

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

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Speaker*

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Eighth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
AGLUGUB, Cris	The Maples	N.D.P.
ALLAN, Nancy, Hon.	St. Vital	N.D.P.
ALTEMEYER, Rob	Wolseley	N.D.P.
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
BJORNSON, Peter, Hon.	Gimli	N.D.P.
BRICK, Marilyn	St. Norbert	N.D.P.
CALDWELL, Drew	Brandon East	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CULLEN, Cliff	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
CUMMINGS, Glen	Ste. Rose	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard	Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary, Hon.	Concordia	N.D.P.
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
EICHLER, Ralph	Lakeside	P.C.
FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GOERTZEN, Kelvin	Steinbach	P.C.
HAWRANIK, Gerald	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
HICKES, George, Hon.	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
IRVIN-ROSS, Kerri	Fort Garry	N.D.P.
JENNISSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
JHA, Bidhu	Radisson	N.D.P.
KORZENIOWSKI, Bonnie	St. James	N.D.P.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
LATHLIN, Oscar, Hon.	The Pas	N.D.P.
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	La Verendrye	N.D.P.
LOEWEN, John	Fort Whyte	P.C.
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	N.D.P.
MAGUIRE, Larry	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	N.D.P.
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McGIFFORD, Diane, Hon.	Lord Roberts	N.D.P.
MELNICK, Christine, Hon.	Riel	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	P.C.
MURRAY, Stuart	Kirkfield Park	P.C.
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	N.D.P.
OSWALD, Theresa, Hon.	Seine River	N.D.P.
PENNER, Jack	Emerson	P.C.
REID, Daryl	Transcona	N.D.P.
REIMER, Jack	Southdale	P.C.
ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Rupertsland	N.D.P.
ROCAN, Denis	Carman	P.C.
RONDEAU, Jim, Hon.	Assiniboia	N.D.P.
ROWAT, Leanne	Minnedosa	P.C.
SALE, Tim, Hon.	Fort Rouge	N.D.P.
SANTOS, Conrad	Wellington	N.D.P.
SCHELLENBERG, Harry	Rossmere	N.D.P.
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield	P.C.
SELINGER, Greg, Hon.	St. Boniface	N.D.P.
SMITH, Scott, Hon.	Brandon West	N.D.P.
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	P.C.
STRUTHERS, Stan, Hon.	Dauphin-Roblin	N.D.P.
SWAN, Andrew	Minto	N.D.P.
TAILLIEU, Mavis	Morris	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, March 22, 2005

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONS

Highway 200

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

Signed by John Papas, Adolph Gunter, Berthe Peloquin and others.

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

Riverdale Health Centre

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

These are the reasons for the petition:

The Riverdale Health Centre services a population of approximately 2000, including the town of Rivers and the R.M. of Daly, as well as the Sioux Valley First Nation and the local Hutterite colonies.

The need for renovation or repair of the Riverdale Health Centre was identified in 1999 by the Marquette Regional Health Authority (RHA) and was the No. 1 priority listed in the RHA's 2002-2003 Operational Plan.

To date, the community has raised over \$460,000 towards the renovation or repair of the health centre.

On June 1, 2003, the Premier (Mr. Doer) made a commitment to the community of Rivers that he would not close or downgrade the services available at the Riverdale Health Centre.

Due to physician shortages, the Riverdale Health Centre has been closed to acute care and emergency services for long periods since December 2003, forcing community members to travel to Brandon or elsewhere for health care services.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Premier to consider ensuring that acute care and emergency services are available to the residents of Rivers and surrounding areas in their

local hospital and to live up to his promise to not close the Rivers Hospital.

To request that the Minister of Health (Mr. Sale) consider developing a long-term solution to the chronic shortages of front-line health care professionals in rural Manitoba.

This petition has been signed by B. Schlosser, N. Taylor, H. Lepp and others.

* (13:35)

Ambulance Service

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

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

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

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

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

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

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

To request the provincial government to consider improving the way that ambulance service is supplied to all Manitobans by utilizing technologies such as GPS in conjunction with a Medical Transportation Co-ordination Centre (MTCC) which

will ensure that patients receive the nearest ambulance in the least amount of time.

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

Signed by Sandra Intrater, Murray Intrater, Brett Intrater and many others.

Generally Accepted Accounting Principles

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

Manitoba's provincial auditor has stated that Manitoba's 2003-2004 budget deficit was the second highest on record at \$604 million.

The provincial government is misleading the public by saying they had a surplus of \$13 million in the 2003-2004 budget.

The provincial auditor has indicated that the \$13-million surplus the government says it had cannot be justified.

The provincial auditor has also indicated that the Province is using its own made up accounting rules in order to show a surplus instead of using generally accepted accounting principles.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request the provincial government to consider adopting generally accepted accounting principles in reporting Manitoba's budgetary numbers.

Signed by Lope Polvorosa, Mateo Acosta and Avelino Polvorosa.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Diane McGifford (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table the Adult Learning Centres in Manitoba Annual Report for '03-04.

* (13:40)

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 3—The Recreational Trail Property Owners Protection Act (Occupiers' Liability Act Amended)

Hon. Eric Robinson (Minister of Culture, Heritage and Tourism): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Trade (Mr. Smith), that Bill 3, The Recreational Trail Property Owners Protection Act (Occupiers' Liability Act Amended), be now read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Robinson: Mr. Speaker, this bill amends The Occupiers' Liability Act to provide a limited duty of care to persons on recreational trails which is the same as the duty owed to persons driving off-road vehicles. The primary purpose of this legislative initiative is to provide comfort to private landowners concerning potential liability arising from the location of a recreational trail on their property.

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

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us from Valley Gardens Junior High 28 Grade 9 students under the direction of Mr. Marek Kutka. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable First Minister (Mr. Doer).

Also in the public gallery we have from Maple Leaf School 34 Grade 5 students under the direction of Mr. Frank Reeves. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Education System Access to Counselling

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately there have

been many fatal shootings over the last decade. The ones we are most familiar with are, of course, on April 20, 1999, in Littleton, Colorado, the Columbine High School, where there were 14 students and one teacher murdered by a student. On April 28, 1999, in Taber, Alberta, at W. R. Myers High School, one student was murdered and one was wounded by a former student.

Now, yesterday, in Minnesota, another tragic shooting has taken place at Red Lake High School, as reported in the newspapers, by a 15-year-old student. Mr. Speaker, I think all of us in this Chamber, our hearts go out to all of those involved in this most tragic incident.

As many educators said, Mr. Speaker, in 1999, and emphasized, they said we are not in a crisis situation, but it is important that adequate information is available because we all want to ensure that all students are not panicking or are not scared to go to school. For the benefit of all parents, to the benefit of all students, could the Premier please update the House as to what steps are being taken to ensure that our schools have adequate supports in place to offer things such as access to counselling?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, first of all, on behalf of all of us and the Leader of the Opposition, I want to offer our condolences to the community of Red Lake, to the people of Minnesota and North Dakota that are relatives and friends of the deceased and victims of the shooting. I have written to the governor of Minnesota and offered our condolences to our friends in Minnesota and in that community.

Many people, of course, have travelled through that community on the way from Thief River Falls to Bemidji, and some others have friends and contacts in that community. I have also offered to the governor of Minnesota any possible support staff that we could provide to the community. It is very close to the Canada-Manitoba border, and I have pledged to him any co-operation we can provide. I think you will find that there has been an increase in funding for counselling staff in Manitoba.

* (13:45)

Safe Schools Legislation Codes of Conduct

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, obviously back in 1999

when we, like numerous others across North America were shocked and somewhat saddened by the tragic events that we saw at Columbine and the Taber school shootings, we all agreed that tragedies, they make us re-evaluate our systems which I think is important because we have to question how we can better protect our students and come up with strategies and hopefully prevent these types of incidents from happening.

Mr. Speaker, we know that many of our schools have worked very hard to develop good programs, and as numerous students showed at the 2002 Safe Schools Conference, the student body has always come up with good ideas and strategies to combat the many safety issues that students and our schools face.

Mr. Speaker, clearly nobody is ever asking for a guarantee. That cannot be done, but recent events in our own schools highlight the fact that much more needs to be done. I would ask the Premier if he would be willing to have the Province organize a Safe Schools summit so that students, teachers, parents, superintendents and other stakeholders could get together to share their concerns, their programs and their safe schools' practices.

Mr. Speaker, we believe that such a summit would be an ideal opportunity to share, to learn and to develop strategies that would help us all.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I am meeting with teachers very shortly, and I will talk about this idea. We are looking for any ideas that can reinforce the legislation that we passed, can reinforce the codes of conduct that are in place in 24 out of the 25 school divisions that have so far responded.

We noted that in some of the budgets in the 1990s, when there was a cut in education funding, there was a reduction in counselling support investments. We believe and we have heard from educators that not only the teacher-pupil ratios, the engagement of parents, but also the investment in counselling and counselling staff is very, very important to try to prevent tragedies that may or may not happen.

Mr. Speaker, I also think it is important to not only pay attention to the situation in Minnesota and offer our condolences, but I also think we should be canvassing what happened in New Brunswick, where

at that school where there was going to be a potentially very dangerous situation, teachers, educators and counsellors worked with the law enforcement officers and were able to prevent a tragedy from taking place. I will not cut off any good idea. I will talk with the Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson), and any other ideas the members have because as the member has indicated, we certainly agree that this is a non-partisan issue.

Mr. Murray: I appreciate that, Mr. Speaker, and that is why I regret that the First Minister always has to make references back. What we are looking for is forward. We want to ensure that these tragic incidents do not happen. Maybe the Premier thinks he can score political points by talking about cutting in the other years. That is not the issue. I did not raise it on the issue to talk about history. I looked at moving forward.

It is on that basis that I rise and say to the Premier that perhaps knowing that his own Minister of Education (Mr. Bjornson), when questioned by the member from Charleswood, seemed to be in the dark on a very important initiative. We would ask that the Premier take a leadership role in this very serious issue. It is not about partisan politics, Mr. Speaker. It is about children, parents and doing the right thing for all Manitobans.

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, reductions in counselling and increases in funding for counselling are not partisan. It is just a question of priorities that deal with resources on the front lines. That is not partisan; that is fact.

Mr. Speaker, The Safe Schools Act followed advice from educators in Manitoba. I believe the individual who has been working with school divisions, Dr. Mary Hall, was hired in 2002 to work with school divisions on safety and on bullying. We also have put in place other supports for empathy programs in the school divisions. Some of the people that are again working on the front lines, the teachers, have commented on some of our efforts. We will be meeting with teachers.

The member opposite has proposed an idea. We will meet with educators, teachers on how best to move forward on this issue, but I want to again reiterate my condolences to the people of Red Lake, Minnesota, and our offer to provide any backup resources in counselling and other special needs that

may be necessary to put in place to the people of Minnesota.

Children in Care Safety Concerns

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): Mr. Speaker, on June 2, 2003, the *Winnipeg Free Press* reported that a 22-month-old child died after getting his head caught in the bars of his crib, that modifications had been made to that crib and that an investigation was underway. Although it was not made public at the time, we have learned that the child was, in fact, in the care of Family Services. Can the minister share the findings of the investigation and advise us what action her government has taken?

* (13:50)

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Well, Mr. Speaker, I cannot speak to the specifics of any individual incident. I can tell you that our department works with our organizations on issues of safety and on issues of protection of children. I know that we have been following up and that we have been taking this situation very seriously. We will continue to develop initiatives around safety concerns for children in care.

Mrs. Taillieu: Mr. Speaker, we are not asking for the specifics, we are simply asking what she has done with the report. The Medical Examiner's office has confirmed that the investigation was completed and the recommendations were submitted to the government.

Will the minister please tell us what the recommendations were and what action her government has taken to implement them?

Ms. Melnick: Again, I will reiterate for the House, it is not appropriate for me to speak to the specifics of any incident. When recommendations are received in the department from any source, Mr. Speaker, we take them very seriously. We review them, and we do our best to bring in safety features for children who are in care.

Mrs. Taillieu: Mr. Speaker, I think that if the minister was taking this seriously she would make a serious attempt to answer the questions.

Can the minister table the recommendations of the report as well as her department's follow-up and action plan on these recommendations?

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Speaker, again, it would not be appropriate to speak to the specifics around any incident. Again, I can inform the House that we get recommendations from various sources. We take those very seriously and we work towards the improvement of safety for children in care.

Children in Care Safety Concerns

Mr. Glen Cummings (Ste. Rose): Mr. Speaker, we are not asking for specifics of that case. We would like the minister to share information that would come in a form of a recommendation to her. Be frank with the public. Will she now tell us if another child was placed at that location?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I am being asked for information that would not be appropriate to report to the House because it is, in fact, case specific. It is very important that when such serious incidents occur, we respect the process. I am respecting the process. Again, the department reviews recommendations as they come from a multiple of sources. We take them very seriously, and we work to improve upon the safety of children in care.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on a point of order.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. Question Period in this House is designed for opposition members to ask questions of ministers and of the Premier (Mr. Doer). For a minister to stand up and say that the question is not appropriate, it is completely abuse of the rules of this House. We are not asking her to disclose any specifics of any individual case, and that case is not being named, but this is a serious incident where a child has died.

Mr. Speaker, the House and Manitobans have a right to know whether, in fact, some of these allegations that are coming forward were, in fact, true or not, and it is up to the minister to answer to Manitobans and to this House. I would have to say the Premier knows this full well and he should be

cautioning his minister to answer the questions as asked.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): On the same point of order, Mr. Speaker, clearly this is just an interruption. This is a dispute on the facts and not a point of order.

* (13:55)

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable Official Opposition House Leader, it is not a point of order. It is a dispute over the facts.

* * *

Mr. Cummings: Mr. Speaker, it is very disappointing that on an issue as serious as this, we are only receiving evasive answers. We are not seeking matters that would be held privately. This minister received recommendations. What assurance can she give this House and the people of Manitoba who are concerned about the safety of children in care? What assurance can she give us that she has, in fact, followed those recommendations?

Ms. Melnick: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, I will repeat myself that it is inappropriate to speak of specific incidents—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Ms. Melnick: We take very seriously recommendations that come from various sources. Recommendations that include the safety of children in care are very important to the department. We will work with those recommendations around the improvement of safety for children in care.

Mr. Cummings: Mr. Speaker, the answers from this minister are inappropriate or embarrassing at best. I hear across the way, "No, they are not."

Mr. Speaker, the minister will not tell us if she has followed the recommendations. She will not really assure us whether or not she even got recommendations, although we are confident that she has. She will not confirm or deny when, or if, another child was placed in that location.

Ms. Melnick: Mr. Speaker, I am not trying to be glib. I did not actually hear a question, but I will

again repeat that it is not appropriate to discuss the specifics of any case. Again, the Department of Family Services and Housing takes very seriously any recommendations that we receive from whatever sources they may come from, and we work to improve the safety of children who are in care.

Children in Care Safety Concerns

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): I hate to follow up on the same question, but this minister is stalling. She is refusing to answer questions in this House. Mr. Speaker, the question was very clear. This was a child in the care of Family Services, a child under the care of this minister because she is supposed to be accountable to Manitobans and to the families.

Mr. Speaker, the question was very clear. Was there another child placed in the care of this home which was under the supervision of Family Services before the report came out?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Again, Mr. Speaker, it may not be the answer that members opposite want. They have made that very clear, but I also believe members opposite understand that it is not appropriate to speak to the specifics of any incident.

The department receives recommendations from various sources. Those recommendations are taken very seriously, and the department is continually working on ways of improving safety for the children who are in care.

Mr. Derkach: The reality of the issue here is that a child has died under the care of Family Services, Mr. Speaker. It is quite appropriate for us to ask questions as to what caused the death of this child. We want to know what the follow-up of this minister was as a result of the death of this child. It is also appropriate for us to ask about the risk that other children might be exposed to because recommendations may not have been followed. I ask the minister again, was there, in fact, another child placed in the care of this home before the recommendations were acted upon?

* (14:00)

Ms. Melnick: Well, Mr. Speaker, again, it is a question that has come from the opposition a number

of times today. The appropriateness of speaking to the specifics of any case has not changed. It is inappropriate to speak to the specifics of any case. Again, recommendations are taken very seriously, and we work to continually improve the care of children who are in care.

Auto Theft Reduction Strategy

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, in September of 1999, the headline read, "NDP to target auto thieves." That was the Premier's (Mr. Doer) announcement in 1999. Since then, there has been an additional 5000 cars stolen in Winnipeg every year. Today, the Manitoba Progressive Conservative Party announced a five-point plan to reduce auto theft in Manitoba. It includes strict enforcement of curfews of auto thieves, re-energized "Bait Car" program and promotion of deterrents, the filing of community impact statements on the impact of auto theft, the establishment of an auto theft authority and improved incentives for automobile immobilizers.

Mr. Speaker, given that the Premier made his promise six years ago, will the Minister of Justice now take our plan and implement it?

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, today, when I heard that the opposition had developed a new, but I am sure, passing interest in auto theft, and had developed a five-point plan on auto theft, I, at first, wondered if that was indeed the second time that it was the same five-point plan they promised action on when they were in office.

Mr. Speaker, on further advice, I understand that there is a new point in there, the first point being the focus on curfew checks, an idea I am sure they gathered from front-page stories and radio and television stories on what we have been doing. I am glad they have endorsed our strategy.

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, there are 13 500 vehicles that are attempted to be stolen every year in Winnipeg. That is 5000 more than when the minister took office. He has the nerve to stand in this House and say that they have been doing something on this. In 1999, the headline read, "NDP to target auto thieves." The headline earlier this year from the minister was, "Minister of Justice hands are tied on the issue of auto theft."

Manitoba Progressive Conservatives believe that there is a solution, and we do not mind helping this government out. We do not mind doing the job of the minister. Now, will the Minister of Justice, today, take the help in a bipartisan spirit and say that he is going to accept the recommendations?

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, despite the rudeness of members opposite, I am more than happy to entertain questions on auto theft, although I wonder where the opposition thinks they have any credibility on this issue after their pathetic record in government.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, I also regret that their ideas, although one of them is copied on what we have been doing, I also find their recommendations rather pathetic, because the single most effective preventative measure to reduce auto theft, if not almost eliminate it, in this province, is missing, and that is immobilizers. Why are they standing up for the auto makers and the federal government?

Mr. Goertzen: Mr. Speaker, the only thing that is missing in this province is a Minister of Justice who will take his job seriously and bring down auto theft.

Mr. Speaker, last week I was fortunate enough to attend a forum on crime that was hosted by the Member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson). In addition to residents from River East, there were residents from Rossmere and there were residents from Elmwood and, I believe, from Concordia and other areas of Winnipeg. Residents said that they were frustrated with the lack of action by this NDP government and they challenged us. They said, "Will you come up with a strategy on auto theft?"

Well, Mr. Speaker, together with the member from River East and members of our caucus and our leader, we met that challenge. We have come up with a strategy. I want to ask the Minister of Justice why he will not just take that recommendation, put politics aside, accept a good idea, no matter where it comes from.

Mr. Mackintosh: We know the good idea in there came from action, from police, MPI, and this government, but, Mr. Speaker, we have of course

since coming into office introduced an 11-point strategy.

Mr. Speaker, there are further improvements and strengthenings of our strategy that are unfolding, as members opposite know, but it is interesting that when we introduced Canada's strongest provincial laws to counter auto theft, the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Murray) went public and criticized that because he said, and I quote, "We believe that you need to educate. You need to talk about crime prevention."

Mr. Speaker, where are immobilizers in your plan? More importantly, why are they now flip-flopping on education and prevention? Why are they saying stop the ads, stop the public education. They do not even get it right among themselves. Perhaps they can talk to themselves first.

Education System Funding

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, on Thursday, Brandon University will be proposing to the board of governors a reduction of 5.5 full-time teaching positions. Brandon University is struggling to find a solution that will least affect the students' quality of education, a solution that will also ensure that accreditation is not jeopardized. Can the Minister of Advanced Education advise the House why she is forcing Brandon University to cut staff and cut programs?

Hon. Diane McGifford (Minister of Advanced Education and Training): Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by pointing out that the preamble to this question is really rife with inaccuracies.

Having said that, let me point out that this government is committed to accessible, affordable and quality education. I think we have shown that in spades over the years. It was just last week that I mentioned, since 1999, the university grants in this province have gone up by \$45 million; which is 21 percent if we include the property tax relief which the members opposite chose not to support, but if we are to include that, then the funding has gone up by \$57 million.

I think our policies are really in sharp contrast to the funding in the nineties when the members opposite really, I suppose the order of the day was to raze and burn universities, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Rowat: Mr. Speaker, in my conversations with administrators through discussions on post-secondary education, they have on a number of occasions asked me if the other side of the House actually knows how to add and subtract because there are really serious issues with their funding formula.

Mr. Speaker, Brandon University vice-president, Scott Lamont, has indicated that the gap between revenues and expenses has grown wider and that the effects of the shortfall are compounding. Third party observers are questioning the NDP's priorities. The question was asked, "What are the students gaining access to?" A very good question.

I ask the Minister of Advanced Education why her government is not demonstrating a commitment to education by adequately funding existing programs at Brandon University.

Ms. McGifford: Mr. Speaker, again I think our commitment to Brandon University is everywhere apparent. Our funding to Brandon has gone up \$4.4 million or 24.5 percent; or, again, if we are to include the property tax alleviation, which members opposite did not support, then our funding has gone up \$5 million or 31 percent.

This is, again, in sharp contrast to the nineties when fundings to universities over the entire 10-year period went up a mere 16 percent. I, too, have friends at Brandon, and I assure the member opposite I can add and subtract. I had, in fact, Mr. Speaker, the pleasure of having lunch with the president of Brandon University on Saturday, and we discussed Brandon University concerns. I can assure the member opposite that he was very satisfied with the conversation, very satisfied with our commitment and we are very good friends.

*(14:10)

Mrs. Rowat: I appreciate the minister's response. Actually, I am encouraging her to have frank conversations with the administrators across the board on post-secondary because I do not think that the message is getting through to her.

This NDP government is realizing unprecedented revenues. Why are they refusing to share those revenues with Brandon University and the other universities throughout the province? At

Brandon University, five faculties may not be filling teaching positions. There is a strong possibility that the varsity sports and the popular Brandon Bobcats may face elimination.

Mr. Speaker, why is the Minister of Advanced Education launching new programs and not funding existing and established programs?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I think it is very important for the people of Manitoba to know that members opposite are opposed to the University College of the North which has campuses in 19 communities in northern and Aboriginal communities. They ask questions about access and inclusion, and they oppose the most inclusive program in all of post-secondary education here in Manitoba.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: The combination, Mr. Speaker, of operating grants at the level of growth of the economy, plus the reduction in property tax for universities, works out to 3.5 percent to 4 percent a year for universities. Over the last four years, this has worked out close to 30 percent in four years or five years, compared to 16 percent over eleven years.

Mr. Speaker, the Brandon University and all the universities in this province have the capacity of increases that are well above inflation. We would expect the administrators that members opposite are quoting to not take out funding increases above inflation on student accessibility.

Water Quality Kississing Lake

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, on World Water Day, we start the U.N.'s international decade for action on water. In Manitoba, sadly, water quality under the NDP has gotten worse, not better. The Sherridon mine tailings, one of the most polluted sites in all of Canada, day by day, month by month, year by year are leaching a toxic heavy metal blanket of death over the floor of Kississing Lake, one of the best lakes in northern Manitoba, a lake which is as attractive as Lake of the Woods, just northeast of Flin Flon. The stories of shrivelled, emaciated fish in the water near the tailings are frightening. This is one of the most vile

environmental atrocities ever perpetrated in Manitoba. I ask the Minister of Water Stewardship this: What is he doing about it?

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Water Stewardship): Mr. Speaker, given that this is World Water Day, in fact, one of the most important things that we have to deal with, I think, with the global community, is in terms of protecting fresh water. I hope that the member opposite and other members of this House will join with us to support the passage of Bill 22, the most significant initiative we brought in this House that will improve water quality in Manitoba.

But I do want to acknowledge, Mr. Speaker, indeed, the member's concerns in terms of Sherridon. I point out, this goes back to the operation of the Sherridon mine between 1931 and 1951. Indeed, many actions have been taken to ensure that this is not impacted in terms of drinking water, health, but in addition to the mitigation, the work that has been done already, we met as government with the community of Sherridon. We are looking at further actions.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, for 11 years in opposition, the minister watched this tragedy unfold under the Tories. He had time to put in place a plan that he could implement when he was in government, and he failed to do so. Under his watch, we have lost five and a half years. Now, the pile of tailings has deteriorated so badly that it is like battery acid, the increasing acidity only increasing the leaching and the damage. For eight kilometres and more from the site, the toxic waste spread along the lake bottom so that not even the invertebrates that fish eat live. The water has so much copper, it runs red, crying for help.

The minister has been furiously advertising all over the place that he has a plan for Manitoba's lakes. I ask him to table today his plan to clean up Kississing Lake and make sure that it no longer runs red.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Government House Leader, on a point of order.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): It is clear what the member opposite and,

indeed, his colleague do too often, unfortunately for the traditions of this House, is to try and use a stunt. Mr. Speaker, I ask that you please deal with this issue. A matter like this does nothing for the decorum in this House. Clearly there are rules in this House that say there shall be no exhibits in the Chamber.

Mr. Gerrard: I just have a little cranberry juice here. Many members have coffee or hot chocolate or Coke or other things, I do not see it is a particular problem. This is just the colour of that water up there, but this is cranberry juice. If there is a problem with cranberry juice in this House, then tell me.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Minister of Water Stewardship, on the same point of order?

On the point of order raised by the honourable Government House Leader, I have to take it under advisement, because there is part of the question that, because of the decorum, I did not hear. It would be very important for me to peruse Hansard to see that one line that I did not hear. So I have to take it under advisement, and I will bring back the ruling to the House.

* * *

Mr. Ashton: Indeed, if there is any shade of red in this House, it should be from the member opposite, a federal Liberal. You look at Pinawa and the complete lack of federal action to deal with that, Mr. Speaker. The member should be embarrassed, because indeed, I thought the member was taking this matter seriously.

Starting in 2000, we put in place a number of steps through the orphaned mine sites to deal with the problem. We are working with the community in terms of an alternate water supply. We are already working on further mitigation efforts. Starting in 2000, we have started to deal with a legacy that goes back to 1931, to 1951. We take protecting Manitoba's water seriously, and we are working on Sherridon.

*(14:20)

Water Quality Kississing Lake

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, another minister that chooses to blame Ottawa for its

problems. The bottom line is that this government is allowing that water to turn red.

Mr. Speaker, the government has been all over the news saying it has a plan for Manitoba's lakes and yet the minister is not going to table his plan for Kississing Lake. The minister is advertising he has a plan on TV, in newspapers, and yet he cannot produce it. Companies which advertise a product which they cannot deliver can be sued for false advertising, yet this government, which should be setting an example, is spending thousands of tax dollars on propaganda.

I ask the minister to come clean and table his plan for Kississing Lake or admit that he does not have a plan and that he is engaging in false advertising and self-promotion.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I just want to point out that when the former member of Parliament, the minister, was responsible for Science, they not only took a \$75-million R&D investment out of Pinawa, they left us with a plan to clean up nuclear waste over 75 years in the Pinawa site under his plan. When it was in the Ottawa Valley, the clean-up of nuclear waste approved by the Liberal government was six years. That is the difference between a proper plan that was put in place and the member from River Heights' plan that left the nuclear waste here in Manitoba for 75 years.

Mr. Speaker, we have put a northern mine site clean-up in place. We are working with the federal government with the half billion dollars that they have now announced to work with them on a co-operative agreement and plan to clean up some of these tailings.

Housing Programs Infill Housing

Mr. Andrew Swan (Minto): It is clear from the construction that is taking place in the west end of Winnipeg that this government is taking a multi-faceted approach to the affordable and low-income housing needs of our province.

Recently the Minister of Family Services and Housing made an announcement on improving the availability of infill housing in the city of Winnipeg, especially the inner city of Winnipeg.

I am wondering if the minister can inform the House of that decision.

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, on March 11, I joined the Manitoba Home Builders' Association as they successfully launched their Parade of Homes for the first time in the inner city of Winnipeg. I congratulate the home builders for their initiative and for their caring of Winnipeg as a whole city.

That day, I had a member from the local neighbourhood come up to me and say, "I have come here today to thank your government for reinvesting in my neighbourhood."

In addition to the 80 infill homes that I announced through a private-public partnership in November, we have announced the building of 20 more homes in the inner city, Mr. Speaker. That is our strategy. We are building houses in the north, south, east and west.

Manitoba Hydro Rate Increase

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): In September of 2003, we had the president of Manitoba Hydro say, and I quote, "We will not have a rate increase in Manitoba Hydro in any way related to the drought."

Mr. Speaker, we heard that message reinforced by the Premier (Mr. Doer), who said rates had not gone up and they would not go up, and the former minister of Hydro.

Will the NDP government today come clean and tell Manitobans that the real reason for the Hydro rate hikes that they are experiencing right now are a direct result of the raid of \$203 million from Manitoba Hydro and the increasing of the water rental fees and the debt guarantee fee?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Energy, Science and Technology): Mr. Speaker, not only is the member factually wrong, but the member misquotes. In fact, Manitoba has the lowest and will continue to have the lowest hydro-electric rates in the country, and I compare that with members opposite who took MTS, privatized it, and since then we have seen an increase of 60 percent in telephone rates on average across Manitoba. There is a contrast in styles that

Manitobans are well aware of. We have the lowest and will continue to have the lowest hydro-electric rates in this country.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Speaker, this kind of a flip-flop by the NDP government is only too common, and Manitobans are saying let us get real. Let us have this NDP government tell the truth, put the facts on the table. Will they now admit that the rate increases from Manitoba Hydro are a direct result of the raid on Manitoba Hydro of \$203 million and the increases in fees that have drained Manitoba Hydro, and now Manitobans are having to dig deeper into their pockets to pay their Hydro bills?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, members opposite continually say, "Send rate increase to the PUB." These rate increases went to the PUB. The PUB authorized these rate increases and indicated that they were related to the drought conditions, the third worst drought to be experienced in Manitoba Hydro history, where all five watersheds were affected. Not only is the member factually wrong, she is wrong in her analysis. She is trying to raise an issue that is inaccurate, which is continually done. It is another attack on Hydro by members opposite who would like nothing better than to privatize Hydro and take away the future growth of Manitobans in Manitoba and in the North.

Mr. Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

Order. I have a ruling for the House.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Official Opposition House Leader, on a point of order.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. It has been customary in this House and a tradition that when you come down with a ruling in the House, the members of the Assembly remain in the Chamber. Unfortunately, that is not the case, because I just noticed that the Minister of Family Services (Ms. Melnick) has vacated the Chamber.

Mr. Speaker: Order. On a point of order raised, I want to ensure, either through your leaders or through your House leaders, I want to make sure that each and every member understands the rules.

The rule is it is not when I am making a ruling. It is when a Speaker is standing, all members should

be seated, and the Speaker should be heard in silence. That is the rule. If I am standing, there is no member who is to leave their seat, and if any member has done so, I would very, very strongly encourage the Leader or the House leaders to address that individual, because in the future if the Speaker is standing, all members should be seated and the Speaker should be heard in silence.

Speaker's Ruling

Mr. Speaker: I have a ruling for the House.

Following Oral Questions on December 8, 2004, the honourable Official Opposition House Leader (Mr. Derkach) rose on a point of order regarding events that had taken place during Question Period where the Member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) requested that the House observe 33 moments of silence.

In speaking to the point of order, the honourable Official Opposition House Leader stated that it was not Manitoba practice to ask for leave to request a moment of silence, nor were negotiations necessary in order to request a moment of silence. The honourable Deputy Government House Leader (Mr. Ashton), the honourable Member for River East and the honourable Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) also spoke to the point of order.

I took the point of order under advisement. In looking at past Manitoba practice, my research uncovered that moments of silence were requested for the following items and issues: ministerial statements on the National Day of Remembrance and action on violence against women; on the subject of Holocaust Awareness Day; the Day of Mourning for workers killed on the job; on the topic of the September 11 terrorist attacks and World AIDS Day. In addition, a moment of silence was requested at the conclusion of debate on a private member's resolution on the Ukrainian famine. Also, it is customary that a moment of silence is observed when condolence motions are considered in the House. In none of these cases was leave asked for.

Turning to the events of December 8, 2004, where the honourable Member for River East requested a moment of silence, she did so during Oral Questions. We have never had that occur during Oral Questions before.

Given that this appeared to be a departure from the usual practices of the House, I asked the House if

there was leave for this request, as it is customary to request leave when undertaking an action that is at odds with the rules or usual practices of the House.

I would therefore rule that there is no point of order. However, I do suggest that this issue is one that could be taken up with the House leaders or with the Standing Committee on the Rules of the House in order to further discuss the matter and decide whether there should be any restrictions on when a moment of silence can be requested and where leave would be required.

* (14:30)

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

The Dupont Family of St. Georges

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): It gives me great pleasure to rise in the Manitoba Legislature today to pay tribute to the Dupont family of St. Georges, Manitoba, who are the Official Voyageurs for the Festival du Voyageur.

The Dupont family, Jacques and Paulette Dupont and their sons Daniel, Remi and Mario, have a long history of volunteerism, not only with the Festival du Voyageur, but also in their community. A community is only as good as the people who live there, and St. Georges is a better place to live thanks to the dedication and community spirit of the Dupont family.

Besides being the third generation of Duponts to operate the family farm in St. Georges, Jacques is employed at the Pine Falls Paper Company and Paulette works with special needs children and also at the library in Powerview.

Their three sons, Daniel, Remi and Mario, are all accomplished students and athletes and have inherited from their parents a caring and compassion for their community as well. Not only are Jacques and Paulette Dupont proud parents of their three sons, their residence has served as a foster home for many years.

Jacques and Paulette Dupont have been involved with the Festival du Voyageur for many years, and in 1993, they were both honoured recipients of the Order of le Capot bleu. The Dupont family are proud

of their heritage and instil the same sense of pride into their work, their education and their community.

On behalf of the residents of the Lac du Bonnet constituency, it is with tremendous pride, as their member of the Legislative Assembly, that I pay tribute to Jacques and Paulette Dupont and their sons, Daniel, Remi and Mario, on all of their achievements. I wish them continued success in all of their future endeavours.

Transcona Health Centre

Mr. Bidhu Jha (Radisson): I am pleased to state about many improvements being made to health care access for our communities. In the Radisson constituency, we will see more evidence of this when the ACCESS Transcona health centre is completed. This new centre will be a vital contribution to an already lively and energetic community. The new Transcona health centre will provide residents with increased access to a range of social and health services which will bolster a greater quality of life.

ACCESS Transcona will include first-class primary care from nurses and doctors and will administer several public health programs. In order to address this unique need of citizens, senior support services, children's special services and mental health counselling and intervention will also be made available. These services will have a significant impact on the lives of residents of Radisson.

I am proud to be a part of the government which is also dedicated to maintaining the health of all Manitobans. This month, the Department of Health demonstrated that commitment when it announced that \$10 million in Health Accord funding will be used to increase the number of orthopedic surgeries throughout the province. To the people of northeast Winnipeg, which will include a substantial part of my own constituency, Radisson, the emphasis on increased hip and knee procedures means Concordia Hospital will become a centre of excellence. The people of Manitoba will immensely benefit from this government program which is on the wait-time reduction plan.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the government for its continued efforts to improve the health care infrastructure in Manitoba so that all Manitobans can enjoy dignified, healthy and active lives. Thank you.

David Ingram

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I rise today to congratulate one of my constituents, David Ingram, on his participation in the 2005 Special Olympics World Winter Games. From February 26 to March 5, 2005, more than 1900 Special Olympics athletes from 80 countries competed in seven sports at the 8th Special Olympics World Winter Games in Nagano, Japan. This showcase event marks the first time the Special Olympics World Winter Games was held in Asia, and made Nagano the first city to have hosted the Olympics, Paralympics and Special Olympics World Games.

David Ingram has been involved with Special Olympics Manitoba for five years. He has had the chance to travel to different provinces and to meet new people. He enjoys many different sports and has had the chance to participate in many. Basketball, golf, floor hockey and track and field are just some of his areas of interest. The sport that he has particularly excelled at is snowshoeing. He has already received gold medals at the national level in snowshoeing. At the World Games, David came home with two gold medals. He won a gold medal in the 200-metre race with a time of 41.54 seconds. He also won a gold medal in the 4 x 400 relay with a time of 5 minutes 50.2 seconds. David also placed fifth in the 100-metre race.

I would like to congratulate David on his amazing performance and also the volunteers and organizers of the World Winter Games and Special Olympics Canada for enriching the lives of Canadians with an intellectual disability through sport. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

World Water Day

Mr. Conrad Santos (Wellington): Mr. Speaker, the MLA for Wellington would like to speak on the importance of clean drinking water and its effect on human life and health.

Today is World Water Day. Why is clean drinking water important to human life and health? Without water, the human body cannot be sustained for long. It is the basis of terrestrial plant, animal and human life.

The theme of World Water Day for 2005 and indeed for the next decade is "Water for Life." Water

is essential for us to maintain life. Without water, human life would not exist. The human body is a marvellous composite of many interrelated physiological systems, such as the respiratory, digestive, circulatory, nervous and immune systems. Approximately two thirds of the human body is made up of water. All bodily processes, such as metabolism, occur in the presence of water. When we are sick, water carries medicines to the proper body sites and afterwards flushes wastes away.

Many people in our world live without adequate access to clean water. In 2003, the UN reported that over one billion people lack access to a basic supply of clean water. Because of this, the United Nations declared in 2002 that basic amounts of water for personal and domestic use is a fundamental human right.

Debates abound as to what is proper nutrition and appropriate exercise, but one thing is certain; we need clean, refreshing, safe water for good health. As decision-makers, we must make sure all people have access to clean drinking water to reduce disease and to stop poverty and hunger. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

* (14:40)

Irvin Goodon

Mr. Larry Maguire (Arthur-Virden): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to rise in the Manitoba Legislature again to congratulate a constituent of Arthur-Virden, Mr. Irvin Goodon, founder of Goodon Industries of Boissevain. After a lifetime of achievement in business and community service, Irvin Goodon was recognized on February 15, 2005, as he was formally inducted into the Aboriginal Business Hall of Fame.

The honour was bestowed upon Mr. Goodon by the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business. The CCAB is a national, non-profit organization that promotes the full participation of Aboriginal communities and individuals in the Canadian economy.

Irvin Goodon has been a successful business leader in the rural community of Boissevain, Manitoba. Goodon Industries is one of his most successful projects. Mr. Goodon started distributing fence posts in 1951, and his business has now grown to be the largest post-frame construction company in Canada. The company builds such projects as farm shops, cattle shelters, riding arenas and vegetable

storage facilities. Currently, Irvin Goodon's other business initiatives include the Irvin Goodon International Wildlife Museum, the Canadian Wilderness Inn and Goodon Imports, all businesses which are located in Boissevain.

Not only has Irvin Goodon been a business leader, but he has also been a role model in the Métis community. He continues to inspire young Aboriginal and Métis people throughout our community and province. Once again, I congratulate Mr. Irvin Goodon, along with Billy Diamond, a northern Québec Cree business leader, on being the two inaugural inductees to the Aboriginal Business Hall of Fame in 2005.

I wish Irvin, his family and business partners continued success in all their business endeavours. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

House Business

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I would like to advise the House that the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs will meet in camera this afternoon following Routine Proceedings to deal with issues involving the hiring of the new Children's Advocate.

Mr. Speaker, would you please call Supply and Interim Supply?

Mr. Speaker: The Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs will be meeting in camera this afternoon following Routine Proceedings to deal with issues involved with the hiring of a new Children's Advocate.

Also, the House will now resolve into Committee of Supply to consider the resolution respecting the Interim Supply bill.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

Interim Supply

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Harry Schellenberg): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

Point of Order

An Honourable Member: Point of order.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Harry Schellenberg): Point of order.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Chair, given that there is a standing committee meeting that I understand will not take very long, but I am just wondering if there is leave of the committee for no quorum count until the committee rises.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Harry Schellenberg): Is there leave to have no—

Order, please.

The House will have to deal with this.

Will the Speaker please take the Chair? The committee will recess.

IN SESSION

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Mr. Speaker, is there leave of the House to have no quorum counts until the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs rises this afternoon?

Mr. Speaker: Is there leave of the House not to have any quorum counts or votes until the Standing Committee on Legislative Affairs concludes their meeting? Is there agreement? *[Agreed]*

Now, we will resolve into Committee of Supply.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

Interim Supply

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Harry Schellenberg): Good afternoon. Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This afternoon, the committee will resume consideration of the two resolutions respecting the Interim Supply bill. Opening statements were given yesterday, so today we shall proceed with questions. Are there any questions?

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Chairperson, in asking questions yesterday, we were bringing to the Minister of Education's (Mr. Bjornson) attention some of the concerns from the Manitoba Teachers' Society about the concerns around their pensions. In having an opportunity, just a short while ago, to reread all of the questions and answers from yesterday, it appears that what the Minister of Education is saying is that the Manitoba Teachers' Society is, in fact, putting forward a dishonest campaign.

He is saying that he has spoken to them on a number of occasions about the concerns of their pensions. He said that has not been an issue for him, that he has been available to speak to them and yet, the Manitoba Teachers' Society is indicating, in fact, that is not the case. So, in fact, what the Minister of Education, over a number of answers yesterday, is accusing the Manitoba Teachers' Society of dishonesty.

Mr. Chairperson, the Manitoba Teachers' Society, right now, has a massive postcard campaign going on indicating that this government is refusing to talk to them about the issue and their concerns around the pension. I would like to ask the Minister of Education if he could please explain why the Manitoba Teachers' Society feels that they need to go to such lengths if, as the minister has said, he has been willing to discuss this with them on numerous occasions.

Hon. Peter Bjornson (Minister of Education, Citizenship and Youth): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to say, first of all, that I applaud the efforts of the Manitoba Teachers' Society as advocates for the profession. They are very passionate about the profession, as am I. I do recall participating as an advocate in these very halls when the opposition was proposing some very draconian legislation for teachers around the issue of collective bargaining. Unfortunately, the minister of the day referred to the teachers in the hall as not being real teachers, and certainly, that is not the message from this government.

We have a lot of respect for teachers. We continue to meet with teachers, and as I said yesterday, they have been very good advocates. I expect that the Teachers' Society would be holding the government's feet to the fire on issues of concern, and as such, on a number of occasions when we have

met, yes, indeed, they have raised the issue of pension. They continue to do so. We continue to listen, and we are going to work with them. That is my commitment to the teachers, to address this issue.

* (14:50)

Mrs. Driedger: The Minister of Education is indicating that he says he has respect for teachers, and yet, according to all of the information I am getting, all of the discussions, the postcards, that is exactly the opposite message this government appears to be giving to teachers, because all of these teachers are saying that this government is not listening. The minister cannot have it both ways. He cannot be sitting here saying he respects teachers, and then, at the same time, he, according to the Teachers' Society, is not listening, that the government is not listening to their concerns. The minister definitely cannot have it both ways.

I do want to indicate at this time while the minister is talking about respect for teachers, I too have a huge amount of respect for teachers. They were probably the most influential people in my life, particularly one teacher that I can likely say, because of the foundation she gave me at a very young age, is probably why I am sitting in this chair. That was my Grade 3-4 teacher. I would like to say that if I had a handful of teachers that I would name on one hand, that teacher is likely responsible for a good part of why I am here.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

She also made me ask a lot of questions, and I learned to look into things because of a lot of things that she taught me. She certainly taught me to question when I hear somebody that seems to be meandering around with his answers to maybe ask that minister again if he is saying he truly respects teachers, why they are being forced to go out on this campaign and, in fact, accuse him of not listening.

Mr. Bjornson: Once, again, I also said in my response that I respect the work of teacher advocates, and certainly the Teachers' Society is doing an excellent job as teacher advocates. They have been doing an excellent job as teacher advocates for a number of years. I recall, as a teacher advocate back in the early 1990s, when we were advocating for the government of the day to do something about the

pension liability and the incredible debt, I certainly was very well aware of what that pension—
[interjection]

Oh, pardon me, but the member from Russell just called me stupid. I must take offence to that.

An Honourable Member: I can put it on the record.

Mr. Bjornson: Yeah, I really appreciate your bringing that forward. That really speaks to the decorum of members opposite. Obviously, he respects teachers, because I am a teacher, and he is the individual that signed my teacher's certificate. Obviously, he does respect teachers.

As I was saying, I absolutely believe in the role of teacher advocates. The Teachers' Society has done an incredible job as teacher advocates, and we believe in the democratic process and their participation in that democratic process. I was in this building when a Minister of Education under the opposition government said that we were not real teachers. Well, those are real teachers that are advocating for pensions, and we are listening to those concerns. We have met with teachers on a regular basis as we meet with all stakeholders and will continue to meet with them. In fact, as I indicated yesterday, we will have meetings in March. We will have meetings in April. We will continue to meet with teachers to address their issues of concern. Pensions have been a part of a number of issues that have been brought forward by the teachers.

Mrs. Driedger: It is interesting to hear the Minister of Education patronizing teacher advocates. I am not sure that they are looking for that kind of patronizing here, but it is certainly a tack that the minister seems to be comfortable going down that road. I do agree that all they are asking for is respect. I am not sure how he feels it is being respectful to them to force them into this campaign to ask him to listen and then to basically accuse them of not telling the truth, of running a dishonest campaign. Through everything he said, he is basically saying they are lying. They are not telling the truth, that he has done all of these things. I am not sure that is particularly respectful to any teachers in this province.

I have one final question. I would like to ask the minister if the teachers' pension has at all been compromised by the fact that TRAF has co-invested with Crocus for a total of \$20 million into two

different ventures. Is that pension at all compromised through that co-investment by TRAF with Crocus?

Mr. Bjornson: The TRAF fund is a very significant fund, and they have a very diverse investment portfolio as is good fiscal management, and as such they have invested in a number of different funds of varying degrees of risk. That is part of the investment portfolio, and that is part of the job of the board to assess risk, and that is the determination of the TRAF board. That is their job to determine if there is acceptable level of risk, and I believe they acted prudently.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister has indicated that the TRAF board has acted prudently in their investments, but I am asking him as the Minister of Education if he feels that the pension fund has been at all compromised in his view by the co-investment by TRAF with Crocus of \$20 million.

Mr. Bjornson: I do not believe that it has been compromised. As I said, the board acts responsibly by assessing risk, and we have very diverse portfolios of investment because that is part of prudent investment planning.

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Lac du Bonnet): I, too, have a question for the Minister of Education.

Almost a couple of weeks ago, on March 11, a concerned parent group from Pine Falls headed by Kristy Sharpe from Pine Falls met with him, and they have some concerns about the forced amalgamation of Pine Falls School District with Sunrise School Division. Their concerns are parental concerns, and their concerns are for their children in terms of the education that they believe they will receive and will continue to receive if the Pine Falls School District continued to exist and the Pine Falls School remained as it was.

My question to the Minister of Education is this: Will he force them to amalgamate with Sunrise School Division? We have all seen the effects of the forced amalgamation of Agassiz School Division with the Springfield portion of Transcona-Springfield School Division, and those effects were increased property taxes beyond reason. My question to the Minister of Education is this: Will he force them to amalgamate Pine Falls School District with Sunrise School Division, or will he give them other options?

Mr. Bjornson: We had a meeting with both the board from Pine Falls School Division and also from the parent group that was concerned about the situation in Pine Falls. Certainly, I am, as they are, concerned about the well-being of their children and the quality of education that they receive. There is no question about that.

The issue around the amalgamation was first identified by the Boundaries Review Commission that was brought forward by Bill Norrie when he was commissioned to do so in 1994, and the recommendation at the time for Pine Falls as a special revenue district was that it would be part of the proposed merger between what was then Agassiz and, I believe, Lord Selkirk. Now, as such, since it is no longer a special revenue district, it will achieve municipal status. This was identified back in 2002, that once administrative and legal issues were addressed, those administrative and legal issues being municipal status, then they would proceed with the realignment of the school division boundary.

It is currently going to go to the Board of Reference, as both Sunrise School Division and Pine Falls School District have met, have had public consultations, and have submitted a proposal to the Board of Reference. At that point, the Board of Reference will make a decision around the status of the school division.

* (15:00)

Mr. Hawranik: I need to remind the Minister of Education that, in fact, it is the Premier (Mr. Doer) who said there shall be no forced amalgamations. It is not the Manitoba way, and yet it appears as though the Minister of Education is not providing the Pine Falls School District, or the parent group, with any options with respect to amalgamation. He is, instead, following recommendations that were made with Sunrise and Springfield, or with Agassiz and Springfield, without any regard to the interests, I believe, of the parents and the students there.

It is very difficult to negotiate when you have a gun to your head when, in fact, you force an amalgamation of the school district with Sunrise. It is very difficult to negotiate with a school division that is in a position of strength. They are in a position of weakness when it comes time to negotiating.

My question to the minister again is this: Will he force them to amalgamate with Sunrise School

Division, or will he give them some other options that may be available to them?

Mr. Bjornson: Madam Chair, as a matter of process, as I said it was indicated back in 2002, that Pine Falls would be engaged in the discussion around amalgamation and working with neighbouring divisions, and as such, that discussion has gone on. Whether that discussion has gone on with Sunrise School Division, both school boards have brought forward a recommendation that is currently in front of the Board of Reference. The decision rests on the shoulders of the Board of Reference. That is a public process and the process will be undertaken shortly.

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): Madam Speaker, I would like to, first of all, thank the minister for making himself available to answer some of the questions that we have. Hopefully, he can provide us with some of the information that I have, so far, not been able to lay my hands on.

I wonder if the minister could tell me on Border Land School Division, which was a merger between southeast and southwest, the central part of the province, Rhineland School Division and Boundary School Division. That merger has caused some consternation in some parts of the division. However, what we found most interesting is that the minister, or the government, had told everybody that these mergers would save a significant amount of money. We also heard last year that the Province was reducing the education tax on agricultural land significantly by 30 percent, and this year, was going to reduce it by 50 percent.

Now I wonder if the minister could tell us what the increase in levy was in the Border Land School Division last year. What was the percentage of increase in local education taxation in Border Land School Division?

Mr. Bjornson: I will have to take that question as notice. I do not have that data in front of me.

Mr. Penner: Madam Chairperson, the minister should have that information at his fingertips because it is very public information. I believe the budgetary increases last year, tax increases were about, I believe, a 13.2% increase in local taxes. I do not know whether the minister might be able to tell me, and I have not been able to quite clearly get the information this year yet, as to what the increase in

local property taxes will be in Border Land School Division.

Could the minister probably tell me what he has been told what the increase in taxation will be in Border Land School Division this year?

Mr. Bjornson: Madam Chair, again, I have to take that as notice. I do not have that data in front of me. I will gladly provide it for the member as soon as I do have it available to me.

Mr. Penner: Madam Chairperson, I was told yesterday that the increase in taxes this year was somewhere in the neighbourhood of just better than 6 percent, either 6.2 or 6.8 percent this year. That amounts to about a 20% increase in two years, the two years after the merger took place between Boundary School Division and Rhineland School Division. If you take the 20% increase that we have seen and deduct that from the 30 percent that the government has so far paid farmers in reduced taxes, the tax reduction is virtually nil in Border Land School Division. I have not looked at other school divisions and how they have fared in rural Manitoba, especially those that were forced to merge.

I believe, Madam Chairperson, that the minister and this government put out information that was very questionable to the school divisions and/or to the people in the general public. If, in fact, the savings would have been there that the minister and the government put before the people during the last election campaign, one would have expected that the proposed plan that we had put forward of removing entirely the agricultural contribution to education taxation on property, and all the residential properties in the province having been able to eliminate the taxation, would have been a significantly better plan without forcing amalgamation on school divisions.

I think the Border Land School Division is clearly a demonstration of how misguided that approach was. Whether the pupils will be better served because of the merger still remains to be seen. We do not know that yet, but nothing much has changed as far as the application or the delivery of education in most of those two school divisions that were merged. I understand that the administration costs had actually gone up instead of coming down. Again, I would like the minister to look into that, because I think here is a model or a demonstration of

how misguided that approach really was in trying to bring a reduction in costs to the taxpayers of Manitoba.

I want to ask the Minister of Education whether he is contemplating further mergers and/or forced mergers in the province under the auspices of saving money to the taxpayers of Manitoba.

Mr. Bjornson: As has been stated, if there are any further amalgamations to take place, those amalgamations would be done so voluntarily.

Although the member from Emerson suggests that the jury is out with respect to the benefits of this process, I would like to ensure the member from Emerson that we have received very positive feedback from administrators and teachers and all involved in the amalgamation process. It was an opportunity to reinvent, to establish new vision, to share resources, to share best practices and a number of other sound educational reasons why we proceeded with amalgamation have been verified through reports that have been written on the issue.

With respect, the member refers to Border Land School Division. I met with the trustees from Border Land, who were very pleased that we addressed some of their concerns related to remoteness through the funding of schools formula and specific requests to address remoteness, with respect to one particular school, and it certainly met the criteria that have warranted grants of that nature for sustainability and programs in remote areas. We are very pleased to bring forward additional funding to assist with the remoteness issue that was identified by the trustees in Border Land.

I would again like to reiterate that the sound educational reasons behind the amalgamation process have been verified through a report that had been requested on the benefits of amalgamation, and certainly we have seen that there have been a lot of benefits for students and teachers through this process.

*(15:10)

Mr. Penner: I thank the minister for that response. I will meet very shortly with members of the school board in Border Land School Division, and I will try to find out from them whether what the minister is telling us today is, in fact, accurate.

As we all know, the Sprague School is, I think, the school that the minister is talking about. It is what we might consider a remote area from an educational standpoint because we have children in that southeast area, especially one student that I know of from Sandilands, that was on the bus for an hour and a half in the morning and an hour and a half in the evening. That is a three-hour bus ride for a six- to eight-year-old child, and that becomes fairly significant.

I think there also needs to be maybe a different realignment there of educational facilities access through some means. The minister might want to check that. I know that the school division in the Sandilands area has made, I believe, provisions that have shortened the ride. I think, originally, the ride was somewhere in the neighbourhood of two hours in the morning and two hours in the evening. No person in here going to work would ride every morning for two hours on a bus, I believe, and two hours in the evening. That simply would not be acceptable, and changes would be made.

I would suggest that the minister take a hard look at some of those areas that have smaller communities in them, quite viable communities, but small populations and therefore small populations of children. Some of those children have some difficulties to overcome as far as accessing educational facilities.

So I ask whether the minister is referring to that area when he says there are special provisions. Maybe he could tell me how much money the Province had added to the budget of the Border Land School Division because of that situation.

Mr. Bjornson: I do not have the exact figure, but I believe it was in the neighbourhood of \$60,000. I will gladly provide the exact figure for the member from Emerson.

Certainly, with respect to issues of concern around small communities and the sustainability of schools and issues around transportation, it is something that we do work with our partners to address their concerns in these areas. There is a committee that meets that makes recommendations regarding funding, and we have acted on many of those recommendations around small school grants and declining enrolment grants and things of that nature that have gone a significant distance to

address concerns around the viability of the small schools.

So this is something that has been raised very passionately by people in these areas where there are challenges of geography and challenges of population around sustainability of schools. Certainly, we have acted on those recommendations.

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Madam Deputy Chair, I have a few questions to the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Struthers).

As the minister knows, over many years Springfield has contributed to the growth of the province of Manitoba through the gravel pits that are mined on a daily basis. A lot of gravel, a lot of product comes out of those pits. Six property owners that border one of the pits have several concerns regarding an expansion that is happening in one of the pit sites, including what they feel is a loss of buffer zone, direction of berms, increased depth of dredging, and what they feel is a general impact on the enjoyment of their property.

I bring it to the minister's attention not because I do not think the minister has enough to do. Their concern is, and I met with the group today, that everywhere they go the message to them is, well, wrong department. They have moved from Cooks Creek Conservation District to provincial department by provincial department, and everybody keeps saying, "Well, no, we don't oversee that. That's not our department. That's not our purview."

What they want to know is who actually is responsible for the regulation of gravel pits, keeping in mind that over 12 000 people, directly or indirectly, access the water in and around Birds Hill Park, which includes those gravel pits. They have some very legitimate concerns on what is happening to the water. They just want to make sure that it is being, besides a few issues that I mentioned, the water is being protected. Can the minister help us in this?

Hon. Stan Struthers (Minister of Conservation): Madam Chair, certainly the minister will try his best to help Manitobans who have concerns dealing with everything from the quality of their water to buffer zones that provide some type of protection whenever resources or minerals are being extracted from our land.

I also want to thank the minister for worrying about my busy schedule and giving me work to do. I like my job, so I do not mind him looking for more for me to do.

One of the things that is quite evident with the way governments operate in the 21st century is that there needs to be a lot of co-operation from one department to the next. It may have been this way for a lot of years, but I think there is becoming recognition that we cannot silo ourselves out in different departments and never have one department working together with another. This example that my colleague from Springfield brings forward underscores that very important concept.

There are a number of departments that are working on these sorts of issues. I think that ensures a better job is done on behalf of his constituents, but it also increases the possibility that constituents of his get bumped around from one department to the next. My department is involved in this along with the Department of Water Stewardship when it comes to water quality and also along with the Department of Industry, Economic Development and Mines, which ultimately does have the power to regulate gravel pits and other extraction activities that happen in this province.

We want to make sure that good decisions are made in terms of the environment so my department does play a role in ensuring the member from Springfield's constituents' concerns are brought to the forefront. I will continue to operate under the mantra that his constituents' concerns need to be addressed.

Mr. Schuler: I see that, after being an individual who has put a considerable amount of pressure on the Premier to put this member into Cabinet, he is starting to speak like a Cabinet minister. He never answered the question, but I will just pose it one more time and then we will leave it at that.

Insofar as water quality, insofar as buffer zones, how far the development of a gravel pit is allowed, how close they are allowed to provincial trunk highways, who is responsible for enforcing compliance? What I will endeavour to do, I am going to package all this up. I will send a letter to the minister because, of course, I do not expect him to have the answers here at the tip of his hand. I just wanted to make sure that he was aware of the issue. It is important.

As he knows, water is important to everyone. Fresh water is what it is all about and Manitoba holds an incredible treasure of fresh water. It is important that we preserve and protect that. That is what keeps our communities safe and our communities growing. I will package this all up. I will lay out the concerns. I will send it to the minister and if he can in the meantime have his department look into this. I think it is time these individuals got a straight answer who they should be talking to. Thank you.

* (15:20)

Mr. Struthers: Madam Chair, I would appreciate that. I know it is always easier to work with all of the information, and I know the Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler) will forward that on to me.

We do take the quality of water in this province very seriously. I think we have launched a number of very useful, and I think, very visionary steps to make—speaking of steps—a number of very visionary steps to protect not only the quality of water, but the quantity of water starting with the banning of the movement of bulk water south of our border. So I appreciate the member from Springfield bringing forward that issue.

Mr. Penner: Madam Chairperson, I would like to pose this question to the Minister of Water Stewardship (Mr. Ashton). I want to ask him about some of the issues that have been raised with us on the floodway and the authority vested in the Floodway Authority by the minister, and the agreement that the government has, obviously, struck or come to some arrangement without the involvement of the Heavy Construction Association in the province of Manitoba.

We have received and had some discussion with the Heavy Construction Association, or some members and their executive director, on some of these issues. We have to really wonder what would have prompted the government of the day to draft an agreement or come to an agreement and force workers that are not unionized to register with the Floodway Authority.

I would like to ask the minister whether he believes that the constitutional right of an individual is being infringed upon by this agreement and by forcing them to register with the authority, and also at the same time, register or indicate by some means

to the unions who they are, what their trades are and what talents they possess to be hired by the authority. I wonder if the minister could give us some indication what would have prompted them to move in that direction.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Water Stewardship): Madam Chairperson, I want to run through a number of the key elements of the agreement because, and I appreciate by the way, that the member opposite is opposed to an agreement. He is opposed to even the employment equity aspects of the agreement. I must say that I am a bit disappointed, but I think it is quite clear that members opposite were opposed to any kind of agreement right from the start. I think they are firmly rooted, and I am going to be generous, in the 1950s in terms of—and certainly have not looked at anything that has happened in this province since the 1960s—when we have had agreements in place for Hydro developments, agreements, by the way, that are certainly more broad-sweeping than the agreement that was reached recently.

I do want to indicate that, certainly, there was involvement from both the Floodway Authority, from a number of trade unions and also a number of contractors. While one organization, the Heavy Construction Association, was involved initially and decided to withdraw from the process, I think it is important to note that when the agreement was announced, the president of the Winnipeg Construction Association was there. There have been, I think, fairly clear indications from the Construction Labour Relations Association, and from others. The fact is that in the Manitoba tradition there was a fair amount of discussion and some give-and-take. Indeed, the final result, probably, it most closely reflects the kind of compromise that we saw in the Wally Fox-Decent report. I think the general consensus is, obviously, there are people who oppose any kind of agreement, including the members opposite, but what the agreement does is it provides certainty over the life of the construction of the project. It provides opportunities for unionized and non-unionized contractors to bid on the work. There is no requirement for an employee working on the site to become a member of a union, and, by the way, that is quite different from the kind of agreements we have with Manitoba Hydro for a northern development, where that is a requirement.

There is, in fact, a clear provision in here, both in terms of what is commonly called the Rand

Formula, which in this case provides for a mechanism in which there is provision of services to unionized employers. In this case, there is an equivalent fee, but not a direct fee, that is required even for non-unionized employees. I want to put on the record that I was particularly shocked when the members opposite, I think it was in the previous Friday Question Period, went after the deduction in the agreement and saying this was somehow some payment, I do not know if I should use these terms on the floor of the Legislature, but somehow, you know, kickbacks, that is the word, to unions. I am assuming they are opposed to this. You know what those payments were for? They were for pensions and benefits, both for unionized and non-unionized employees. So the member opposite does not understand the agreement, but does not agree with the agreement anyway.

The bottom line, Madam Chairperson, is even the question he raised in terms of the reference to names being provided and that is not the case, and this particular case is quite standard for the Floodway Authority and others to have a list of employees. That is not there for, in this particular case, any purpose other than as stated there and, in fact, there is even a clear recognition through the agreement that it will not be certification throughout the life of it, because, essentially, you have an agreement.

So the bottom line, Madam Chairperson, is the members opposite never agreed with the concept of an agreement to begin with, and now I would appreciate it if the member opposite, when he is asking his questions, would not only own up to that, but perhaps put factual information on the record because, again, this is an agreement. Unionized workers and non-unionized workers, unionized employees, non-unionized employees, will have an opportunity. One, perhaps, significant difference between us and members opposite, we do not think that employment equity programs are, to use the words of members opposite, apartheid. What they are is stating very clearly is that there are a lot of people out there, a lot of Aboriginal, minorities and women, who are qualified to do the job.

Mr. Penner: I think, Madam Chairperson, if it is your will, then I will refer to the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) and, I think, he wants to ask some questions of the Premier (Mr. Doer). So, if that is all right, and then I will revert back.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): My first question deals with equalization, and the Premier, I think it was yesterday, said that much of the equalization transfer, I suspect he meant the increase in equalization transfer this last year, was put into the rainy day fund.

I would ask the Premier how much of the more than \$300 million that was put in the rainy day fund came from the equalization transfers.

* (15:30)

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): I will get the exact number, but there was well over \$150 million that was placed in the rainy day fund. Last year's equalization was made up of two parts. One was prior year adjustments based on increased population numbers, and the other was the increased amount of money. The increased amount of money was based on readjusting equalization to have the impact it had in the '99-00 year for all provinces that, for us, it is on a percentage of revenue. It is slightly down from '99-00. The amount of money for this year in equalization, the '05-06 year, is less than last year both in base and prior year adjustments.

The issue of equalization is before a parliamentary committee chaired by a deputy minister from Alberta, so we are quite nervous about it, from the federal government, although we have had chats with the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance from Saskatchewan. I would point out there was a significant payment to British Columbia as part of the equalization agreement the '05-06 year, '04-05 year and, I think, carrying on to '05-06, and there was a payment contrary to media reports to Saskatchewan.

Where equalization is going, I cannot predict. It is in the Canadian constitution: comparable services and comparable taxation rates. What you see now is a situation where Manitoba's revenue and equalization is slightly less on a percentage of the budget than '99-00, but obviously more than a year ago because the Ontario economy had decreased. I will get the exact number.

Part of the money in the rainy day fund was a last-minute amount of money that the federal government put in for the waiting lists, a multi-year fund for the waiting lists. That was announced in the federal budget. I believe it was February 22 or 23.

That money, we would have preferred to have it flow each year in a waiting-list fund as opposed to flowing for three years or so in a rainy day fund. Of course, our Auditor will now take that out as a deficit under GAAP because he does not respect the rainy day fund in terms of accounting procedures. It might work well for Ottawa to prepay it, but it does not work well for us.

The amount of money in the rainy day fund is made up of two parts: one part, the waiting list fund; and the other part, the equalization money for the '04-05 year.

Mr. Gerrard: The Premier has mentioned the part of the money which came from the waiting list fund, and clearly my understanding with the agreement with Ottawa is that there be some process of accountability in terms of how that is used to decrease waiting lists.

I would just ask the Premier if he could explain how he proposes to ensure that there is that accountability, the link between the waiting list dollars and how they are going to be spent.

Mr. Doer: We have always agreed to accountability. In terms of the five criteria, there is obviously some progress, positive progress in some areas, and some areas that we have admitted that require more work.

I think you saw the hip and knee announcement. We are expecting more orthopedic surgeons to graduate, seven this year, hopefully. We are short of anesthesiologists. Well, we are not only short of anesthesiologists; I noticed yesterday that Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children is sending kids down to the United States because they do not have enough anesthesiologists in that hospital, which is quite shocking.

Certainly, we want that money to go to the quality-of-life areas that we are weak on. One is hip and knee and the other one is cataract surgeries. On CancerCare waiting lists we are the lowest or second lowest. We move back and forth between ourselves and British Columbia. Cardiac waiting lists are down 60 percent and very consistent with the requirements. On home care, our home care plus the palliative care plus with the treatment of drugs is considered the finest in the country.

Mr. Gerrard: My question has to do with the process, presumably, during the coming year or two.

I do not know exactly what the Premier's plans are. Money will be coming out of the rainy day fund specifically for use with respect to improving or decreasing, I would hope, waiting lists.

How does the minister propose to make that link to ensure that those dollars are actually being used for the waiting list reduction rather than for some other purpose?

Mr. Doer: Well, any money we have had to date has been very well accounted for. The radiologists in Canada said we had the best accountability for diagnostic equipment in the country. We are fully accountable for the expenditures. We will continue to demonstrate, quite frankly, not just the amount of money we are getting from Ottawa on those procedures but more money we will be spending.

I would point out to the member opposite that this waiting list money will mean that we are getting about 22 percent or 23 percent of our health care budget from the national government. The other amount of money is from the provincial taxpayers, so we will clearly be accountable for the money. We have no difficulty with accountability, and we are prepared to be accountable with the federal government. I think there is a council established with the chairpersonship of Mr. Michael Decter. I think that is the independent person.

I think where the biggest weakness is in accountability, by the way, just for members opposite, the biggest weakness of accountability when the accountability report came out two years ago, and there were weaknesses from provinces in terms of overall standards, the biggest weakness in this country where the most whiteout was used was on Aboriginal health care, and the federal government has also promised to be accountable for Aboriginal health care. The Aboriginal health care system is the sixth largest health care system in Canada, and most of the items that are under the direct responsibility of the national government were whited out in the first report on accountability.

This accountability is a good thing for Canadian citizens. We are committed to it, but I think it is a two-way street here for First Nations people who, as the member opposite knows, are really, when it comes to primary health care, when it comes to home care, when it comes to diagnostic care, when it comes to doctors' services in the community, nursing

services quite a bit behind and dental services, by the way, which were reduced by the national government a few years ago, quite a bit behind other people.

Mr. Gerrard: When I look at the budget documents for this year, I see that the forecast amount for equalization transfers for 2004-2005 is \$1.699 billion and that the estimate for 2005-2006 is \$601 million, which is a decrease of about \$98 million. In the \$1.699 billion, the minister has told us that a component of that, which the Premier said that he would get us the information on, but may be somewhere around \$150 million of that, almost \$1.7 billion has been to the rainy day fund. Will the Premier provide details of how the other \$1.54 billion was spent?

Mr. Doer: The money was spent to provide comparable services in Manitoba, comparable taxation rates, and that is the Constitution of the country. You and I have had this chat before. I think this is déjà-vu, but you are right. The member is right. The '05-06 number is down \$90 million for the '04-05 actual. That is why we put money away in the rainy day fund. I would refer the member opposite to the Senate report on equalization which makes a number of recommendations, but it will deal with some of the components of equalization.

Why the number is down, there are two reasons. One is the first-year adjustment that the Prime Minister proposed as part of the health care discussions included a mixture of per capita and non-per capita. The second year included a proposal that included more money per capita, and that is why British Columbia, contrary to media reports, and Saskatchewan, because of the resource adjustment in '04-05 of some \$500 million, both got some extra funds.

* (15:40)

Having said that, we expect the federal government, with the lack of the abolition of the GST, to be running surpluses between \$10 billion and \$12 billion a year, and so, on the basic fiscal issue of balance, you can see the needs are in the provinces. When you look at post-secondary education, and there is a number there—at one point we paid for 80 percent of the cost of post-secondary education, or 83 percent, and the federal government picked up 17 percent. Now it is down to 7 percent.

So there are gaps where the equalization money has been, not necessarily applied directly because equalization is supposed to go to all services and all taxation rates.

I notice today that Newfoundland and Labrador were able to reduce, with the new equalization deal, their deficit from \$750 million to some \$450 million. I assume that some of that was the offshore oil agreement.

Mr. Gerrard: My follow-up question has to do with the Premier's reference to 22 percent or 23 percent of the health care budget being paid for by the federal government. Does that include only the Canada health transfer, or does that include some proportion of equalization transfers? Maybe the Premier could explain what it includes, that 22% to 23% calculation.

Mr. Doer: It includes the health care transfer. If you look at Ontario, you look at Alberta, you look at Saskatchewan or Manitoba, it is between 22 percent and 23 percent from the national government. The rest is from the provincial governments. Equalization is supposed to go to all services and comparable taxation rates under the Constitution of Canada, and I support the Constitution of Canada. I support the Pierre Elliott Trudeau constitutional amendment of 1982 and the party that actually pushed for that to go in the Constitution was Sterling Lyon in 1981, just to credit where credit is due. So Sterling Lyon put that clause in the Constitution.

I think Jim Eldridge helped write it. I want to give credit to Jim Eldridge and the former Conservative government of Mr. Lyon for having it in the Constitution. I want to assure the member opposite, after Pierre Elliott Trudeau agreed to it, it was in the Constitution. Some provinces, including Eric Stefanson, Clayton Manness, many Liberal leaders now, Daniel Johnson have always believed that. Allan McEachen took the constitutional provision and changed it by going to a five-province average and excluding Alberta with the revenues. Both the Conservatives in the past, the distant past, I hope, and ourselves, supported the 10-province average because how can you have a Constitution that cherry-picks the five provinces.

So I would point out that Trudeau was correct to put it in the Constitution, and I think McEachen was

wrong to calculate it without Alberta because then it is not equalized, equalization. So you will find letters on file from Eric Stefanson, from Clayton Manness, from Greg Selinger, all arguing for the 10-province average, which would produce \$300 million more for Manitoba. Then you would ask where is that money going. It will go to comparable taxes and comparable services.

Mr. Gerrard: We have clearly benefited significantly from equalization, but I would like to move on.

This year will be the first year that the act which provides for the gasoline taxes and diesel taxes will go to be spent on highways and on construction. I would ask the Premier, when one looks at the taxes there are clearly two relevant taxes, one of which is the gasoline tax and one of which is called the motive fuel tax. I think that it may not be all the motive fuel tax, but it is most of it that would be included. If you combine those two, the number is about \$233 million, and it may be a little bit less than that.

First of all, the Premier's comment on the amount, and second, when we look at the Transportation and Government Services budget, which parts of that will it specifically apply to, in terms of which components will be covered by the costs as they are shown in the Estimates?

Mr. Doer: Well, we will not have any difficulty accounting for the money under the accountability act. The amount of money, and you missed transit, as well, because in the act, I think if you go back and look at the act, it includes transit transfers as part of the legislation on The Gas Tax Accountability Act. I am just going by memory here, if somebody wants to correct me, but I think transit is part of the act and other capital infrastructure granted to municipalities.

I think the number to municipalities is \$240 million. Now, not all of that would be a part of the municipal tax agreement. Then you look at the highways budget and the maintenance budget, and you can see it is well over 200 million as well.

You mention a number, in terms of diesel fuel and fuel tax as opposed to gasoline tax, the amount of tax we collect in Manitoba, which, by the way, is the second-lowest fuel tax in Canada, the amount of money that is the lowest is Alberta. The amount of

money we collect will be exceeded by the highways capital, the highways maintenance, the infrastructure grants, the transit grants. There will be no difficulty in accounting for those.

Mr. Gerrard: Just a little bit of clarification from the Premier on that last point, and that is the transfers to municipalities. The Premier is indicating that a significant proportion of the transfers from municipalities would be covered under that which could be covered by the gasoline and motor fuel tax.

Mr. Doer: I know the member opposite has read the law, and I am just trying to recall the law, but I am pretty sure issues like street infrastructure to municipalities and transit grants, which, by the way, have been increased by 15 percent. I was surprised the member opposite voted against those transit grants of 15 percent, but those are all part of The Gas Tax Accountability Act, I believe. I am looking at the former Minister of Transportation, but I believe that is correct.

Mr. Gerrard: Last year the government provided for, depending on which way you look at it, new sales tax or increased sales tax on legal, accounting, engineering, architectural and private security services and so on. Just to ask the Premier how much new revenue this brought in last year and what is the projection that that will contribute in terms of the coming year? All we have in this budget is a total retail sales tax.

Mr. Doer: I would have to look at the breakdown. The Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), I think, was here and will be here. I do not want to say he is not here because that would be against the rules.

The tax, the member opposite would be fully aware, these tax revenue items because they are applied under the GST. There were a number of GST taxes we decided not to apply when we were looking at professional services and there were some we decided to apply. So I know the member opposite, when they looked at these taxes themselves and the GST, and they promised to abolish the GST, I am sure he would know those numbers even better than I would.

Mr. Harry Schellenberg, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

There is not one of those professional tax changes that is not applied by the Mulroney GST that was brought into Canada in 1989, promised to be abolished in 1993, and continues to generate tremendous revenues for the national government.

Now, the GST works to all kinds of other people, for example, hairdressers. There are all kinds of people, other professionals, that are covered by the GST that are not covered by this tax. I know the member from Inkster is shilling for the lawyers in his riding, but we will stand with the hair industry.

* (15:50)

Mr. Gerrard: We know the Premier has quite a good head of hair and, you know, he would not want to have to pay any more to have it looked after.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Harry Schellenberg): Order. The Member for River Heights has the floor.

Mr. Gerrard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask a question about another area of budgeting, and this is one that is coming up, indeed, it came up in question period today, that deals with environmental liabilities. Whether the Premier is going to look at the inclusion of environmental liabilities in some fashion in the budget so that we will know what the Province potentially is on the hook for in the future. Clearly, if we are going to have a full budget of the assets and liabilities of the Province, the environmental liabilities are ones that should be included. I would ask the Premier (Mr. Doer) what his plans are with regard to expenditures which are essentially environmental deficit expenditures which would be, and whether he is, in some future budget, going to look at including an assessment of environmental liabilities.

Mr. Doer: Some of these liabilities are maintained by the private sector. I would say the biggest environmental liability we have in Manitoba is at the AECL site in Pinawa. We feel that because that was a federal Crown agency, they have some responsibility there.

I think the tailing issue and the mine issue is a legitimate issue. We have a strategy on that, but in 2000 and 2001, we are dealing with mine sites from

back in the thirties, forties and probably even back when the Liberals were in office in Manitoba. They are serious. Just as late as last week, I met with the federal lead minister from Manitoba. There is a half-a-billion dollar account in the national government. I suggested we should have a co-operative approach to this. They put aside money. I would like to see some of that come to Manitoba. I would like to clean them up if we can as opposed to recording them. Some of them, we would, as I say, want the private sector to be responsible.

Mr. Gerrard: Does the Premier have a number, for example, of the environmental liability for the Kississing Lake-Sherridon mine tailings site?

Mr. Doer: I could take that as notice.

Mr. Gerrard: I thank the Premier and I look forward to hearing what that number is in due course. I think my colleague from Inkster would just like a couple of questions to the Premier now.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): I do have a couple of questions. I guess it is almost predictable in terms of the response I will likely get to them, but I am still going to pose the questions primarily because this is something in which, over the last number of months, I put a great deal of effort, and that is in regard to the petitions I have been introducing on the provincial deficit situation. I would just ask for the Premier to acknowledge that the provincial auditor has indicated that there is a \$604-million deficit and it was the Auditor's opinion that very few Manitobans are aware of that fact.

Would the Premier agree with that comment?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, the deficit in Hydro which constituted the majority of the deficit in the Province was recorded in the first quarter report. Ironically, it was out the day the lights went off in Ontario. Hydro reported in August, they were running a major deficit based on the drought. I forget the exact date, but it was the exact same day, ironically, as the lights went out in Ontario.

Members opposite will know the Liberal record in Ontario with the former Premier Peterson on hydro-electric development, and then the subsequent lack of progress there on the transmission capacity, which was exacerbated, I would argue, by the Harris government in Ontario. I think to some degree the

present premier has got a good handle on where Ontario has to go, and we certainly want to be part of that solution with him.

The quarterly reports of Hydro were released every day in this House and the member opposite knows that the balanced budget legislation, which is the primary legal reporting entity of this Legislature until it is amended, was complied with by this government. The member opposite will also know that. I mean, anybody that found, a majority of the money from the 2003 drought, it is an insult to any member's intelligence in this Chamber. Every member of this Chamber knew the deficit of Hydro. It was tabled in the House over and over and over again, every quarterly report. It was the second-largest drought in history. We knew it.

Now, this year, the summary financial budget, produces all this rainfall that comes down. Hydro is projecting now \$148-million surplus. That does not, in my view, reflect positively on the government in the sense of fiscal management, nor does the deficit created by a drought for Hydro create any problems. The reporting under summary financial budgets means, let me give you another example, it means that the amount of money we took out of crop insurance. You build up a surplus in an insurance account and you take it out, and that is considered a deficit. Now the former government rejected that advice. We have said that we have no difficulty reporting. The Auditor has further made a speech to the business community just last week and said, "Well, you should not close St. Boniface Hospital down because of a drought at Hydro." But we are following the law of this Legislature. That is what we have also said, that we are going to follow the advice of the Auditor on a future law.

Mr. Lamoureux: The provincial auditor expressed concern that Manitobans were not aware of the fact that, in that budget year, we had a \$604-million deficit. Does the Premier share the same concern that the provincial auditor had that, as a whole, Manitobans really are not aware that we had a \$604-million deficit?

Mr. Doer: I think everybody in this Chamber knew that Hydro was running a huge deficit. I think everybody in the public knew. In fact, when you take the Auditor's statement and go to somebody and if they ask you a question say, "Well, that was the Hydro debt." "Oh." So a lot of people do not know

that even the statement of the Auditor included the Hydro debt. I have had town hall meetings where people said, "Oh, that was the drought. Oh, I did not know that." How you take that amount of money, I mean, when you start explaining these things, Hydro had a drought in 2003. They ran a deficit. It was one of the biggest ones in the history of the province.

Four out of five years, Hydro will make a profit. Should we use that to subsidize the Health operating budget? I do not think so. Having said that, should Health then get cut dramatically because there is a drought in Hydro? So, to me, the Hydro debt was well known. I certainly knew about it. Everybody else knew about it. The Auditor does not agree with the balanced budget legislation, and he believes in a different system. I promised to the people of Manitoba that we would follow the balanced budget legislation.

The Auditor says that this is in balance under the balanced budget law. He says that. If it was not, we would take a pay cut. I know members opposite were not willing to take a pay cut when the member from Inkster voted against that legislation, but we are going to change it, because I think that whether I agree or disagree with the Auditor, he is the Auditor. I think that we displayed the numbers in summary financial budget. We display all the numbers at Hydro, for example, and we will continue to do so.

* (16:00)

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the Auditor. I believe very few Manitobans are aware of the fact that we had a huge deficit in that year. Even if you factor out the Hydro, we still had a deficit.

I am going to move on as the final question, because I realize the Premier has other responsibilities. I want to go to a March 24, 1995, newspaper clipping in the *Free Press*. The Premier, then Leader of the Opposition, indicated that there is a \$2-million savings to be had by reducing, and I will quote this part, "by reducing the number of Cabinet ministers to 15 and cutting the number of government departments." It was in very small print, so I hope I got it accurately there. I am wondering if the Premier could indicate to us why it is that he no longer believes that his government cannot operate under 15 ministers.

Mr. Doer: The member will also know that I also promised a reduction of the senior civil service, and

we have achieved that with the reduction by 10 percent of ADMs here in Manitoba.

Mr. Lamoureux: The question was why no follow-through on the size of Cabinet. Cabinet is what, 18, maybe even 19? We will say 18. Why did you not go down to 15? I appreciate the time from the Premier.

Mr. Doer: We did have a smaller Cabinet in our first term, but we thought emerging areas, post-secondary education, we thought Science and Technology, and we thought that Water Stewardship required new ministries.

We combined other ministries. We combined Urban Affairs and Municipal Affairs. We combined Housing and Urban Affairs. We combined Mining with Industry. We put Consumer Affairs into Finance. In terms of the new emerging areas, and I just want to say to people, the new emerging areas, the word "new" is part of our name, and we are always new. The member opposite may have cobwebs on his policies and his clippings, but we are always new.

Science and Technology, we have had an increase of 40 percent in the biotech industry in Manitoba. We have the first Water Stewardship Department in Canada, and we also have a post-secondary education which is able to deliver on our commitments for a knowledge economy, which, I think, will help the children and grandchildren of the people in Inkster greatly, compared to his policy of walking around with a Big Mac in this Legislative Chamber.

Mr. Penner: I would like to ask the Minister of Water Stewardship whether he could tell this House, and this is further to the question I asked before and further to his response, could the minister tell us how many work stoppages have occurred in non-unionized projects in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Ashton: For the information of the member opposite, I know this line of questioning, because I have heard members opposite put forward similar lines of questioning before. The member opposite should be aware that the reason we have these kinds of agreements with Manitoba Hydro is, in fact, in the 1960s we had construction of the Grand Rapids Dam. At the beginning of the project, Mr. Chairperson, the project workers were non-unionized. During the course of the project, they

became unionized. In fact, there were, I believe, two legal work stoppages, and it delayed the construction of the dam by a year.

I know members opposite have had a difficult time in recognizing that what was good enough for the Duff Roblin government in the 1960s for Hydro, and has worked well since, does have some application here, that indeed there is a history, and in this particular case in Manitoba Hydro, of where, in this case, workers began as non-unionized workers and later certified and went on a legal work stoppage.

So the bottom line here, Mr. Chairperson, is this agreement that we have reached now ensures that will not happen for the duration of the time this is being constructed, which is essentially we are hoping to start construction this summer, pending environmental approvals. The completion date will be 2009. This will ensure that there will not be any work stoppages, regardless of what happens. In fact, there will not be, actually, certification drives. That is part of the agreement as well. So I think the answer to the member's question is there are numerous cases where, in this case Hydro, where non-unionized workers in that particular case became unionized afterwards, because prior to the project agreement there was no strike, no lockout provision, they went on a legal work stoppage. That will not happen under the new agreement.

Mr. Penner: Mr. Chairperson, I want to ask the minister again. Can you identify for us how many work stoppages have occurred in non-unionized construction projects in the province of Manitoba? You said these were unionized and then the work stoppages occurred. How many non-unionized construction projects have seen work stoppages?

Mr. Ashton: The member obviously was not listening because I just gave him the example of Manitoba and Grand Rapids, where the contractors that went on the work site were initially non-unionized. They were certified. There was no provision as there is in this agreement for no strike, no lockout, and then there was a legal work stoppage.

I do not think the member opposite understands what has happened with Manitoba Hydro for 40 years, and I do not think he wants to understand, Mr. Chairperson. So there is an example of where two

initially non-unionized contractors ended up with legal work stoppages because they were certified, in fact, as is the right under Manitoba law and our constitution, and those workers went on strike.

So that is why Manitoba Hydro, since the 1960s, has had project management agreements. That is why they have had provisions for no strike, no lockout. That is why for the Manitoba Floodway Authority, the Expansion Authority, we now have an agreement that will ensure that that does not take place, regardless of whether we have unionized or non-unionized contractors for the duration of the agreement. There will not be a repetition to the history that we saw in Grand Rapids.

Mr. Penner: Mr. Chairperson, again the minister has just confirmed that he cannot identify one non-unionized project in this province of Manitoba where a non-unionized construction firm has had to stop work because of disagreement. So I think, clearly, if that principle would have been established here, you would have had a totally different kind of a bidding process that would have been established.

What I find absolutely astounding under this agreement is that the successful bidders will be obliged to submit to the Floodway Authority almost \$3 an hour, starting in 2006; \$3 an hour for every person that is employed by that company will have to be paid to the Floodway Authority. For what purpose? Well, the purpose is to pay into a pension trust fund, a health and welfare trust fund and a trade improvement trust, no guarantee that any of those funds will be used to compensate any of the non-unionized employees that would be paying the \$3 an hour.

I have yet to see anywhere in this country or other countries where this kind of a process has been used. It is almost as if the employees will have to pay \$3 an hour to work for the flood authority, directly to the authority. What does that sound like? I mean, is that protectionist? I thought we only had seen that sort of a process used through illegal processes, where a person would actually walk into a person's business and say, if you pay me so much, I will protect you and provide you protection for your business. This smacks of protectionism and I think the minister—

An Honourable Member: Protectionism.

* (16:10)

Mr. Penner: This is protectionism. This is \$3 an hour paid. For what? To be able to be allowed to work on the Floodway Authority, every person that is employed here, and the cost, what will the cost be to the general taxpayer? It is estimated that that cost alone will be between \$10 million and \$15 million to provide that kind of protection to the employee that is not part of a union movement. An additional amount of money will have to be paid by that employee, \$15 million of additional money that the taxpayers are going to have to put up on this project alone.

The worker, of course, will be stripped entirely of privacy protection, and I think there is a reason here where somebody should really start looking at this, at the privacy rights accorded under the Constitution to all people in this country. That has been taken away, because successful bidders will be forced to disclose the names and addresses of all employees to the Floodway Authority and we do not understand why.

There will be a pool of workers and, if a contractor wants to hire additional staff, he will have to go to the Floodway Authority and draw from that pool. Where have we ever seen anything like that before? Does that smack of protectionism? It sure does to many people. There are words that could be used to describe this which I will not put on the record, but clearly the minister, and he should answer, why this kind of protection is charged. Why these people are charged \$3 an hour to get the right to work there. If they do not pay the \$3 an hour, you are not going to get a contract on the Floodway Authority. Simple as that.

Do you now have to start buying your way into a job in this province? That is what this agreement says. You are going to have to pay to be employed by this government of Manitoba. It is nobody else but this government of Manitoba, the NDP government of this province, that will charge, through the construction company, \$3 an hour to allow that person to work there. I think that is despicable.

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Chairperson, I am glad the member opposite is putting on the record that party is opposed to both unionized and non-unionized workers on the floodway having pensions and benefits. I want to state that might have been good

enough in the 1950s, but since the 1960s, we have had agreements with Manitoba Hydro, which by the way, require that every employee be part of a union. This is not the case with the floodway agreement, where we built in specific provisions for both union and non-unionized employees.

If the member of the Conservative party is now saying—we know he is opposed to employment equity. Now he is saying he is opposed to pensions and benefits for people that work on the floodway. I think he does a disservice to the workers that are going to work on that. I want to say very clearly we cannot build the floodway without decent wages and decent working conditions. That goes with building a floodway, the human resources.

I want to remind the member too, he made reference to this, but we have set up a provision that allows contractors to bring on the worksite their existing employees, but we also felt it was important to provide opportunities to Manitobans. By the way, the provisions of the agreement are going to provide opportunities for both union and non-unionized members.

Also, I want to put on the record for an employment equity provision that does nothing more than target what: that the workforce should reflect the diversity of this province. When you look at the diversity of this province, I can tell you there are many qualified Aboriginal people, qualified visible minorities, qualified women who will be a part of that process, along with many other Manitobans. I took great offence when the member opposite called employment equity "apartheid." I think the member opposite is stuck in the 1950s, quite frankly, and to talk about it being despicable, what? Despicable that workers on the floodway will have pensions and benefits?

Mr. Speaker, I would suggest before the member opposite points in any direction talking about this being despicable, he may want to go and understand what he is saying, that workers in the year 2005 should not get pensions and should not get benefits. In fact, particularly in this case, because many unionized workers will have those through a collective agreement. He is saying that about non-unionized workers, that they should not have pensions and they should not have benefits. This is the year 2005; it is not the year 1955. Maybe in their version of the world this would be the case. We are

not going to allow this province to have the clock rolled back.

This agreement, we think, is fair and balanced. The Winnipeg Construction Association was part of that Construction Labour Relations Association. I appreciate that the Heavy Construction Association withdrew from the discussions, and I appreciate that it did not support a project master agreement from the beginning, and I have had the opportunity to discuss that. I know that that was the concern right from the beginning, but what the member opposite is criticizing here is, in this particular case, a section in the agreement which deals with pensions and benefits.

Mr. Chairperson, we as a government make no apologies for having decent wages and decent working conditions for workers on the floodway. You cannot build a floodway without decent wages and decent working conditions. I make no apologies, also, for making sure that all contractors and all employees will have access through the tendering process to this. I believe this agreement is the Manitoba model. Yes, there are compromises from all sides, unprecedented compromises, but you know what? We are going to be able to do job, No. 1, build the floodway, with no work stoppages due to strike or lockout and we are going to make sure we have the human resources to do the job.

So I would suggest the member get the agreement, read the agreement, and if he is against pensions and benefits, let him put it on the record, because when he criticizes this, that is what he is criticizing. I have got news for him. I do not know anybody in the construction sector, any employees, by the way, who would be opposed to pensions, and many non-unionized contractors, also, have provisions for pensions and benefits, as well as unionized contractors, in the collective agreement.

Mr. Chairperson, this reflects the specific reality, that we will have access to both unionized and non-unionized employees. This member is stuck in the 1950s. It is not 1955. It is the year 2005.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Harry Schellenberg): Order. The Member for Emerson has the floor.

Mr. Penner: I find it extremely interesting that the minister almost talked himself into a corner by

suggesting that the non-unionized worker would not have access to pension funds or pension plans, would not have all the benefits, through their employees. I know many of the major construction firms, Mr. Chairperson, in this province that have a highly trained work force, that have great pension benefits, that have medical benefits, that have holiday benefits, the same as any unionized person does. What this contract will do, those non-unionized contractors will bid on this project, and they will pay their employees their pension benefits, they will pay them their holiday pay, they will pay them their medical benefits, as they always have, plus they will pay almost \$3 an hour into this benefit fund over and above what they will pay, the benefits of their employees.

This minister is trying to portray the non-unionized industry in this province, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as an industry that does not provide any benefits to its labour force, and I think that is unfortunate, that the minister talked himself into that kind of a corner. I think the minister owes the construction industry, the major construction industry in this province, an apology, and I would ask him to apologize.

Mr. Ashton: Mr. Chairperson, perhaps the member opposite would apologize for when we brought in provisions for employment equity, for calling them, the employment equity provisions, apartheid provisions. Apologize, by the way, to the many people, including many of the contractors who have indicated clearly, and I want to put on the record, by the way, that notwithstanding some of the concerns expressed by the Heavy Construction Association, the Heavy Construction Association, itself, has pioneered in terms of promoting employment equity, has developed many partnerships with Aboriginal people.

* (16:20)

You know what? They are in the 21st century. It is the member opposite who is stuck in the 1950s, and I am being charitable, Mr. Speaker, because some of the attitudes the member has expressed go back beyond that. The member, obviously, does not understand elements of the agreement, but you know what? I do not think this is about the agreement. Members opposite last session asked more questions on the project management agreement than virtually any other issue. I think they asked more questions on

that than health. They just do not have any real issues.

We know what the job is. In this particular case, it is to build the floodway. We have an agreement that protects against strikes and lockouts, that provides an agreement in terms of wages and work conditions. It provides opportunities for unionized and non-unionized contractors, unionized and non-unionized employees. The only problem members opposite have, I think, in this case is that they are stuck in the 1950s. What worked in the 1950s, or dare I say, did not work, is not going to apply in this particular case.

Mr. Speaker, I am not going to apologize. No one on this side is going to apologize for coming up with an agreement that reflects the Manitoba way. In this case, compromise, yes, but the basic principles of protecting our ability to build the project and building opportunities for unionized and non-unionized contractors and employees, that is what good public policy should be about. I realize members opposite do not have any sense other than to criticize. You know what? We are going to build the floodway expansion; we are going to get it done. Members opposite have nothing to do but criticize and go back to a 1950s agenda.

Mr. Penner: I find it, actually, a bit humorous that when the minister gets stuck, he reverts to name-calling, and that sort of stuff. The last time I questioned him on this, he called me a member of the Flat Earth Society. Well, I am a flatlander. I want the minister to know that. I am a flatlander. I live in the Red River Valley. It is probably one of the flattest places on Earth, and I am very proud of living there and farming in a flatland area of Manitoba, because it is very fertile soil. It is prone to flooding, and I live in that flood area. I know what it is like to be flooded. I know what it is like to help my neighbours out of a flood-prone area. I know what it is like to move livestock. I know what it is like to move grain and feed out of flood areas. I know what it is to help a neighbour.

I also know what it is when a government talks about public policy, an NDP government talks about public policy where a labourer is forced to pay a fee to the government or a government agency to be able to get a job in this province. I think this is the first time that I ever have seen in writing an agreement that forces a non-union member, or a union member,

for that matter, to pay almost \$3 an hour to be able to get a job in this province. That is protectionist policy; that is protectionist at the best.

I would suggest to this minister that those policies are going to be hugely costly to the taxpayers of the province of Manitoba. Once the taxpayers of Manitoba truly realize what kinds of additional costs this government has imposed upon the people, the taxpayers of Manitoba, to construct a floodway around the city of Winnipeg, to protect the city of Winnipeg, which we all agree upon, then I think the people of Manitoba will judge rather harshly this minister and his agreement that he has struck and the additional costs that will be borne by the taxpayers to deal with this protectionist policy of the Province of Manitoba, of the NDP party of Manitoba.

Mr. Ashton: I do not know why the member opposite would say I resorted to name-calling. He is talking about my comments in debate where I read back to the member his own comments where he said that climate change is not a problem, that water is in better shape than it was 20 years ago.

I find it incredible that the official opposition's critic for Water Stewardship would essentially say "Hey, we do not have a problem to deal with in terms of water quality." In fact, he has actually gone on record as criticizing me for saying that we do have issues to deal with in terms of water quality in Lake Winnipeg, that it is bad for tourism was one of the concerns. What I said was we have Lake Winnipeg under stress.

Mr. Chairperson, I suspect we are not going to get any agreement here, but I just wanted to put on the record that I believe the project management agreement is in the tradition started back in the 1960s by Duff Roblin on Manitoba Hydro. We have gone beyond that to build in many features that reflect the current situation in Manitoba.

I do want to put on that we do take seriously things like employment equity, making sure that there are proper provisions in the agreement in terms of pensions and benefits. I suspect, in the end, though, it comes down to the fact that the members opposite do not agree with the project management agreement. I understand that. There are other people who do not agree with the project management agreement. I understand that, as well, but we have a

project management agreement that involved input, certainly, from the Winnipeg Construction Association, the Manitoba Construction Labour Relations Association, the Building Trades Council, also many groups concerned about employment and equity. I note, for example, the positive words coming from our Aboriginal communities.

I can tell the member opposite that we, unlike the Conservatives, take very seriously the need to ensure that, on this major project, there is an opportunity for training and employment opportunities, yes, for Aboriginal people and for other minorities, I would remind the member opposite, by the way, who often face significantly higher unemployment rates. There is a much higher unemployment rate amongst Aboriginal people in this province.

You know what the ironic part is, Mr. Speaker, and I want to stress this again, you know, the member opposite criticizes employment equity, but I can say that I have had many meetings over the last several years where the Heavy Construction Association has supported it. So you know what, they quote the Heavy Construction Association on some issues, but they have their own agenda. Well, I have said before, it is a 1950s agenda, before we worried about things like employment equity to ensure that all Manitobans were reflected in the workforce, before we had the experience in the 1960s with Manitoba Hydro, before maybe it was necessary to have provisions and agreements for wages and benefits and pensions. You know what? We are not going to allow members opposite to turn back the clock. This is the year 2005.

Mr. Penner: I want to just raise a couple more issues with the minister. There is a provision under this agreement that will require every participant, non-unionized person, to register with the Floodway Authority. I want to know from the minister whether he and his government have given up the rights of those individuals to privacy and the protection of their privacy rights under this agreement. There are those that will say that the industry workers are required to sign up, give their names, their addresses, all the information, and that will be shared with the unions. I think that is an infringement on the rights of the individual and the privacy protection that we are afforded under the Constitution. I would like to know whether the minister is truly committed to stripping the individuals working of their privacy rights.

Point of Order

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Harry Schellenberg): The Government House Leader, on a point of order.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): On a matter of House business, I am just wondering, there is some urgency, or some interest in having LAMC meet. I am just wondering if there is a will of the committee to go into the House so we can ask for no quorum count while the committee meets.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Harry Schellenberg): Is it the will of the committee to recess? *[Agreed]*

Call in the Speaker.

* (16:30)

IN SESSION

House Business

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Is there leave of the House not to call quorum while the LAMC meets? It will have a brief meeting this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker: Is it the will of the House to not have a quorum count while the LAMC meeting is in committee? No quorum count? It has been agreed to? *[Agreed]*

We will now resolve back into committee.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

Interim Supply

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Harry Schellenberg): I call the committee back to order.

Hon. Steve Ashton (Minister of Water Stewardship): Mr. Chairperson, again the member has clearly not understood the agreement. I do not know if he has had the opportunity to meet with any of the people involved in the discussion. I certainly would encourage him to meet with the Floodway Authority, perhaps even the Winnipeg Construction

Association, the Construction Labour Relations Association as well, that were part of all the discussions.

I appreciate that the Heavy Construction Association chose to withdraw from their involvement in the interim process that was in place that ensured input from contractors, but, Mr. Chairperson, the Floodway Authority is the owner of the project. The contractors will be the employers. It is a fairly standard process. In this case, when you have a work site to ensure that you have identification of who is on the work site, et cetera, that is the provision that is in place. There is all the protection that is necessary in terms of the privacy of the individuals involved.

I would urge the member opposite, and I appreciate it is difficult since he is opposed to a project management agreement. That is the decision the members opposite made. Certainly, I cannot speak for the Construction Labour Relations Association or Winnipeg Construction Association, the Building Trades Council, but I certainly can speak from the Floodway Authority's perspective, and I would be more than happy to arrange a full briefing on this.

I am not suggesting, by the way, that the member is going to change his opposition to a project management agreement, but, rather than taking the agreement, twisting it around and then putting it in the form of a question, a statement that is riddled with inaccuracies, Mr. Chairperson. I think it would be better if the member did have the opportunity to talk to the Floodway Authority. I make that offer now. I think he will see that—as I said, I am not saying he will necessarily agree with the project management at the end of the day—a lot of the issues he is raising are really based on misinterpretation on his part. Perhaps, you know, an honest misinterpretation, I appreciate that. I am not saying the member is deliberately misrepresenting it. I think he obviously views this as a legitimate concern.

I can say that certainly in terms of the provision of names, the clear intent in the agreement is put in place. Nothing more than you would get with any employment site, any construction site, whether it be the Tembec expansion that took place, whether it be the work of contractors now taking place in Thompson. There is a very buoyant Inco, metal

situations, with many contractors coming on site, where in that case Inco is not the employer. Inco is the owner of the site. They require that you go through security provisions, and names of the people working on the site are provided. That is not a question of privacy, it is a question of standard practice in any work site.

Again, I just remind the member that one of the elements of this agreement is that there is essentially no strike, no lockout during this period, but there also is not a certification process as well. This goes back to the Wally Fox-Decent report, and, indeed, in this case the trade unions themselves have indicated that that is part of the agreement.

So this issue early on that members opposite talked about just simply is not reflected in the agreement. There is no compulsory unionization. There is an ability for unionized contractors and unionized workers, as well as non-unionized contractors and non-unionized workers, to work on the site. There is even a referral provision that builds that into effect, that there are provisions for all Manitobans, and indeed I suppose potentially other potential workers, to apply.

I think in the end we are looking at about 450 jobs at peak times. There are going to be plenty of job opportunities for people from all backgrounds, from all parts of this province, and I am really proud of that. I think the agreement will help us improve the potential for Manitoba input, because I really do believe, Mr. Chairperson, that this is the Manitoba way. I realize it is not everything that people necessarily would like to see, but, you know, when you have an agreement, chances are it involves some degree of give-and-take.

I do want to put on the record, notwithstanding I recognize there are some people such as the member who oppose the project management agreement, that I certainly appreciate the hard work that has gone into this and the attempt for balance because when you saw the announcement, the president of the Winnipeg Construction Association, a representative of the Building Trades Council, the Manitoba Floodway Authority. Last I heard, Mr. Chairperson, that reflects some balance.

Members opposite and other Manitobans, some Manitobans, may not agree with it. You know, it is far more balanced than coming in here and not even

bothering to look at what the provisions are for pensions and benefits and then taking the agreement and trying to twist it around again. Members opposite can oppose the project management agreement. That is their prerogative, but I think they should stick to the facts.

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): I am always amazed at how the minister likes to put words in people's mouths or put words on the record that are simply of his own manufacture. That is his business. He is very good at that. I give him credit for that, but it does not serve the purposes of the debate in many instances. So I say to the minister that many of the issues that have been raised with me by the construction industry and many members of the construction industry, I think, are very valid concerns.

We are not opposed to a labour-management agreement. That has never been the case. Manitoba Hydro, under a Conservative government, as you say, used a labour-management agreement. This management agreement, the way it is drafted, is fraught with difficulty. It is fraught with issues, some of which I have raised. I think privacy protection for individuals, the right of individuals to gain access to a job without having to pay a fee of \$3 an hour or more. It is simply not acceptable in this day and age.

The minister talks about going back to the fifties. Well, I think the minister is going way back, but that is his business if he wants to look back in history as to what has happened in some areas. He needs only to look very close to home in what some organized groups today use to protect. Some would say those kinds of things are illegal. However, under this agreement, we legalize the payment of a fee to be able to get and keep a job.

The last thing I want to raise with the minister is the issue of composite work crews established by the Authority, crews consisting of mixed skills and trades. I think every crew of a construction company needs people that have different skills, a mix of skills, and are able to, in many cases, trade off. When somebody cannot fulfil a position, somebody else jumps on a cat, for instance, or a dragline and operates a dragline. I think every construction company that I know, every farm that I know relies on a work crew that has mixed skills. We support work crews of mixed skills.

* (16:40)

We also support the intent of this government to try and ensure that there will be employment opportunities for a wide range of people, be they ethnic, be they linguistic, or whatever. We support that. However, I want to say to the minister that the way this is drafted sets in place quotas and that is what we do not agree with. We believe that if a person has a skill, it should not matter what colour, race or creed that person is. If the skill is there, let them apply for the job and ensure that that person will have the right to demonstrate his or her skills, but this project and management agreement does not do that. That is why we say this management agreement is fraught with difficulties.

I believe that the costs that will be incurred by the taxpayers of this province to implement this agreement will be rather substantial, and I would suggest that the minister should really seriously sit down with the Heavy Construction Association of Manitoba and have that dialogue with them. Open your doors to them, Minister, and invite them in. Have the discussion. Find out from them what kind of skills, what kind of opportunities they bring to save you money, to be able to put in place a workforce and a Manitoba crew, made up of Manitoba contractors, to do the job for you.

Many are saying this is designed to contract with the big multinational firms that will come in here, bid the projects and do them, and our small contractors in this province of Manitoba will be left out of the loop. I say to you, Mr. Chairperson, that it is imperative that if the minister is not willing, then the Premier (Mr. Doer) must intervene in this to ensure that the people working in small construction industries in this province are given equal right of employment through any kind of agreement that is struck to do the Floodway Authority. With that I would like to ask the minister of highways a few questions, and then I will stop.

Mr. Ashton: I will not belabour the debate, but I think it is very clear that the member opposite has put on the record that the Conservative Party opposes the employment equity provisions of this agreement. By the way, the target is to ensure 20% employment of Aboriginal people, visible minorities, and I take great exception, by the way, to the fact that he has classified this as quotas, because what this requires is working towards the target, similar to what we do with the civil service, similar, by the way, what has been in place for more than 20 years in this province.

Mr. Speaker, I want to put it on the record that this member called it apartheid, requiring that one third of the additional employees be Aboriginal people, be visible minorities. I want to point out to the member opposite that he may want to check with many Aboriginal people, many minorities, check and see what the unemployment rates are, because this agreement will ensure that there will be job opportunities for all, and many people have seen that employment equity is a critical part. It is not a question of apartheid. This is the kind of approach we have had in the civil service, including when the member opposite was part of government. It seems that members opposite, as I said, have gone back in time on this.

The second thing I would like to say, Mr. Speaker, and I will conclude on this. I believe that the Manitoba contractors can, and will, rise to the occasion in terms of the opportunities. By the way because the members opposite truly decided that somehow, though, they support Manitoba Hydro agreements. You know the agreements of Manitoba Hydro require that you be a member of a union the moment you work on the work site. Okay? That is the way it works.

The provisions of Manitoba Hydro also have employment equity, by the way. The first priority is in terms of northern Aboriginal employment. That is the way they work. So it is interesting, on the one hand they slam this agreement, and they say, "Well, we do not mind the Manitoba Hydro agreement." Let us be clear. If they are against this agreement, they are against the Manitoba Hydro agreement, because the Manitoba Hydro agreement goes much further in terms of a lot of the issues they express concern about.

I want to stress, again, that the member opposite can attack employment equity all he wants. He can go back to the 1950s if that is what he wants, in terms of Manitoba. This province is a diverse province, and if we are going to have a major project like this, it is mandatory, I think, it is a required element, that we have got to make sure that the diversity of the province is reflected in the employment. It is not a question of quotas. It is a question of making sure that people who have been denied opportunities in the past are given opportunities. No apologies for that.

I also want to say, Mr. Speaker, we have built in a provision here that unionized and non-unionized

contractors can apply for and obtain work on the project. Along with the non-unionized employers, we have employees, as well. I think that is balanced, and the member can try and twist and turn around whatever he wants. If he is opposed to the project management agreement, if he is opposed to employment equity, wages, pensions, benefits, that is his choice, but I will say that I believe that history will show that this agreement will be a progressive agreement for this province. In fact, I think it will probably be a model for other jurisdictions as well, and the bottom line is here. The most important thing is, we can now get on with the job at hand which is to build the floodway expansion. This government, this NDP government, is going to build the project expansion. This will help significantly in achieving that goal.

Mr. Penner: Mr. Chairperson, I want to reflect just briefly on what the minister just put on the record. I say very clearly that this agreement, read it, it clearly sets out employment quotas. I have never seen this kind of an agreement put in place in the province of Manitoba. I would not mind looking at some of the past agreements that have been struck. I would suspect there would be a significant difference in what we see here.

I believe the privacy of the individual, the private protection of the individual, has always been paramount to any government, but this NDP government is setting that aside. The minister can say whatever he wants or try to couch what I have said in the ways that he wants. The fact is that this agreement will not provide an economical way to build a floodway and will not achieve the goals that the government has set out.

The minister of highways and I had a discussion in here a couple of days ago. I had indicated to the minister of highways that there had been a meeting in my constituency, in the town of Dominion City, dealing with the bridge on Highway 201 at Letellier crossing the Red River. We all know that that bridge is in very, very poor shape, and the minister's department, the engineering department has indicated that they will have to put load limits on that bridge.

We are not opposed to that while construction takes place. I mean we understand that there must be emergency repair work done on that bridge in order just to make it last another year or two. I would like

to ask the minister, that committee that was struck at that meeting, the newspaper said there were about 75 people at the meeting that we had, they represented industries, they represented some very large industries, Cargill Grain, Agricore, United, the Altona concrete, Derksen Trucking, there were many, the Winkler Concrete, I am not sure whether they were represented at this meeting, but they are affected equally because all the aggregate for those businesses comes across that bridge. If that bridge is closed for any length of time those businesses are not going to be able to open this year.

So I want to ask the minister whether he would be agreeable to meeting with the committee that was established at that meeting and meet with these people to discuss the economic impact of the bridge closure or the limitation of load limits to the 16-tonne limit on that bridge, and whether he would be amenable to meeting relatively soon, because I think they met today, to put in place a bit of a package as to what the economic impact would be if the bridge is closed.

The Emerson Milling company, a major oat processor in the province of Manitoba, has clearly said if that bridge closes they are going to have to close their business. That would have a major economic impact on the oat industry in the province of Manitoba. Similarly, the cattle industry, once the border opens, virtually all the cattle out of the southeast will have to come down that highway and come into Emerson for inspection if the border opens to young cattle moving across South.

Those are only a few of the issues that need to be addressed, and I would ask the minister whether he would be amenable to meeting with that committee that has been formed.

* (16:50)

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Transportation and Government Services): Mr. Chairperson, Deputy Speaker, back to Deputy Speaker, just wanted to comment with regard to the Letellier bridge. It is a bridge that is about 50 years of age. It is starting to show its wear and tear, obviously. The transportation infrastructure system in Manitoba is, regrettably, starting to show its age as well, even though we have put an extra \$16 million this year into our capital program. There are going to be a lot of challenges related to this.

With regard to the bridge, specifically, we sent a letter out to the R.M.s of Franklin, Stuartburn, Montcalm, Piney and, I believe, to the Roseau First Nation community, informing them at the beginning of March that it was with regret that we would have to take a look at putting on some weight restrictions. The bridge would be posted as 16 tonne. Traffic lights being installed, as well, on the bridge to allow traffic, just one lane of traffic to be used, and we are looking at some structural modifications that will be necessary in the interim anyway due to some piles moving, and so on. I am not an engineer, but I have been advised by the department that they are doing whatever they can to keep that bridge open and, with regret, again, it is going to be restricted.

Having said that, it is safety, safety, safety. I cannot say it enough, and that is our primary goal with respect to that bridge. The department has tried to work with the R.M.s, inform them in advance of what is going to be going on. I have had the pleasure of meeting with some of these municipalities in the past, and I will continue to meet with them on a lot of issues, including this particular challenge that we all have.

Mr. Penner: I thank the minister for that response. We all know that that bridge is not long for this world. We know the pillars are sliding into the river, the supports under the bridge, and that cannot be stopped. The engineers have told the minister that, and the engineers told us that in 1998 at a public forum in Letellier. There was a public open house, and they explained to the general public. *[interjection]*

The minister might have done that as well, to come out and ask his department to come out and explain exactly what would happen, because that would, I think, have alleviated some of the fears that were out there. We know that the new bridge will have to be built, and it will have to be done soon because, no matter what is done to the bridge, the slide of the pillars that are supporting the bridge simply cannot be stopped. Red River mud slides, and the higher the waters come, and the more washed away, the more the pillars slide, and that is what has happened in the last couple of years.

The department of highways told the meeting at Letellier back in 1998 that that bridge probably had about 10 years left in its life, and I think they were very close. When I look at the bridge today, it is

about 8 years ago, 7 years ago that that forum was held. They showed the design of the new bridge, and they gave two options as to where it would go, one through the First Nation reserve, and one a mile south of the reserve and then around the edge of the reserve and back onto 201 again. Those were the two options that were being considered.

There was also, I understand, direction given for land acquisition, and I know the negotiations with the Houles had started. I know that the negotiations with the First Nation had started, because the then-chief and I had a couple of meetings because of that bridge and how this could be done. I think they were amenable at that time to allow for right-of-way access through the reserve, and if they do not, the bridge can be constructed in such a way that you could very easily bring the abutments right almost in line with the current highway as it sits, and you would not need a great deal of reserve land at all to construct that new bridge.

I want to ask the minister whether he is contemplating budgeting in the near future for the construction of that bridge, and if he does not, what advice he has for the communities east and west of the river as to how they conduct commerce across the river.

I was told this morning, Mr. Minister, that the length of the drive for agricultural equipment was 72 miles to get from the west side of the river to the east side of the river, to get to the boundary. I was also told that the streets in the town of Emerson simply were not constructed to carry the weight that would have to be carried by the hundred semi loads of oats going to the plant a week, and the up to 200 loads of fertilizer, and those kinds of materials, by the grain companies and chemical companies that come across those bridges.

So I would ask the minister whether he has taken all that into consideration, and whether he would, in fact, consider meeting with that committee that has been directed to gain a meeting with the minister or the Premier. It does not matter to them who they meet with, but they want to try and make the case and demonstrate the urgency of the matter of constructing a new bridge there.

Mr. Lemieux: Well, thank you to the MLA for Emerson for the question.

There have been some actions taken, as I mentioned. There has been consultation with the municipalities in question. Let me just tell you that what the action and what it looks like the action will be with regard to this particular bridge, in the short term anyway, is that there are going to be traffic signals put up. It will be installed at each end of the bridge to restrict the bridge to one lane. We are looking at that the bridge will be posted for a weight limit. I have asked the department to take a second look at that to see whether or not there is any ability to increase the load limit. That is under review by engineers. Also, the speed limit over the bridge is going to be posted at a lesser amount. So we are looking at what we can do in the short term with regard to this particular bridge.

The member mentioned that a lot of work had been done in the past. I do not want him to paint a picture that this is so. We have looked at this project as being a real challenge, but we understand the economic benefits that transportation provides. We believe as a government, and as the minister, that transportation is an economic enabler. It not only provides for access for tourism, but also for a lot of businesses that depend on bridges and roads.

When government should change hands, whether that be in 12 or 16 years, I do not want to hand the ball to the next particular government, the kind of ball that was handed to us. I am not just painting the picture just of that previous government. Successive governments, provincial governments, have allowed the provincial transportation infrastructure to not be kept up the way it should have been. It is a personal comment. I have been told that when you are in government you do not have a personal opinion, but I am trying to be quite frank here that there are a lot of challenges in transportation. Even though we have bumped up our particular budget to unprecedented amounts, an additional \$16 million this year, there are still a lot of challenges that remain.

To try to answer the question with regard to what the member was asking, there is a short-term plan to address it. We understand that it is going to cost some money in the short term to address the challenges that are there. I know there is other structural work to be carried out in the summer of '05. Hopefully, we will not have to shut the bridge more than a few days to do some of this work. The timing is going to be crucial, but we are working

with all of our partners in this to try to accomplish this.

No one likes to see a bridge or road closed. No one likes to see roads restricted, but, quite frankly, it is my duty and responsibility to the people of Manitoba to ensure that the roads are safe and they are passable. We do have to protect the integrity of our roads, so we have to sometimes put in place restrictions on those roads. Sometimes we have to repair bridges and have to close them for a short period of time or do extra work on them. This bridge, I do not think there is anyone who questions the value of the bridge and the importance of it for the southeast region and for that area of the province of Manitoba.

* (17:00)

Currently, the bridge, as I mentioned, is under review for weight limits. We looked at putting 16 tonnes as a limit on the bridge. There are going to be lights put in. The speed is going to be reduced. So we are hoping, with doing some of these short-term measures, that the longevity of the bridge will be enhanced, and we are hoping to be able to address some of those questions by the short-term measures we are going to be implementing.

Mr. Penner: Well, I respect what the minister has said. However, he has not agreed yet to meet with the committee that is meeting today, and they were hoping they would get an early answer from the minister that they would get a meeting date.

I want to say this to the minister. The dangerous traffic situation that will be caused by even the partial closure of that bridge should not be underestimated. Those farmers have some very large equipment, and the minister knows that.

Our farmers in Manitoba have led the way in changing how business is done on their farms in soil preservation, in soil conservation, in water conservation and in ensuring that the degradation of our water supplies will not happen or will decrease. They have spent billions of dollars in heavy, large tillage and seeding equipment that does not disturb the cover that is naturally supplied by the environment.

Therefore, I say to the minister that if he expects that equipment to travel 70 some-odd miles down 75 highway, which is a very busy truck traffic route, and

that is the only way to get across the river with that heavy and big equipment, so if he expects that traffic disruption to happen continually, and that will happen continually because they will not be able to get across that bridge. There is no agricultural equipment. A heavy tractor today, with an air seeder behind it, will weigh significantly more than 16 tonnes so they will not be able to cross. The one lane will not be wide enough to allow those vehicles to cross that bridge. They utilize the whole bridge now, from side to side, and when they cross the bridge, the traffic stops and allows them to come across.

That is the kind of situation you are going to create on 75 highway. I would suggest to you that the traffic disruption that will be caused, will cause you a greater headache than meeting with that group and giving them some assurances as to when that new bridge will be constructed.

It is not a matter of if. It is going to be when because it has to be constructed. We all know that. The Province should, I believe, immediately put in place the amount of money to encourage the immediate start of the construction of that bridge. We could build the abutments during the summer months and in the winter months, you could put the decks in. By next spring, you could have a new bridge there.

If we did that in Emerson—it took less than a year to build that Emerson bridge, and you have seen the Emerson bridge. If that kind of construction was built there, we need only have one season of disruptive traffic on 75 highway. If not, you are going to see—and the possibility of accidents in that sort of situation is great—I think, the people that we will put in jeopardy there are the farmers and their employees that will have to make that trip around. So I suggest to the minister, think long and think hard about what is happening there because of that closure.

We all knew this was coming. We knew this back in 1998. We knew it, actually, a few years before that this was coming, but no provision during the last six years has been made to see to the construction of that bridge. I suggest to the minister that he think very carefully about what kind of scenario he is putting in place, Mr. Chairman. That is the extent of my comment. Thank you very much.

Mr. Lemieux: The member knows fair well that this is not something that just happens overnight. There are land purchases. There might be utilities. There are a lot of things involved in putting up a new structure, a new bridge of any kind, let alone a larger one like the Letellier bridge.

I can tell you that, as a department, the department is looking at—and very qualified people have been monitoring this particular bridge for the past while. They are looking at alternative routing for the movement of goods, and are currently being examined quite extensively.

All the municipalities are going to be kept informed as soon as they are developed. I appreciate the comment that the member from Emerson raised about possible disruption. I mean, no one wants this. He keeps referring to me in a personal way, I, I, you, you. Well, you know what? The fact of the matter is that no one ever wants to shut down a bridge, or cause it to not be used the way it was meant to be.

The challenge, of course, is going forward and what you do about it, and that is something that I am certainly calling on my department to be monitoring on an ongoing basis. There are many projects in the queue now that we are looking at over the next while. We are going to be announcing a number of different initiatives, whether it is in northern Manitoba, the capital budget for northern Manitoba, which was just announced yesterday. Also, an overall budget was announced. We are going to be announcing rural Manitoba shortly, but many of these projects have taken a number of years to address.

I will leave my comments at that, but I just want to say that it is not that a lack of attention has been paid to this particular structure. A lot of attention has been paid to it. We are prepared to be putting some money into it, in the short term, to ensure that it is safe for those who use it, but to build a new bridge, it takes a lot of engineering. It takes the purchase of land. It takes right of ways. It takes utilities to be purchased, or to be moved. So it is a lengthy process.

We are trying to take a look at the challenge we have ahead of us in a proactive way. I am hoping the residents of the southeast will understand that these things just do not happen overnight. The damage of bridges like this does not happen overnight, nor do the solutions happen that quickly either. I believe all

the R.M.s who we meet with on a regular basis will also understand this, as well as the First Nations community.

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): My question to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger). My first question deals with the sales tax. The Minister of Finance, as he knows, you know, either put new sales tax, or increased or augmented the existing one by including legal, accounting, architectural, engineering, private security, et cetera, services last year.

I just wondered whether the minister could indicate to us how much of the increase in the revenue brought in last year originated from this tax on these new services, and what the projection is for the current year in terms of the amount of revenue that would come in from these taxes.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): I will undertake to get that information for when we go into Estimates. That is something for which I would like my officials to give me official numbers. I do not have the number in front of me.

Mr. Gerrard: Just some very quick projections would suggest to me, if the increases in the retail sales tax had been the same as they had been in earlier years, that the increment may be in the order of about \$50 million for the '04-05 year, and perhaps as much as \$90 million for '05-06 year. It would be good to have those numbers, because I think it is important that we have got them accurately.

My next question, again, for the Minister of Finance. In the budget papers, Manitoba Budget 2005, which I am sure he is very familiar with, on it is about the third-last page in the whole book, 21—it is numbered at the top—it shows that a single parent with one preschool-aged child making \$23,000 per year faces a marginal effective tax rate of 64 percent. That is, of course, the effective tax rate on incremental income. That is quite a high marginal tax rate, or effective tax rate. That is higher than people who are earning \$50,000 or \$100,000 a year.

* (17:10)

I would like the Minister of Finance to comment on this fact that he is, in fact, providing a marginal tax rate for people who are single mothers with a child, having such a high marginal tax rate.

Mr. Selinger: This is a long-standing problem with the way welfare was structured under the Canada Assistance program where, as your income rises, your benefits are reduced, and at a certain point the benefits reduce rather dramatically. That is where you get the effect of higher marginal tax rates. It is sort of a trade-off historically in the design of these programs between targeting, which gets the resources to those that most need it versus a slower phase out of the benefit which gives more benefits to more people at higher income levels.

The more targeted it is, the greater the tendency is for a higher marginal tax rate. The more spread out it is, the less targeting you get, but the lower the marginal tax rate. This has always been one of the major dilemmas on how you allocate resources in the case of social assistance or other like programs. It could become exacerbated when you stack one on top of the other. We have identified this issue here because we think it needs to be worked on.

Now, the National Child Benefit program, by providing that to people on social assistance or all families, that would reduce the marginal tax rate somewhat, because it stays with you as you move into the labour market and gain market income versus social assistance income. In that sense, there are some positive design features to that, and our challenge is just to find other mechanisms to reduce the tax-back rate.

One of the things we do is, of course, we increased the non-refundable tax credits by 39 percent, so there are higher thresholds to reach before you pay taxes. As you know, there has been some movement this year on the first threshold, so we have done some things on the tax side that provide some relief there. It is an ongoing challenge built into the very nature of how social assistance was originally designed back in the sixties.

Mr. Gerrard: I thank the Minister of Finance for his comments. It is an issue that I have raised for a number of years, and I would just like to comment. It is clearly a bad system when a single mother, with one child, earning \$23,000 is faced with a marginal tax rate of 64 percent. I would at least like the Minister of Finance to admit that this is a bad system when this is occurring, that such a single mother is facing an effective marginal tax rate of much higher than people who have much greater incomes.

Mr. Selinger: As I have described to the member, this was one of the original design flaws in the original construction of the welfare regime in the sixties under the Canada Assistance program, and we have taken measures to reduce the impact of high tax-back rates as people gain more income from the marketplace. Some of those measures are extending the National Child Benefit to all families. Other measures are increasing the nonrefundable tax credits. Additional measures are lifting the thresholds, and the member also knows, we increased the value of the Property Tax Credit. All of these things provide additional income support, but the trade-off between targeting versus spreading the benefit to a number of people.

The other thing we did, which I did not mention in my first answer, is the family tax reduction was reduced from 2 percent to 1 percent. The clawback feature on that, or the reduction, was a 50% reduction in that. That allowed more families to keep more income for the responsibility of raising children as they moved into higher income thresholds. We have done a number of things in the redesign of our tax system which have reduced those marginal tax rates, but, as the member has correctly pointed out, this is an area where we should continue to look for other ways we can reduce those tax-back rates.

Mr. Gerrard: In previous years, I have raised the issue of tax expenditures, which the Minister of Finance has taken some steps to address. I believe I have also raised one of the, I think, important issues in terms of budgeting, and that is knowing and putting in the budget the environmental liabilities, which, as we know, for example, in the Kississing Lake issue, are a significant issue, because they are expenditures, future expenditures, based on environmental damage which exists now. It is expenditures which we are, as a province, going to have to make and to make sure that things like that are cleaned up.

I would ask the Minister of Finance whether he has made any progress in assessing the environmental liabilities and in starting to look at including some mention of these in the budget.

Mr. Selinger: As the member knows, I undertook to publish for the first time in many, many years tax expenditures, and those were shown in the budget papers on D14 and D15, and are updated every year now. There is a substantial array of tax expenditures

there which the member can peruse if he has any questions on the specifics.

On the issue of environmental liabilities, this is being reviewed as we move to full summary budgets, the accounting treatment of those, and who is responsible for the liability because it varies, depending on the specific issue out there and which corporate entity was involved in it. In some cases, corporations have some responsibility, residual responsibility; in some cases, they do not; in some cases, it is partial. So there is a lot of work to be done on the accounting treatment for environmental liabilities, and that work is ongoing right now. I can assure the member that it is on the radar screen in the Department of Finance, and we are looking at ways to properly account for it and then be able to report on it.

Mr. Gerrard: I would ask the Minister of Finance whether he has any numbers or assessment for the size of the environmental liability with respect to the Sherridon mine tailings in the Kississing Lake clean-up.

Mr. Selinger: Again, I do not have that information with me today. If the member wishes to come to Finance Estimates, I will see if we can get something for him for that meeting, to see if there are works advanced enough to be able to identify the Kississing Lake tailings liability estimate. I will see if I can find something on that for him.

Mr. Gerrard: Well, I will let the minister take that as notice that I will bring that up in the Estimates and look forward to him having those numbers at that particular time.

I have some questions for the Minister of Water Stewardship (Mr. Ashton), but I see that he is not yet here. I was hoping that he was going to be here.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Harry Schellenberg): Excuse me. We are not supposed to make reference to people here, or not here. Thank you.

Mr. Gerrard: While waiting for a moment before asking a question for the Minister of Water Stewardship, I would have a question in terms of the Estimates, as they relate to the Department of Industry.

Oh, I will ask my question to the Minister of Water Stewardship. My question relates to the

Kississing Lake situation and an update on where things are, given the fact that there has been remarkably little progress, some rhetoric, some attempts, maybe some studies, but remarkably little action, in fact, at the Sherridon mine tailings Kississing Lake site.

Could the Minister of Water Stewardship, seeing as how this is an important issue of water quality, give us an update on what is happening?

* (17:20)

Mr. Ashton: I actually do appreciate the member raising the point. I am disappointed that he made some reference in his comments. I do not think his reference was happening, but I do think that it is an issue that we all should be aware of and concerned about. So, in that sense, notwithstanding the disagreement on, perhaps, maybe some of the phrasing of the question, I do appreciate the question.

The key thing to remember here, and I will not go into all the details because of time constraints, but the mine was in operation between 1931 and 1951 and 7.4 million tonnes of acid-generating tailings were dumped into the Kississing Lake area. I will not go into all of the background. There was an assessment, though, in 1983 at the time, but what I think what the member would be most interested in, apart from the aquatic assessment done in 1983, is in terms of recent developments.

The key thing here, I think, is that the minister of the mines department, Minister of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs (Mr. Lathlin) have been working on this particular issue. In fact, we came into government in 1999 and, in July of 2000, put in place the orphan mine initiative. In fact, this is one of a number of mines in this situation because these are mines for which, essentially, we do not have a functioning owner. This has been an initiative by the provincial government, in fact, a quarter of a million dollars per year, to identify risks to other mines that have been in a similar situation.

What has taken place is there have been a number of initiatives on the mitigation side. The shafts have been capped. There have been a number of fences put in place to deal with some of the immediate problems that were there, and the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) did reference a number of studies. It is important to

recognize, by the way, that there was an '83 study indicating that the potable water was safe.

The indications of the studies have indicated that the tailings are certainly harmful to certain aquatic species. The member, I think, gave a fairly good description of that. It is a very difficult situation in terms of contamination.

In terms of the drinking water side, there are issues in terms of the coloration of the water, even though in terms of pathogens, other areas, issues, it is safe in terms of the drinking water standards.

But what we are looking at now, and there was a meeting that took place with the community, and I think, to be fair to the Member for River Heights, that he has had opportunity to speak to the mayor of Sherridon. The committee has been concerned about moving ahead in terms of additional actions. There are, in particular, a number of buildings that are still potential concerns in terms of contamination, so we are looking at some initiatives to deal with the sites as well. Aboriginal and Northern Affairs is also looking at a number of options because there were a number of proposals made by the community, both in terms of Sherlett Creek, I believe it is, and also other options in terms of drinking water supply. So we are dealing with it.

I do want to put on the record, too, and I am sure that the member and I would agree on this. I know the member has certainly put forth this suggestion, and I do commend him for it. I will actually be raising this issue with the minister of the environment. There are many situations across Canada of similarly abandoned mine sites. The federal government, I know, has got some interest now in partnering in terms of these matters, and all the debate in the House aside, there could be some real opportunities here. I appreciate the member has put forth a number of suggestions in terms of that.

So we have started a mitigation going back to July 2000, and we are looking at some further initiatives right now that are very much based on the work that has been done thus far and the work from Sherridon. It is still going to be a difficult situation to deal with, with 7.4 million tonnes of tailings, but I think the member has put forth some very useful suggestions particularly. I will be following up, by the way, with the Mines Branch, which, essentially, is dealing with the orphan mine side of this.

There have been a number of suggestions that the member from River Heights has put forward in terms of further containment. We have contained the shaft itself. There has been fencing that is put in place to contain that side of it, as well, in terms of the leakage into the lake, but there are still some exposures with a number of the buildings, and there is still the difficulty that the lake itself, over a period of more than 50 years, has now gotten to a point where, quite frankly, we have a significant amount of the tailings that have gone in.

The member is quite right about the red colour. Notwithstanding the cranberry juice before, there is, because of the tailings, an elevated iron level. That is one of the discoloration elements. So, even though it has met the test in terms of drinking water standards, in other areas you have what is called the turbidity issue, the colouring issue. I think everybody has focussed in on: (a) containing the problem; (b) finding ways of mitigating the damage that has already taken place; and (c) looking at other potential water sources that will be safe, but also will not have the discoloration.

I want to commend, by the way, well, give credit to the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) for raising this. I know he raised this with me prior to the question in the House. I, certainly, appreciate his concern about this, but also share it. I believe we have made a significant start, but more needs to be done. I think that is the sense in which the member is asking the question.

Mr. Gerrard: Quite clearly, one of the fundamental issues here is the continuing leaching of the toxic metals from the tailings site out into Kississing Lake. It would appear that it should be logical to put up a couple of cofferdams to isolate the tailings site so that there is no longer leachate and toxic metals continuing to travel out into Kississing Lake, which is an incredible lake and needs to be protected, and at least further deterioration than we already have in a major way should be prevented.

The other issue, and let me ask the minister to comment on this, when I visited Sherridon and the nearby area last fall, and have talked with the mayor and others in the community, they are quite concerned about one of the two sources of water and water treatment. Many would much prefer to have a line from the Sherlett Lake water treatment plant that

goes to Sherridon, and would ask the minister whether he is looking into this and what his decision is going to be, and approach.

Mr. Ashton: I will indicate the Department of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs is looking at a number of proposals, because it is a Northern Affairs community, but I am just going to indicate the Minister of Mines can answer the question on the cofferdam and some of the mitigation that has taken place. So, if the Minister of Mines, if the member would like, I can provide that answer.

Mr. Gerrard: My question to the minister for Mines is this: What is the status of cofferdams or other measures to ensure that the tailings site is isolated and that we do not have this continued leaching of heavy metals out into Kississing Lake, which is continuing to cause huge problems in Kississing Lake and, if it is not stopped, is going to continue to be a huge and accelerating problem?

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Industry, Economic Development and Mines): Mr. Chair, what has happened is that, in 1986, I believe, there was the original cofferdam that was established under the former government trying to remediate the situation. So there was an original engineering study in 1986 which put up a cofferdam to do just what the member suggested. From what I understand, that did not work.

So what we are trying to do is there have been some studies to make sure that this whole issue is starting to be addressed. I know we have put in some staff time as far as addressing the issue, looking at the engineering and looking at it. I understand the previous minister wrote to the federal minister about this whole mines rehabilitation initiative, trying to get some money into this initiative. It is not a problem just for Manitoba; it is a problem across the country. We are looking forward to trying to address it, because I think it is a very important environmental issue that we do need to address.

Mr. Gerrard: The Minister of Industry and Mines, I do not know if he has been to Sherridon, but it is quite clear that the approach that was taken was deeply flawed and that there never has been a reasonable approach to putting up cofferdams, which would actually isolate the tailings site. I hope that the

minister will look into this and see if he cannot do a better, proper job.

Mr. Rondeau: I am pleased to inform the member opposite that I have been to Cold Lake multiple, multiple times. The interesting part is that in my travels through the North I have been aware of the issue, and what I said in my answer was that they had tried to do something in the original initiative. What has happened is they found that did not work, and they are looking at engineering solutions that will work and will actually solve the problem. Part of the problem was people made an attempt to solve the problem. It did not work in the first instance, and we want to make sure we do a solution that solves the

problem and, at the same time, does not cause more problems or more environmental issues.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Harry Schellenberg): The hour being 5:30 p.m., committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, March 22, 2005

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