is that all schools or is that schools under a certain size?

Ms. Allan: It's—actually, what happens is is they calculate what every school is getting in the small-school category, and if that school isn't getting the \$125,000, what they do is they boost the funding to the \$125,000. It's similar to the 2 percent guarantee for school divisions. We want to make sure that those school divisions—those small schools are provided with that—it's kind of a floor. The \$125,000 is kind of like a floor.

I just have a small correction from the officials in my department. It is—what they do is they calculate the instructional support grant which is the per pupil money for all schools, all school divisions and then they take into account the small-schools calculation. And if that small-schools calculation doesn't meet the 125, then they boost it to hit that floor.

Mr. Cullen: I thank the minister for that response.

There has been a few amalgamations of school divisions over the last few years. I just wonder if the minister knows of any school divisions who are considering amalgamations in the near future?

Ms. Allan: No, I don't. I'm not familiar with any that are interested in amalgamating.

Mr. Cullen: I'm curious in the process in the past, and I know the minister may have to refer to her colleagues there. What would be the normal process? Would school divisions have that discussion or would they come to the department seeking advice in terms of possible amalgamations with some neighbouring school divisions? I'm just wondering how the process has unfolded in the past.

Ms. Allan: Well, the process, as it rolled out the last time, was we mandated the amalgamation. And we have said very clearly, since that last amalgamation process—I believe we went from 54 to 37 school divisions under the leadership of the previous minister of the day from Brandon.

And we have said, since that exercise, that we would not be interested in mandating amalgamation again. We are—we have been, you know, we would be interested in some voluntary amalgamations. So it would probably—you know, if school divisions were interested in amalgamating, that would be something that they would probably want to have a discussion

with our department about it and come and chat with us in regards to exactly, you know, what that process might look like, depending on which school division it was and those kinds of things, and depending who they want to amalgamate with. It's kind of like arranged marriages.

So, you know, we're not really sure what—you know, what it would look like, but we would certainly be interested in working with them.

Mr. Cullen: A comment, I guess, as much as anything, in terms of amalgamations: I know one of my local school divisions has gone through a couple of amalgamations and the message I'm getting from the trustees is they end up being quite focussed on spending time in terms of getting from point A to point B. And they end up, you know, you're rewriting your rules and your regulations internally, and they quite often, as trustees, they lose focus on the students.

And I'm just wondering if there's a way for the department to help through the transition. Or does the department have staff that could be available if they—two school divisions did, voluntarily, want to amalgamate? What resources does the department have in situations like that?

Ms. Allan: Well, I remember going through an amalgamation in Norwood and St. Boniface and it was the first time I ever met Gerald Farthing. And I'm sure—I certainly didn't know I'd be working with him again, you know, in another 20 years or so.

But, you know, the department is there to provide that kind of support to the stakeholders and—all the stakeholders, you know, not just the trustees but, you know, the schools and parents. Because it is a—it can be—a change of process sometimes is always scary for people. But, they would definitely—they've got expertise, the department does, in amalgamations. They've done this in the past and they would be there to provide that expertise in the future.

Mr. Cullen: Yes, when we talk about amalgamations and, obviously, everyone has their own perspective on the benefits of—or the thought that there's benefits to amalgamating.

I'm just wondering if the minister—what her view is in terms of amalgamations. Have we, historically, seen benefits in terms of cost savings and are we seeing benefits in terms of the education level? I'd like the minister's comments on that.

Ms. Allan: We actually did have some research done in regards to our amalgamation process around the school division amalgamation that occurred. It occurred, actually, in July of 2002, when we reduced the number of school divisions from 54 to 37.

And amalgamation, we have determined from that report, showed quite a few benefits, actually. The amalgamation was undertaken, obviously, to improve program access and increase equity and taxation levels, and allow to focus resources on student services. And the study that was done actually proved that a number of positive benefits had been realized. And those positive benefits were around enhanced access to programs and services to students, more efficient use of human resources and opportunities, as well, to reflect on best practices. And also, one of the interesting benefits was it rejuvenated some of the organizational approaches to education.

So we feel that, you know, there was some analysis done of that amalgamation process in the early years when we were in government, and that most of it is positive.

* (15:10)

Mr. Cullen: Well, that's encouraging to hear. From the provincial perspective, is there any cost savings to your department when—you know, once a number of school divisions amalgamate? Is there a cost saving to the department in that regard?

Ms. Allan: There was—there wasn't a cost savings to our department per se, but officials inform me that, just, it just became more efficient dealing with the school divisions, just simply from the perspective that there was less—going, you know, from 54 to 37. There was, you know, that—just that many less organizational structures and officials in the field that they were liaising with and working with.

So it did make a difference in regards to the work that we were doing with them.

Mr. Cullen: You know, as we're seeing fewer students in some of the schools, particularly in rural Manitoba, it's—the teacher-student relationship becomes a bit of an issue, and it's a sheer numbers situation.

I guess the first question would be: does the Province have a policy in terms of where it wants to have student-teacher numbers, ratios? Is there, you know, a high end and a low end of where the

department wants to have that ratio of students to teachers?

Ms. Allan: Our teacher-pupil ratio is, we think, very close to being in the—one of the best in the country, and we're proud of that. And we don't have an official policy on that. We do keep track of the—in the FRAME report, the document that I referenced yesterday that I thought you'd really enjoy reading. And we do keep track of the pupil-per-teacher ratios in that document.

But, you know, I really think that this—you know, small can be beautiful. I was at an event two weeks ago that I hosted here at the Legislature, and it was teacher excellence awards. And the team of teachers that received the teacher excellence awards were from a very small school in Interlake, and it's the school of Rosser. And these three teachers received this award, and it was just incredible, the work that they do in regards to sustainable development. And they have actually reached a record in regards to an initiative—a world eco-record in regards to the number of projects that they have done. And they've engaged not just their school and not just the teachers, but their whole community and families in this incredible initiative. So it's neat to see. Sometimes these small schools are doing very, very exciting things, sometimes just as exciting as some of our larger schools that seem to sometimes have more resources.

So we do keep track, but we don't have an official policy.

Mr. Cullen: Well, I would certainly agree that we do have some excellent teachers across this province who are doing great things. And it is encouraging to hear that they are trying to get the parents and the community involved in the education too. And I think that's going to be very important moving forward.

And I would certainly welcome, if the minister would allow, an invitation to next year's awards presentation, if that's at all possible. Of course, if I'm still around as the critic for Education, it'd be nice to congratulate those people on a job well done, if the minister would allow that.

Ms. Allan: Well, that's certainly something I'll take under consideration. Who knows, I might not be here next year.

Mr. Cullen: Well, thank you very much for that, and I appreciate the minister's comments.

In my view, technology in education is becoming even more important. You know, especially when I look at rural Manitoba in terms of, you know, the schools we have, some of the smaller class sizes we have. How do we get the most bang for our buck out of our teaching staff.

And I know there's a lot of challenges out there in terms of delivering this technology, and I know that the school division that I am in that my wife works for, they're in the process where they're being forced to have to look at new technology and to upgrade their technology. The problem is it's very expensive—usually expensive—at a time when school divisions aren't allowed to have too much surplus funds. So they're having a bit of a challenge in terms of their capital expenditures.

I just wonder if the minister would care to comment on the technology side of where I think we can get a lot more bang for our dollar here and bang for our teaching resources.

Ms. Allan: Well, we recognize that there's no question, technology is important in the classroom, and that's one of the mediums that our students have to be comfortable with, and have to be savvy with in the classroom.

We do provide an information technology grant, have done a lot of that kind of work, \$45 per eligible pupil in the past, provided a lot of supports to school divisions and, in fact, what we do here in Manitoba is—has been recognized nationally and internationally. So, you know, we do—that is a discussion that school divisions have with our—with the officials in our department, and we're definitely cognizant of the fact that that is something that is important to our learners of today.

Mr. Cullen: Does the minister have a specific department within Education that deals with technology in school divisions?

Ms. Allan: Yes. We have a specific unit in our department that deals with technology and, then, of course, there's also the department called MERLIN, and that's in the department of industry.

*(15:20)

Mr. Cullen: I know the minister mentioned MERLIN. I don't have an up-to-date annual report, but this report goes back a couple of years. MERLIN, then, is not associated now with the Department of Education. They're still under

innovations, science and mines, whatever that department's called. Is that correct?

Ms. Allan: Yes, that's correct. Innovation, Energy and Mines.

Mr. Cullen: Well, I'm wondering why we've got MERLIN, in my view, is supposed to be focussed on the education side of things, why it's maybe not closely, more closely aligned with the Department of Education. Maybe the minister could explain, you know, the relationship between the department and MERLIN.

Ms. Allan: Well, the core of what the work that they do is focussed on technology, and that's where the expertise is. And they don't just work with the Department of Education. They work with other departments intersectorally. And that expertise is there for all of government, not just Education. We do have a close working relationship with them, and it seems to be working.

Mr. Cullen: Yes, in terms of some of the, I call it e-learning, I guess, and that's pretty broad, in broad terms, but there is some really neat, interactive television programs out there.

And, visiting at some of the Hutterite colonies, they have developed state-of-the-art communications, you know, in terms of their having one teacher at one location and teaching across Manitoba. And, you know, the teacher has access on her computer screen each of those classes across the province. It's just—it's an amazing technology that they've developed on their own and it seems to be working very well for them. And I'm just wondering if there's some way we can develop that similar technology that I think school divisions are looking for, and what's the role that the Province is going to play in that regard.

Ms. Allan: We are supportive of the uses for new technology in school divisions. We have—we've got some examples of some of the innovative programs that are being done in some different school divisions. We do—it's not that exact program, but there's some distance education in Winkler, and we've also done a lot of professional development with teachers around using technology in that way. And, in a couple of places, when school divisions have approached us in regards to trying to get some projects off the ground, we've done some small grants to some of the school divisions in regards to helping them with that.

And, just a couple of weeks ago, I was at an announcement, a TFO announcement, which is—it's a communication company in Ontario that is with the Department of Education, in Ontario. And they've just worked with them and we've expanded that here into Manitoba. And it's just an incredible resource, and it's all bilingual. And it's programs that students are going to be able to access on the Web. And those programs are going to be available to all of the bilingual schools in the province of Manitoba, and it's done through our French library system that we have here in Manitoba.

And the minister from Ontario came out and made the announcement with the Premier, our Premier.

So we—it was very, very exciting because it was an opportunity for us to access a lot of resources for a very small amount of money. It was incredible. So, you know, we have been doing lots of work in regards to this kind of issue.

Mr. Cullen: I'll leave it with the minister and she may have to have a discussion with some of her colleagues on the innovation side of things as well.

The issue that we're having in rural Manitoba, and I'll take Prairie Spirit School Division who has 20-some schools within the division, and they're trying to get them linked up so they get better utilization of their teaching staff there. The problem is in terms of the technology and being able to get the message back and forth from one facility to the next. And that's really the issue, is we don't have the, you know, the broadband width capacity to get it done, and that's the expensive component here, and I think there's ways we can tie it in with, you know, fibre optics such as Manitoba Hydro has. But there has to be the willingness of the government, I believe, to get all the players at the table to make this thing happen.

And I think it's the way of the future, and I think we as a province have to invest money in that.

Ms. Allan: Well, I agree with the MLA for Turtle Mountain on this issue. In fact, a lot of work has been done by officials in my department, and they've done that work with the deputy minister and the minister that's sitting behind me right now in regards to developing a broadband network for school divisions here in Manitoba.

We actually, about a year and a half ago, spent some money on an individual so that they could go around and kind of do an audit in the school

divisions and figure out exactly what would be required in the different school divisions, so that we could figure out exactly what would be required, because, you know, it's a little bit of a hodgepodge of different resources in different school divisions, and what we're looking at is trying to have a system where we can get everybody up on broadband, and we've been in discussion and in dialogue with the department for quite some time.

John Clarkson has been the lead on that file, and we actually just had a meeting with him about a week ago in regards to how to move this forward, and we're making some progress on it. Obviously, it's expensive, but we believe that it would be—obviously it would be easier perhaps if, you know, we could do what was done in Saskatchewan where their public utility wasn't privatized and, you know, they were able to do it a lot easier. But, you know, maybe MTS Allstream would be interested in partnering with us in developing that kind of resource for all the students in our province.

So we'll continue to work on that file and try to make it a reality.

Mr. Cullen: Well, I'm sure if the government of Manitoba wanted to go out and buy MTS Allstream, they certainly could, and they would then have that resource available to them.

I want to talk a little bit about the, I guess the curriculum, you know, as it's developed in high school in terms of the, you know, as a result of the Healthy Child, Healthy Kids task force we had there. There were some changes to the curriculum there.

And I sat on that particular committee and, you know, I think we—at the end of the day we agreed that there needed to be some changes there in terms of getting our kids healthier and to make changes to the curriculum to get kids more active, and part of my thought was it would be a good way to get the communities involved in education, get them involved in education and also get the facilities that are—the recreation facilities around the province, get them used more often. And I think what my thought was, was we could get the kids in the community at a younger age into these recreation facilities. They would also—they'd get the health benefits, but, in the long run, they would stay affiliated with a lot of those recreation facilities.

* (15:30)

And a lot of the recreation facilities, in rural Manitoba at least, you know, are having financial

challenges. So the more of the population we can get engaged in these recreation facilities, the better off the community is and the better off these particular facilities are.

I'm wondering if you have a sense now that we've—you know, it's been a couple of years since we've had these changes—if you're finding the results on that initiative, do they meet the expectations of what we thought we were trying to achieve?

Ms. Allan: Well, I'm encouraged to tell the member that the implementation of the curriculum has gone very, very well. And there was just a study out recently, about a month or six weeks ago, that showed that students that are involved in phys ed or are involved in physical activities, they do better in school academically. And so we're encouraged that we were on the right track. And the task force, you know, certainly did excellent work in regards to going around the province and identifying what would provide a healthier environment for our students.

The nutrition policy has gone very, very well, as well. A lot of changes have been made in the schools in regards to healthier foods in the schools. Vending machines, a lot of the vending machines with the syrupy pop and the chocolate bars, just like the one in our building, is—they're gone. And lots of schools are—you know, have developed policies around nutrition. So we're very, very encouraged that—you know, that has been very, very successful.

In regards to the joint use of facilities, our department has been working with school divisions and with municipalities in regards to the joint use of facilities. And that is ongoing work. It's gone very, very successfully but, you know, it's—there's absolutely no question that those are the kinds of things that I think are going to be ongoing for a very, very long time.

I mean, you know, we want to look at the opportunity to have more walking trails and more playgrounds. And all of these kinds of facilities, they have to be developed in consultation with the community and with residents, and with officials in the communities that we're working with. So I think that work will be ongoing for quite some time. And we look forward to making more progress.

Mr. Cullen: Well, that's encouraging to hear. My personal view is, you know, if you have a principal or a teacher that has a willingness to go out there and use those other facilities, it works quite well. But,

again, there has to be the willingness on behalf of the staff to kind of engage the community and that's probably an avenue where your department could play a pretty important role, I think. So I am encouraged by that.

Is there—there was additional funds going into the phys ed program for the high school. Is that continuing? Is there anything additional that the department's doing in terms of enhancing that curriculum?

Ms. Allan: We have got a grant that is—that we provide to school divisions, and it's physical education support. And it's provided to school divisions to assist them with the implementation of the grade 11 and 12 physical education and health curriculum.

And we've actually—and that funding has gone up significantly.

Mr. Cullen: Well that's—I guess that's the answer we were looking for. I thank the minister for that.

I want to just touch base briefly on some of the issues my colleague from Russell raised yesterday and, I guess, the member from River Heights as well. He was talking about the absenteeism. Does the Province have criteria on that or do they leave the absenteeism issue up to the local school or the local school division?

Ms. Allan: Officials in my department have been in consultation with school divisions. At present there is not a policy in place around absenteeism. We, you know, we do have—we do know that we can track those numbers in partnership with school divisions.

So, since we started doing that for the H1N1 crisis, we have learned from that experience, and officials are starting to talk with school divisions about what might be possible in regards to policy or practice around having some kind of a strategy and an action plan around absenteeism.

Mr. Cullen: And again, yesterday, the minister from—the minister—the previous minister of Education, I guess, the member from Russell had a discussion about grading. And I guess the issue is in terms of assignments and the students handing in their assignments late and the lack of any issues with respect to handing in work late.

I just want to—just understand, just for clarification, where the minister is going on that. Are you having a review of that particular policy? And, again, are we looking at something policy

province-wide. or again are we going to leave that up to the jurisdiction of the individual school divisions?

* (15:40)

Ms. Allan: So what I said yesterday is that there is a guideline in place and that guideline was from the former Tory Minister of Education, Linda McIntosh. That guideline has been placed since 1997, and the guideline is that information that indicates academic progress and achievement should be separate from and not reflective of punctuality, attitude, behaviour, effort, attendance and work habits. And we believe that we should have a look at this. That's what I said yesterday.

Not only should we have a look at it, the deputy minister has had a look at that guideline and believed, when it first came to our attention awhile ago, that perhaps it was time to review that guideline and have a look at it, and perhaps provide some clarity around exactly how that guideline is being implemented in our school divisions, and whether or not it really meets the—what we're looking at in regards to having students be successful, not just in an achievement kind of way, but in some of the other skills that are important in regards to handing in assignments on time, perhaps maybe arriving at school on time, you know, those kinds of things, maybe getting to committee on time, you know, those kinds of things.

So we're just kind of having a look at this right now. There's no question and officials in my department are reviewing it.

Mr. Cullen: Well, I thank the minister for that, and I look forward to a future discussion about that.

Just to give you an example that hit home with me. My son just started at Red River. He's taking an eight-week apprentice course, and he started on Monday. And I said, well, what's the—your school policy at Red River on this? And he says, you know, if we miss two days without an excuse out of this eight weeks, we're out. And I said, well, what about submitting your reports late? He said if we miss—if we have three late submissions, that's the same as missing one day. So the result is if you're late six times, that's your two days and you're out of the course.

So I guess what I'm saying is we have to make sure that the kids understand what their responsibility is in school, during high school, because once they're out of there, there's repercussions, and that was pretty black and white for me to see that.

So I just wanted to leave that with the minister, if she wants to comment on it.

Ms. Allan: Well, I also have a daughter who went to Red River—who goes to Red River. She's an electrician apprentice. She's in her 3rd level, so she's been there three times for her 1st level, 2nd level and 3rd level of electrician, and she goes to school for 10 weeks, and the rules are exactly the same for her. But you have to remember, these are people in their twenties and, you know, sometimes things are different in school. But having said that, I think we need to have a system in place that prepares them in high school for the harsh treatment they're going to get when they hit Red River or some other post-secondary institution, perhaps.

So we're definitely having a look at it and want to bring something, I think, that is in place that perhaps meets this century. It's time to look at it, for sure.

Mr. Cullen: Just a closing comment: I thank the minister and her staff for their patience over the last few days. I appreciate it. I've learned quite a bit, and I think maybe the minister's learned a little bit along the way, too.

You know, and as I try to learn more about the Education, I get to talk to a lot of people, and I had an interesting conversation with a superintendent who's been involved in both on the private side and the public side of things, and his comment to me was, you know, we've done a really good job about teaching kids their rights; we haven't necessarily taught kids what their responsibilities are.

And, you know, not just your department, but all of us as society probably have a role to play in that side of things. So I'll leave it—at—with that and with that, we're prepared to go line by line.

Ms. Allan: I'd like to thank the new critic for his comments. And, yes, as the new Minister of Education, it's—I guess it's only been about five months now. I said yesterday that I was actually enjoying Estimates because it's our opportunity to spend quality time with officials from my department and to learn more about it. It's a great department, and I feel like I have an incredible group of people to work with, which makes the job that much more exciting.

And I would just like to put on the public record that this will be the last time that Stephen Power will be with us. He's the director of our Public Schools Finance branch and he will be retiring in June. And I

just want to wish him all the best. We are going to miss him dearly, but I know that he's got to break out and go do other things in life, so I'd just like to wish him all the best and thank him for his incredible service to the province of Manitoba and the public education system.

Madam Chairperson: Thank you very much. Is the committee ready for the resolutions? *[Agreed]*

Resolution 16.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$26,333,000 for Education, School Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2011.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 16.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$9,816,000 for Education, Bureau de l'éducation française, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2011.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 16.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$270,428,000 for Education, Education and School Tax Credits, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2011.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 16.5: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,150,180,000 for Education, Support to Schools, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2011.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 16.6: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$47,128,000 for Education, Capital Funding, for the fiscal year ending March—I'm sorry, I have to—*[interjection]* Excuse me, I have to make a correction—RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$47,112,000 for Education, Capital Funding, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2011.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 16.7: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$158,000 for Education, Citizenship and Youth, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2011.

Resolution agreed to.

The last item to be considered for the Estimates of the department is item 1.(a) the Minister's Salary, contained in resolution 16.1. At this point, we request that the minister's staff leave the Chamber for the consideration of this last item.

The floor is open for questions.

Ms. Allan: I move that item 16.1.(a) Minister's Salary be reduced by 20 percent, or \$9,000, to \$37,000.

Motion agreed to.

* (15:50)

Madam Chairperson: Resolution 16.1: BE IT RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,835,000 for Education, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2011.

Revised resolution agreed to.

This concludes the Estimates for this department.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Deputy Government House Leader): Madam Chair, can you see if there's agreement to temporarily interrupt the Chamber section to put the Speaker back in the Chair of the House?

Madam Chairperson: Is there leave to temporarily interrupt the section of Committee of Supply meeting in the Chamber in order for the House to be called back into session briefly to change the Estimates sequence? *[Agreed]*

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

House Business

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Deputy Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, would you please canvass the House to see if there is agreement to have Culture, Heritage and Tourism considered next in the Chamber, until it is completed, with Innovation, Energy and Mines to follow?

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement to have Culture, Heritage and Tourism considered next in the Chamber, with Innovation, Energy and Mines to follow once Culture, Heritage and Tourism is completed? Is there agreement? *[Agreed]*

So we will have Culture, Heritage and Tourism considered next in the Chamber, with Innovation,

Energy and Mines to follow once Culture, Heritage, Tourism is completed, and the Committee of Supply will now resume consideration.

Madam Deputy Speaker, please take the Chair.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
(Concurrent Sections)
(Continued)

CULTURE, HERITAGE AND TOURISM

Madam Chairperson (Marilyn Brick): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will be considering the Estimates of the Department of Culture, Heritage and Tourism.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Flor Marcelino (Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism): Thank you, Madam Chairperson, and good afternoon.

It is my honour to introduce the 2010-2011 Estimates for Manitoba Culture, Heritage and Tourism. These Estimates, like our overall provincial budget, represent a responsible and balanced approach to move our province forward while managing today's economic challenges.

Like many Manitobans, I am looking forward to the 2010 being an eventful year for Manitoba. In February, we celebrated our province with the world at the 2010 Winter Olympics and Paralympic Games, drawing over 120,000 visitors to our CentrePlace pavilion.

The building was designed, constructed and outfitted by some of Manitoba's finest creative talent. Multimedia exhibits and murals showcased Manitoba's unique advantages in green energy, tourism, economic development, trade and immigration. The pavilion won a sustainability award for its environmentally friendly construction and featured a prominent exhibit of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, now under construction.

Manitoba artists were highlighted in the Cultural Olympiad at the Manitoba Day concert at B.C. Place, and over 900 people attended a Manitoba-style social presented in co-operation with Manitoba Homecoming 2010. Here at home, Manitobans in 33 communities across the province got a chance to

participate in the excitement of the Olympic torch relay.

Homecoming 2010 events are extending across the province. Organizers project incremental tourism visitation of over 50,000 person-visits leading to a potential 100 million in incremental tourism revenues. In May, the town of Neepawa will host Manitoba Day with a full day of festivities including a citizenship court to welcome a number of new Manitobans.

In 2008, visitors to Manitoba spent nearly \$1.2 billion in our province. According to Statistics Canada, in 2008, the industry in Manitoba contributed close to half a billion dollars in export revenues, approached a quarter of a billion in provincial tax revenue, and directly sustained over 13,000 full-time jobs for Manitobans.

Manitoba's tourism industry continues to perform strongly despite the many challenges facing the global economy and the travel sector as a whole across Canada. All the hotels and hunting and fishing lodges have been impacted in the downturn in visitation from the U.S. into Canada. Domestic tourism from other parts of Canada and by Manitobans themselves have enabled the industry to maintain a stable footing in an otherwise volatile global environment. Later this May Manitoba will host Rendezvous Canada, the country's largest international trade show, attended by hundreds of international tourism operators and travel trade businesses from around the world. Manitoba tour operators will use this opportunity to forge new relationships with the global travel trade to increase access to consumers in high-yield markets, such as southern U.S. and the United Kingdom, and emerging markets, such as France, Mexico, and China.

My department continues to support the development of tourism in rural and northern Manitoba and in Winnipeg. Through our Aboriginal Tourism Strategy, we continue to support tourism training initiatives being undertaken by the industry in partnership with the Manitoba Tourism Education Council.

We are also helping the Aboriginal tourism sector to increase and enhance Aboriginal tourism opportunities including a new cultural and ecotourism interpretive centre in the east-side region and a new micro-investment programs for small tourism business enterprises in the region.

I'm very pleased, therefore, to confirm that these Estimates maintain our support to the tourism sector, including a provision of 7.6 million to Travel Manitoba. In addition, the Province is making significant investments in the industry through its support for the agencies' Celebrate Manitoba, an in-province marketing campaign; Manitoba Homecoming 2010; and other marketing partnerships with industry.

Nor is tourism sector the only area for which we have maintained support levels. I am delighted that, even in these challenging economic times, our support for all the community groups and industries supported by this department have been sustained. Since my appointment last November, I have had the opportunity to meet with many of the department's clients, to attend a variety of their events, and to visit their facilities. I continue to be tremendously impressed with our public libraries, museums, and art galleries throughout the province and to marvel at the gifts of our performing artists, writers, and visual artists.

Culture is central to our society and deserving of our public support. Recently, I had the opportunity to participate with my colleague the Finance Minister in an announcement here at the Legislature celebrating the Manitoba film industry and announcing additional tax credit options. Through tax credits, grants, stimulus funding, training programs, and equity investments, we will continue to support this important sector as well as the sound recording and publishing sectors.

* (16:00)

As immigration to Manitoba continues to expand, I am pleased that our department support for immigrant communities has expanded as well. Budget 2010 provides for a modest increase for Welcoming Communities Manitoba, an initiative that fosters economic and social participation of new immigrants to our province.

Our efforts are in partnership with our province's many ethnic cultural organizations, which work tirelessly to ensure that newcomers get the supports they need to adjust to life and work in Manitoba. Budget 2010 maintains their support for heritage activities throughout the province, support to community and regional museums, guidance and support of heritage building owners and custodians, archeological services, heritage matters, consultation and funding for community heritage projects.

Staff are working with God's Lake First Nation and Manto Sipi Cree Nation to understand traditional knowledge projects on the east side of Lake Winnipeg. Community elders have been identified—community elders have identified many sights of spiritual and special significance to the First Nation.

My department is also participating in consultations on the creation of the Upper Fort Garry Heritage Provincial Park and continues to work with Parks Canada in managing archeological resources at the construction site of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights.

Members are well aware that, in 2009, we faced not only the second largest flood on record in Manitoba, but also the H1N1 influenza pandemic. Communication Services Manitoba played a key role in ensuring the public received as much timely and clear information as possible as this situation unfolded, including daily updating of the government's central Web site with news releases and other valuable information. This is a role CSM staff continue to play, providing clear and timely information to Manitobans on matters of urgent public concern, as well as delivering information on government programs and services.

Similarly, on behalf of all citizens, our department's Translation Services provides translation and interpretation services to support the French Language Services policy. Legislative Library staff collect and preserve works published in the province to protect that part of Manitoba's history, and the archival staff continue to build the collections of both public and private records that document our shared history.

In keeping with government direction for cost containment, this budget reduces our department's salaries funding envelope, including a reduction in minister's salary as well as their internal operating costs. While we will need to defer new initiatives and closely monitor our costs, we intend to continue to support these organizations and activities that support a stronger, more vibrant and more prosperous Manitoba and build Manitoba's profile and place on the world's stage.

With that, I conclude my remarks. Thank you, Madam—

Madam Chairperson: We thank the minister for those comments.

Does the official opposition critic, the honourable member for Charleswood, have opening comments?

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Madam Chairperson, I would just indicate, first of all, I don't have very much to say in terms of opening statement, but I would like to just welcome the minister to her role as the Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism, and wish her well in the portfolio.

I would also like to congratulate all of those on the front lines and in her department for their efforts and all of the good work that is done in this area. I think it's a very important area in the province. I am very supportive of culture, tourism, heritage, multiculturalism, and I think it adds a very significant depth to our province and is significant at very, very many levels.

And I feel privileged to be able to be given the role of critic in this area. And it's a first for me as well, so I look forward to our exchange of questions and answers over the next short period of time. And, you know, other than that, I'll be prepared to move forward with a global discussion.

Madam Chairperson: We thank the critic for those comments.

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

At this time we invite the minister's staff to join us in the Chamber, and, once they are seated, we ask the minister to introduce the staff in attendance.

Ms. Marcelino: I thank the honourable member from Charleswood for the kind comments.

I'm very pleased to introduce the staff. Joining me today are Deputy Minister Sandra Hardy; assistant deputy minister Andrea—I'm sorry, Veronica Dyck; executive director, Administration and Finance, Dave Paton; and executive director, Tourism Secretariat, Terry Welsh.

Madam Chairperson: Does the committee wish to proceed through these Estimates in a chronological manner or have a global discussion?

Mrs. Driedger: Global discussion would be preferred. It'll help to move these more quickly.

Madam Chairperson: Is that acceptable to the honourable minister? *[Agreed]*

The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Driedger: I'd like to start out with just seeking some confirmation from the minister. From the Estimates book, it appears that the total appropriations for Culture, Heritage and Tourism has been cut by \$1.6 million. Can the minister confirm if that is correct?

Ms. Marcelino: Yes, it is.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister also confirm for me that the program line on Culture, Heritage and Tourism programs has been cut by \$1.2 million?

Ms. Marcelino: Yes, but that reflects reductions in salary and operating costs plus a transfer of capital gains—grants, I'm sorry—to amortization and interest.

* (16:10)

Mrs. Driedger: I also notice on the information resources line that there is a decrease there which appears to be in the vicinity of three quarters of a million dollars, and I note from information resources that we're talking about Communications Services Manitoba, Translation Services, Archives of Manitoba and Legislative Library. And I note all of those, as they are separated out on page 43 of the Estimates book, that they all have also seen a decrease in funding.

Can the minister confirm that my interpretation of this accurate?

Ms. Marcelino: All have received a reduction in salaries and internal operating budgets.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate what she means by a decrease in salaries, like, all have received decrease in salaries?

Ms. Marcelino: We have reduced the total salary budgets and we'll need to manage at a lower level. No staff salaries have been cut, just reduced, the—no individual positions have been cut, just managing the overall global budget.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister just clarify then. Have we, have there been staff cuts across the board in the department in terms of salaries?

Ms. Marcelino: No salary cuts whatsoever.

Mrs. Driedger: Then the cuts have come in other areas that are non-salary, just in the operating costs of the department, is that what she's saying?

Ms. Marcelino: We have—there—we have to maintain positions, although they are vacant at the moment, to manage our budget.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate what the vacancy rate is in the department?

Ms. Marcelino: At the moment, the department has a vacancy rate of 8.4 percent.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister indicate whether these cuts that have appeared in the budget are related specifically to how the government is looking at dealing with the deficit this year and in ongoing years?

Ms. Marcelino: Our department is—also has—just like other departments have to take cuts as the result of the overall—in the overall scheme of things, with reduced revenues. However, in doing so, we made sure that, or we went—we decided that we will take the vacancies and manage them but not cut the programs—support to the programs.

Mrs. Driedger: On page 14 of the Estimates book, the grants to cultural organizations is showing that it is \$604,000 less than the Estimates of a year ago. Is my interpretation of that correct?

Ms. Marcelino: If the member could turn to page 53, you'll see an increase in amortization and interest. They were from funds transferred from capital grants, so that explains the reduction. They're not to programs but to capital grants.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us who determines the grants that are given out from her department, and what is the process for giving out grants and who makes that determination as to who is successful in their grant applications?

* (16:20)

Ms. Marcelino: There are many grants which are operating every year. Other programs are formula-based. As well, there's a process, the grant application process is—it could be obtained either through our Web site or through the department. There are funding criteria approved by the Treasury Board and our staff reviews and makes recommendations to the minister based on the budget, the available budget.

Mrs. Driedger: Is it Treasury Board that actually makes the final decision as to which cultural organizations get grants?

Ms. Marcelino: No, it is the department—based on the criteria.

Mrs. Driedger: So can the minister just clarify that it's department staff, then, that actually make the determination as to which cultural organization will get that grant?

Ms. Marcelino: Our competent staff makes the recommendation, and the minister makes the approval based on other input such as the Treasury Board, analysis of the Treasury Board.

Mrs. Driedger: Where would one find a list of who received grants last year and for how much and for the upcoming year as well?

Ms. Marcelino: All grants given out are available in the Culture, Heritage, Tourism Web site. As we are still finalizing the list or the material for budget '09-10, it's still not available, but, starting '08-09, it could be obtained from our Web site.

Mrs. Driedger: The cultural organizations I see get grants. Can I ask the minister—there is also the Heritage Grants Advisory Council. Is this a whole different set of grants that are given out by her department on top of the cultural organization grants that are listed?

Ms. Marcelino: Yes, heritage grants are separate from cultural grants.

Mrs. Driedger: And can the minister indicate who makes the decision as to who gets these grants?

Ms. Marcelino: The heritage council advisory, or the board, makes the recommendations upon assessment of the grant request, and it's forwarded to the minister's office for approval.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate who is on the heritage branch advisory council and how they end up getting on that council? Is that something that is achieved through appointments?

Ms. Marcelino: Our staff receive recommendations from the community, and, based on the recommendations, appointments are made.

Mrs. Driedger: So can the minister confirm that those appointments to the Heritage Grants Advisory Council are made through recommendations by her staff?

Ms. Marcelino: Besides recommendations from staff, the council also make recommendations to the minister's office for membership to the board. We also get input from the heritage community.

Mrs. Driedger: In the area of multiculturalism, I noticed that there are 12 to 15 projects that appear to

be in the works, and that the department also then provides assistance in helping people to prepare provincial grant applications, and I note that the department approves 100 to 120 grants to Manitoba's ethnocultural community organizations.

Can the minister indicate, in this area, who determines who gets the funding?

Ms. Marcelino: Just like in the heritage grants, the staff of the multiculturalism secretariat makes recommendations, and it's forwarded to the minister's office.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate why, over a five-year expenditure summary, that the amount of program funding skyrocketed in 2007-08? The other years it stayed relatively the same. I see it's decreasing in this next year, but in '07-08 there was a significant jump. In fact, it pretty much almost doubled.

Can the minister indicate what happened in '07 and '08 that we saw this dramatic increase in funding? What perpetuated that?

Ms. Marcelino: Is it, are you referring to grants to Multiculturalism?

Mrs. Driedger: Oh, sorry. I should point out the page I'm looking at is page 56 and 57, and it's related to Culture, Heritage and Tourism, and it's a five-year expenditure summary in the area of Culture, Heritage and Tourism.

And on the graph on page 57, on the bottom half of the page, it shows the five-year expenditure summary, and it shows that the programs themselves received a significant boost to funding, and that's what I'm specifically asking about.

Ms. Marcelino: The spike in grants given out reflects the contribution to the Canadian Human Rights Museum: 40 million.

Mrs. Driedger: Does the 40 million account for that total spike?

Ms. Marcelino: Pretty much.

Mrs. Driedger: And can the minister indicate what month of the year that that expenditure was made public?

Ms. Marcelino: We will get back to the critic on the actual date.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate whether that spike had any relationship at all to the fact that that was an election year?

* (16:30)

Ms. Marcelino: I would have to look into the date when it was given. I'm sorry, I don't know when it was given.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us who the political staff in her office are?

Ms. Marcelino: Special assistant is Kathie Currie; executive assistant, Sara Jean Padrinao. That's all.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister also provide the names of positions of all the staff in her office and the deputy minister's staff as well?

Ms. Marcelino: Appointment secretary in the minister's office is Halyna Kinasevych; admin secretary, Rema Chandran; admin secretary, Claudette Lambert-Johnson. And the deputy minister's office, we have assistant to the deputy minister, Brigitte Lavitt; appointment secretary, Beverly Beck.

Mrs. Driedger: I'd like to thank the minister for that. The next question, and it might make the questions go faster right now, if the minister would just make a commitment to provide in writing a list of all trips paid for by the department, including who travelled, where they went, when they travelled, purpose of trip, and detailed cost breakdown including transportation, accommodations, and meals. I wonder if the minister could make a commitment to provide that in writing.

Ms. Marcelino: A clarification. Are you looking for what year and which staff like?

Mrs. Driedger: I would just ask for the last year, and I would ask for all trips paid for by the department.

Ms. Marcelino: Do you mean out-of-province trip or interprovince trip?

Mrs. Driedger: Probably it would make more sense just to have out-of-province trips.

Ms. Marcelino: We will provide you with that.

Mrs. Driedger: Thank you. The next request would be of a similar vein, and I would ask if the minister would be prepared to provide in writing a list of all print, radio, television and on-line advertisements placed by the department in the last fiscal year, including the cost of each ad, the purpose of each ad, the date the ad was placed, and the publication, radio station, TV station, or Web site on which the ad was

placed. And I would ask if the minister would be prepared to provide that information in writing.

Ms. Marcelino: Would the critic be referring to ads, TV or radio broadcast, by our department alone—advertising by our department alone?

Mrs. Driedger: That's right.

Ms. Marcelino: Yes, we'll do that.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister indicated in her opening statement, or made some comments related to the department's involvement with H1N1. Could she just review again or tell us what role her department actually played in H1N1?

Ms. Marcelino: Our—an office in our department, the Communications Services Manitoba, assisted the Department of Health in putting out their news releases, advertisements, brochures, publications, Web sites, but that cost was all borne by the Department of Health.

Mrs. Driedger: In the 2007 Throne Speech, the government pledged to create a privacy commissioner, and then later legislation was introduced that created the role of a privacy adjudicator. The legislation passed in October 2008, but the section of the legislation creating the privacy adjudicator still has not been proclaimed.

Can the minister explain why this legislation has not yet been proclaimed?

Ms. Marcelino: To my knowledge, there is ongoing conversation between our House leaders regarding the adjudicator position. I'm not familiar with where the negotiation is at the moment.

Mrs. Driedger: Does the minister have any idea of when this privacy adjudicator will be in place?

Ms. Marcelino: When an agreement has been reached between the House leaders, I'm sure it would be announced right away.

Mrs. Driedger: The most recent FIPPA annual report available on the department's Web site is for the 2008 calendar year. Can the minister tell us when the 2009 report will be available?

Ms. Marcelino: As we speak, all the data for the '09 are being finalized and should be in the Web site very soon.

Mrs. Driedger: In the 2007 Throne Speech, the government pledged to launch the Road to 2010 tourism promotion strategy with a goal of reaching \$2 billion in annual tourism revenue by 2010.

Can the minister give us an update as to whether or not this is on target?

* (16:40)

Ms. Marcelino: This program was announced in '07. However, the rollouts have just started or had commenced in '08-09 because of—the partnership with the feds took a little longer to materialize. And then, as we went along, came this unexpected recession in '08. And, as we speak, it's still being negotiated.

Mrs. Driedger: The goal was to reach \$2 billion in annual tourism revenue. Can the minister indicate what that level is right now that they have been able to reach at this point in time?

Ms. Marcelino: Originally, when this came out, Stats Canada—the figures were in the 2-billion range. However, Stats Canada changed, revised the targets, changed some figures here.

It used to include inbound and outbound figures. Now, it only contains inbound statistics, which has reduced it to \$1.5 billion. And Stats Canada has changed the data collection method, which now reduced it to \$1.2 billion, which has now—we're now in the range of 1.2 billion as a result of the data collection method change by Stats Canada.

Mrs. Driedger: Is it the intention that the goal of \$2 billion could still be reached? And is there a revised date for when that could happen?

Ms. Marcelino: The 2-billion regional figure is no longer realizable simply because it contains both inbound and outbound amounts. With just the inbound—expected inbound figures, a realizable amount of 1.5 is expected by 2015.

Mrs. Driedger: I understand that there was a Road to 2010 tourism promotion strategy. I'd like to ask the minister if this was a strategy that was actually developed in writing and if there is an opportunity to see this strategy or is it already posted on the Web site?

Ms. Marcelino: The Road to 2010 is a document—or a plan contained—or proposed by Travel Manitoba and this project has five components. It's a strategy plan comprising of five components, namely: celebrate Manitoba, homecoming 2010, events acquisition, U.S. marketing, off-shore international marketing. Those are the five components, and we will—we can provide you with the Travel Manitoba literature.

Mrs. Driedger: When the minister indicates literature, is she actually committing to provide me with the actual strategy that Travel Manitoba developed around this?

Ms. Marcelino: We will request Travel Manitoba to provide you with their business plan and that plan contains all these strategies mentioned.

Mrs. Driedger: I'd like to thank the minister for that. And can she tell me, does her department have a strategic plan that is put out annually?

* (16:50)

Ms. Marcelino: Our department has a strategic plan that is being evaluated and revised every three years. Right now, we're into a revision because of some of the changes in the department.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us what the total cost and the breakdown of the cost for the Olympics were?

Ms. Marcelino: I would like to tell the critic that, within a couple of weeks, all the details of the Olympic costs will be made public, and, right now, we're confident it is within budget. It was budgeted for 6.3 million over a three-year period, and we're within that budget.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell me if the Trans Canada Trail falls within her department?

Ms. Marcelino: It used to be, but not any more.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us if Travel Manitoba has an annual business plan over the next three years?

Ms. Marcelino: They do. We can provide you with their brochure, Travel Manitoba business plan 2010 to 2013.

Mrs. Driedger: Thank you, I appreciate that. One of the things that I noticed during the Olympics were these fabulous television commercials of British Columbia that, every time they came on, just made you want to go to British Columbia, and they were pretty spectacular. Does Manitoba have anything like that? Like, do we—have we created an ad that runs like that across the country?

Ms. Marcelino: I'm happy to tell you that we didn't have those kinds of beautiful provincial promotions simply because they are very, very expensive. And Travel Manitoba instead continued with their targeted marketing and, as a result, Manitoba's tourism status is in the top three, so that target

marketing works in terms of growth. However, not however—wonderful as it is, the cost is too prohibitive and the results are not there.

Mrs. Driedger: I think I'm pretty much going to have to wrap up in order that we can pass the Estimates, but I have just one quick question. In terms of what you're calling inbound dollars and—where do most of our tourist dollars come from? Is it Canadians, other provinces coming into Manitoba, because I noticed that the American numbers have dropped off significantly, so are we talking that most of our tourists now to this province would be other Canadians?

Ms. Marcelino: In terms of visitors to Manitoba, we are very delighted and very heartened that 81 percent are from within the province; 12 percent are from other Canadian provinces; 6 percent U.S., and 1 percent international tourists.

Madam Chairperson: Is the House—is the committee ready for the resolutions? [*Agreed*]

Resolution 14.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$47,395,000 for Culture, Heritage and Tourism, Culture, Heritage and Tourism Programs, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2011.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 14.3: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$11,918,000 for Culture, Heritage and Tourism, Information Resources, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2011.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 14.4: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,345,000 for Culture, Heritage and Tourism, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2011.

Resolution agreed to.

The floor is open for—the last item to be considered for the Estimates of the Department is item 1.(a) the Minister's Salary, contained in resolution 14.1.

The floor is open for questions.

Ms. Marcelino: I move that item 14.1.(a) Minister's Salary be reduced by 20 percent, or 9,000, to 37,000.

Motion agreed to.

Madam Chairperson: Resolution 14.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,792,000—I'm sorry. Excuse me—RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$2,692,000 for Culture, Heritage and Tourism, Administration and Finance, for the fiscal year ending March 31st, 2011.

Revised resolution agreed to.

This concludes the Estimates for this department. The next department is Innovation, Energy and Mines.

The hour being 5 p.m., I am interrupting the proceedings of the committee.

This section of the Committee of Supply will now recess and will reconvene tomorrow morning at 10 a.m. Thank you.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, April 29, 2010

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