

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

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(Hansard)

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, May 4, 2009

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYER

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PETITIONS

Neepawa, Gladstone, Ste. Rose, McCreary– Family Doctors

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

These are the reasons for this petition.

Access to a family doctor is vital to good primary health care. Patients depend on their family doctor for many things, including their routine health-care needs, preventative care and referrals for diagnostic tests and appointments with specialists.

Family doctors in Neepawa, Gladstone and Ste. Rose are unable to accept new patients. The nearby community of McCreary has not had a doctor available to take patients in months.

Without a family doctor, residents of this large geographical area have no option but to look for a family doctor in communities as far away as Brandon and Winnipeg.

Residents of these communities are suffering because of the provincial government's continuing failure to effectively address the shortage of doctors in rural Manitoba.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To urge the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) to consider prioritizing the needs of these communities by ensuring they have access to a family doctor.

To urge the Minister of Health to consider promptly increasing the use of nurse practitioners in these communities in order to improve access to quality health care.

This petition is signed by Daniel Bertrand, Jennifer Sigurdson, Ken Ives and many, many other fine Manitobans.

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

Seven Oaks Hospital–Emergency Services

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

The background to this petition is as follows:

The current Premier (Mr. Doer) and the NDP government are reducing emergency services at the Seven Oaks Hospital.

On October 6, 1995, the NDP introduced a matter of urgent public importance that stated that "the ordinary business of the House to be set aside to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely the threat to the health-care system posed by this government's plans to limit emergency services in the city of Winnipeg community hospitals."

Mr. Speaker, on December 6, 1995, when the then-PC government suggested it was going to reduce emergency services at the Seven Oaks Hospital, the NDP leader then asked Premier Gary Filmon to "reverse the horrible decisions of his government and his Minister of Health and reopen our community-based emergency wards."

The NDP gave Manitobans the impression that they supported Seven Oaks Hospital having full emergency services seven days a week, 24 hours a day

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Premier of Manitoba consider how important it is to have the Seven Oaks Hospital provide full emergency services seven days a week, 24 hours a day.

This is signed by S. Pranhiso, H. Lacoff, A. Hubines and many, many other fine Manitobans. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Traffic Signal Installation–PTH 15 and Highway 206

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

These are the reasons for this petition:

In August 2008, the Minister of Transportation (Mr. Lemieux) stated that traffic volumes at the intersection of PTH 15 and Highway 206 in Dugald exceeded those needed to warrant the installation of traffic signals.

Every school day, up to a thousand students travel through this intersection in Dugald where the lack of traffic signals puts their safety at risk.

Thousands of vehicles travel daily through this intersection in Dugald where the lack of traffic signals puts at risk the safety of these citizens.

In 2008, there was a 300 percent increase in accidents at this intersection.

We petition the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba as follows:

To request that the Minister of Transportation consider the immediate installation of traffic signals at the intersection of PTH 15 and Highway 206 in Dugald.

To request that the Minister of Transportation recognize the value of the lives and well-being of the students and citizens of Manitoba.

Signed by Peter Kotyk, Margaret Galloway, Robert Galloway and many, many other Manitobans.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Housing): I'd like to table the Supplementary Information for Legislative Review, Department of Family Services and Housing.

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members—

An Honourable Member: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Oh, tabling of reports?

An Honourable Member: Mr. Speaker, tabling of reports. I'm asking leave to—

Mr. Speaker: Okay, we'll revert to tabling of reports. Can we have the will of the House?

An Honourable Member: My apologies, Mr. Speaker, I thought that—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Can I have the agreement of the House to revert to tabling of reports? Is there agreement? *[Agreed]*

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Labour and Immigration): It's my privilege to table the Estimates for the 2009-2010 year for the Department of Labour and Immigration.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to oral questions, I'd like to draw the attention of honourable members to the public gallery where we have with us from River West Park School 17 grade 9 students under the direction of Mr. Todd Johnson. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger).

Also in the public gallery we have from Kelvin High School 30 grade 9 students under the direction of Jerry Banner. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard).

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

ORAL QUESTIONS

Provincial Debt Repayment

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, on Thursday afternoon, the government tabled a bill that allows it to get out of making any repayment on the Province's credit card bill for the next three years. Only five weeks earlier, the provincial budget made reference to the potential for a two-year reduction in debt payments. Bill 30 is completely at odds with what the Finance Minister presented in the budget.

The question, Mr. Speaker, is whether the Province's finances have deteriorated so much in five weeks that Bill 30 couldn't be consistent with the budget or whether the Finance Minister just got it wrong when he introduced the budget.

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I would point out that the budget also includes a \$120-million principal repayment, payments also on the other financing in the government of \$136 million. It does include a \$20-million debt repayment in the budget. We would note that we've repaid \$944 million since we've been in office with the operating debt, and we continue to believe that in these challenging times most provinces are running deficits to invest in stimulus.

The federal government has now called upon all provinces, rather than over the next five years, over

the next two years, to invest in infrastructure. We believe it makes good sense to invest in that infrastructure by reducing the debt payment—not eliminating the debt payment, reducing the debt payment—and investing in the water treatment plant in Selkirk, investing in the new modernization of the instrumentation system at the airport in Brandon, investing in many other projects, the lagoons in Winkler, water treatment in Steinbach, projects in Hanover.

Members opposite can vote against it. We're going ahead, Mr. Speaker.

* (13:40)

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, the budget that was introduced made reference to a reduction in debt payments. That's something that we had some concern about, but what the bill did that came in last week was to eliminate the requirement to make debt payments for three years.

This is at odds with what the Finance Minister said in the budget. He's giving himself a blank cheque to allow the debt to pile on faster than Manitobans can pay it off, Mr. Speaker. At a time when many Manitobans approaching retirement are anxious about their ability to meet their own payment requirements, we have a provincial government piling on the credit card bill and now saying that they can't even make the minimum payment on that credit card bill.

It's the equivalent of paying \$100 on a \$20,000 credit card bill, Mr. Speaker. Why can't they organize their finances in such a way to make the minimum payment on the Province's credit card debt?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, the blank cheque that was in government before we were elected was the fact that the whole issue of pension liability was not on the books, was not accounted for. When you hired a public health nurse, when you hired a jail guard at Headingley—in fact, they even had virtual jail guards when we came into office for the new expanded Headingley section—when you hired a highway worker, when you hired a person to be a conservation officer, when you hired somebody to be a water inspector, there was no pension payment, 7 percent.

That started in the 1960s. We reversed that. All new employees coming into government now have,

on a go-forward basis, their pension paid for. We have gone even further than that, Mr. Speaker, and we have a payment for all civil servants and teachers. We also have a \$20-million debt payment, a \$128-million principal repayment.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, we acknowledge that I think almost every jurisdiction in North America is running a deficit. We also acknowledge, under GAAP financial planning and budgeting, we're not running a deficit. Yes, we are reducing the payment on debt. Provinces are paying for their infrastructure. They're cancelling tax reductions. We don't believe in that. We believe in having doctors, not debt payment. We believe in having nurses, not debt payment. We believe in having an increase in spending at universities, less of a debt payment. We believe in having stimulus with the federal government, not through deficit but by reducing some of our debt payment in this budget.

This is one of the only balanced budgets in Canada right now. Members opposite want to vote against one of only two jurisdictions in North America that are dealing with finances in a balanced way. They're a bunch of negative nabobs. We're going to move forward, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, Manitobans know that it's not a balanced budget when you're running up the debt; you're taking money out of the savings account. That's not a balanced budget. That is a recipe for financial problems down the road. That's where this government is taking us, is down the path to more debt, to Manitobans having to work longer hours for lower pay, for pensioners having to pay higher taxes as they approach their retirement. That is what this financial recipe is creating for Manitobans.

I want to ask the Premier again: This is a relatively small amount of money, and they have made payments on the debt, but they've piled the debt on more quickly than they've paid it off. Now they're going to accelerate that process, Mr. Speaker. How can they justify to Manitobans the inability to take one-half of 1 percent of the total budget and apply that to repaying debt for Manitobans, so they don't leave a legacy to the next generation and the generations thereafter of more debt, longer hours for less pay, fewer social services and a lower quality of living for all Manitobans?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite talks about fewer social services, and, again, these are

kind of the statement of untrue facts that the leader always puts on the record.

And, don't forget, this is the person who was so brilliant that three years ago he said: In three years the government would have no money left in the rainy day fund. Well, we have over \$600 million in this rainy day fund, Mr. Speaker. He was wrong then and he's wrong now.

The federal government has announced, in my view wisely so—the federal government that's running a deficit along with eight out of 10 provinces has announced that they're going to accelerate the Infrastructure Program as part of a stimulus package in Canada. We have the choice right now in this Legislature to join in with the proposal in Hanover, the proposal in Steinbach, the proposal in Portage for the rec centre, the proposal in Selkirk for the water treatment plant, for the cross-Canada trails, and we have the ability to invest in doctors, nurses, justice, police officers and allow for our investment in infrastructure.

We believe that the stimulus package for Canada is sensible. If members opposite want to go on a tirade against the federal-provincial Infrastructure Program, some quarter of a billion dollars announced last week, partially paid for by having more flexibility in our debt payment, let them do that. We are proud to go out and talk about Building Manitoba with the federal government, and we're proud that we're able to do it, unlike most provinces, by reducing some of the debt payment but not running a deficit.

Most provinces are having this stimulus package tied to a deficit. We're not in Manitoba and we're proud of that, Mr. Speaker.

Provincial Debt Repayment

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Mr. Speaker, it now seems that the true NDP debt philosophy has been unveiled: borrow like there is no tomorrow and don't worry about paying back the debt today.

This flies in the face of a recent handout from the minister's own office. The Manitoba Securities Commission distributed a handout that teaches children how to deal with their finances, and I quote: Children should be taught the difference between borrowing money and money that they earn or receive. When you lend a child money, explain that it will have to be paid back. Set your repayment schedule and stick to it.

Is this a classic case of do as I say, not as I do?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Mr. Speaker, I'm glad the member takes the time to read the educational materials we've put out by the Manitoba Securities Commission, and it does actually say put money aside for a rainy day, which we have done.

They had about \$200-and-some million in the plan when we came into office, Mr. Speaker. We have \$634 million in the plan now. And, by the way, we've exceeded the 5 percent targets set by the members opposite.

The other lessons for life in that plan are invest in education, something members voted against. The member said have a budget with goals, something the members voted against. Every single document, every single lesson in here is one being followed by the provincial government, investing in the future so there is more wealth for all the people of Manitoba.

Mr. Borotsik: If he wants more wealth for all the people of Manitoba, perhaps he could cut the taxes, Mr. Speaker, which are the highest west of Québec.

Did the minister not hear the message? Set up a repayment schedule and stick with it. Don't change the rules on the fly. Don't take the easy way out. You borrow; you pay. This is an obvious message lost on the Finance Minister. Our debt has doubled over the last 10 years.

The Finance Minister is addicted to debt. Will he promise Manitobans that he will seek help for his addiction?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, what I promise the people of Manitoba is an honest accounting of what's really going on, unlike the members opposite.

Let's take, for example, the last five years. The assets have grown in this province by 48.5 percent. The debt has grown by 6.4 percent. Every dollar we're investing is building \$8 of wealth for the people of Manitoba. The members opposite always put a zero on government assets, so they can sell them off when they come into office.

The reality is the members opposite talk about having a disciplined plan. Why did they ignore the pension liability for the 11 years they were in office? It went from \$1.9 billion to \$3 billion. They paid down the debt by selling off the telephone system, and they let the pension liability grow. We're dealing with it all, unlike you.

* (13:50)

Mr. Borotsik: The net debt, Mr. Speaker, has doubled under this administration, doubled under this administration.

Mr. Speaker, the Finance Minister used to—and I emphasize the term "used to"—take smug satisfaction in announcing his government paid off \$900 million in debt over nine years. This in itself is wrong because every dollar that they paid down the debt, they borrowed \$10 additional money.

In this budget, he's gone from a debt repayment of \$110 million to \$20 million to zero, Mr. Speaker. Why is he continuing mortgaging our children's future?

Mr. Selinger: I invite the member to table his estimates on how he comes to his calculations because they're usually wrong. I wouldn't be surprised if they are again.

Here's the reality. When we came into office, 13.2 cents of every dollar was dedicated to paying down the debt. We've reduced that to 6 cents on the dollar. It's been reduced by over 50 percent. The amount of money we're contributing towards debt repayment has shrunk because of the way we've handled the liabilities of the Province.

We've increased the wealth of Manitobans. We've reduced the cost to Manitobans in doing it and, Mr. Speaker, the wealth of Manitobans shows up in better schools, better hospitals, better roads, better sewer and water, better assets. We're educating the people of Manitoba and growing the economy in Manitoba. Manitobans' disposable income is up. Under you, it went down.

Manitoba Hydro Bipole III Loan

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, I'd like to ask the Minister of Finance, who's also the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro, to put himself in the shoes of an ordinary Manitoban. The average Manitoban is facing questionable economic times. This Manitoban is looking at making a purchase. In essence, he has two options: He can opt for a more reliable, less environmentally damaging and least costly option, or he can choose to run up his credit card debt even higher with a less reliable, more environmentally damaging and much more expensive option.

Mr. Speaker, how can this minister justify borrowing an extra \$650 million for a west-side line

to the people of Manitoba when he can't even balance his own credit card payments now?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): Mr. Speaker, the debt-to-equity ratio in Manitoba Hydro is the best it's been in over 30 years.

The bipole which was recommended to the previous government after the 1997 almost near disaster when the bipoles almost went down, the bipole that was recommended was never built by the members opposite. We are building it now and we are building it in such a way that we do not put \$20 billion of export revenue at risk.

Manitobans want to know that we're prudent when we build up increased reliability, less risk to export revenues. That is the smart way to go. The members opposite want to roll the dice with Manitoba Hydro's export profits.

Mr. Cullen: Well, Mr. Speaker, if this minister and this government do not want to stand up to Robert Kennedy Jr., maybe they should get out of the road and let somebody get at this job who wants to represent all Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker, Manitobans are seeing a proliferation of Manitoba Hydro advertising lately. They've taken out full-page ads in community newspapers. They've got a four-pager here in the *Free Press* this past weekend.

Now, it seems every time we see this government in conflict with Manitobans over one of their decisions, we see the spin doctors working overtime. This is clearly political spin from the NDP government to justify their west-side decision.

How can the minister justify to Manitobans using our Crown corporation, which has a monopoly on hydro sales in Manitoba, spending thousands of dollars on his political spin when he can't even pay his own debts off?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, every Crown corporation in Manitoba, like every corporation in Manitoba, puts out the story about how well they're doing.

Manitoba Hydro is simply telling people how they're increasing reliability; how they're planning for the future by building Wuskwatim; how they're planning for the future by working towards Keeyask, which is another \$5-billion investment; how they're planning for the future by moving forward on Conawapa, which is power for which there are term

sheets; customers have said they would like to buy that power in the midwest American marketplace.

Manitoba Hydro is just telling the truth about how there's a prosperous future for Manitoba by developing Manitoba Hydro instead of mothballing it.

Mr. Cullen: The minister here is still going to have to borrow an extra \$650 million for a west-side line.

I have to remind the Minister of Finance and the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro that Manitoba's debt is higher than the provinces of Saskatchewan, Alberta and B.C. combined. Bill 30, just introduced, will effectively eliminate any payments to the debt over the next three years.

How can this minister justify to Manitobans running up our credit card debt by an additional \$650 million when he can't even make his minimum credit card payments now?

Mr. Selinger: I know the members like to persist in putting misinformation on the record. The net debt of British Columbia alone is more than two and a half times the net debt of Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker, in this budget, our debt management strategy has the following elements: It has \$136 million to pay the employers' contributions for teachers' pension plans and civil servant pension plans. That never existed when members opposite were in office. It has another \$20 million for debt repayment. That's \$156 million. That is \$2 of debt and pension paydown for every dollar they had when they were in office.

We're doing double the effort to reduce pension and debt liabilities than members opposite did, and that's before we get to \$135 million of amortization. There's more good news if I get—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Provincial Debt Repayment

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Well, there's plenty more questions on this, Mr. Speaker.

Only an NDP government would be proud of the fact that Manitoba's debt is now higher than B.C., Alberta and Saskatchewan together. Most people would see this as a prime opportunity to start reducing the debt, not the NDP's way of increasing it. In fact, the NDP has a bill before this House, Bill 30, that would give this government permission not to have to make minimum debt payments.

This year the government spent more than \$231,000 advertising their own budget, Mr. Speaker. Why didn't they put this money towards paying down the debt?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister of Finance): Perhaps the members could answer themselves the same question at a time when they were paying over 13 cents on the dollar for the debt they had and advertising for their budget that was larger than the advertising we've got this year, and that was 10 years ago. They spent more when they had less to spend.

We're spending a modest amount to let people know what's in the budget so we can get the facts out to them. Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, the other element of our debt retirement or debt management strategy: \$128 million for principal repayments to school divisions, health authorities and other levels of government; \$135 million for amortization; \$136 million for the second year in the last 45 years of paying the employers' pension contributions and \$20 million for debt repayment; a total of \$417 million of debt management and fiscal discipline.

Compare that to their \$75 million, Mr. Speaker. By any measure, we're exceeding the effort they ever made on the best day of the best year when they were in government.

Mrs. Stefanson: In Bill 30, the NDP government plans to legislate that it's no longer necessary for them to make the minimum debt payments previously required under balanced budget legislation.

Rather than spend this \$231,000 promoting their budget, why didn't they just pay down the debt?

Mr. Selinger: We've got a debt management strategy for \$417 million. Our fiscal stimulus plan, the additional \$625 million of infrastructure spending, will generate 10,000 person years of employment in Manitoba.

Employment is where a recession starts for somebody. If they lose their job, that's when the recession starts. We will provide 10,000 person years of additional employment in Manitoba. Manitobans told us that was their priority. We have one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country. We intend to keep it that way while you, hypothetically, would pay down the debt. Bully for you.

Mrs. Stefanson: Manitobans know that if they don't make at least their minimum payment on their credit

card, they will be penalized. Rather than this government being penalized for not making their minimum debt payment, they have decided to pass a law giving them permission not to have to make this payment. It's irresponsible, Mr. Speaker, and it sends a terrible message to hardworking Manitobans.

Mr. Speaker, it's no secret to Manitobans that this government has a severe spending problem. Instead of wasting money on needless things like the government advertising that they spent \$231,000 on in their budget, why didn't they just put this money towards paying down the debt?

* (14:00)

Mr. Selinger: Manitobans will be pleased to know that the cost of servicing our debt is 6 cents on the dollar versus 13.2 cents on the dollar when they were in office. They will be pleased to know that the net debt in Manitoba as a percentage of our economy has gone down by over 25 percent. They will be pleased to know that. The bond rating agencies were pleased to know that. That's why we had five credit-rating upgrades.

Five credit-rating upgrades, a halving of the cost of the debt and a 49 percent increase in the wealth of Manitobans: Those are all good numbers. Any objective analysis will show that we're doing very well. Only the members opposite hide in their ideological clouds.

Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Cost of Enhanced Driver's Licences

Mr. Cliff Graydon (Emerson): Mr. Speaker, the minister apparently doesn't realize that you can't borrow your way out of debt.

Would it not be prudent to take the \$13 million allocated for the enhancement driver's licence that no one wants and pay down a portion of the exorbitant debt that we're carrying today?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Act): Mr. Speaker, I seem to recall in this Chamber when we passed the bill for the enhanced driver's licence, the members on the opposite side voted in favour of having this enhanced driver's licence. Now they're saying you're wasting money on an enhanced driver's licence even though British Columbia, Ontario, Québec and other provinces are doing this.

You know, it's one thing to be ideologically driven, Mr. Speaker; it's another thing to change your

mind within months based on some political consideration.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Speaker, the minister has put some things on the record that aren't true. We didn't vote for the bill. We also know that Manitobans no longer enjoy the lowest rate for auto insurance while vehicle registrations ranked the highest in the country.

Can the minister tell the House today that he is prepared to scrap the enhanced ID cards as Saskatchewan did and pay down the debt?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, members opposite reminded me they didn't vote at all on that particular bill, so that really confuses matters.

I spoke with the minister responsible in Saskatchewan, Mr. Speaker, and the reason that Saskatchewan did not go forward with their enhanced driver's licence were concerns from the privacy commissioner, and they recommended that, as the privacy commissioner recommended, they follow the Manitoba model in introducing an enhanced driver's licence.

So, you know, revisionist history, Mr. Speaker, doesn't last very long out of the mouths of members opposite.

Mr. Graydon: Mr. Speaker, he can have all the discussions he wants with the minister from Saskatchewan. He understands dollars and cents, and it just wasn't working.

Manitobans are frustrated by being overcharged for insurance, vehicle registration and by the complete mismanagement of this corporation that is highlighted by the costly mistakes on the licences and the introduction of the enhanced ID cards.

When will the minister do the right thing, scrap its legacy programs and pay down the debt so that all Manitobans can benefit?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, the members opposite make it very clear what their view is of Crown corporations. MTS they privatized. Hydro, they'd love to privatize. Every single move that MPI makes the members opposite criticize. Even though MPI has the lowest insurance rate or the second lowest in all of North America, they're against it. Even though 90 cents or 80 cents on the dollar is spent in Manitoba by an insurance company rather than going offshore to their big corporate friends, they vote against it.

It's very clear. They hate Crown corporations. They privatized MTS. They'd do the same thing to Hydro and MPI if they ever got their hands on it. Manitobans do not like that kind of ideological extremism, Mr. Speaker.

Provincial Debt Repayment

Mr. Hugh McFadyen (Leader of the Official Opposition): I don't know where that rant came from, Mr. Speaker, but Manitobans would have a lot more sympathy for the government's position today if they hadn't spent the last 10 years, the good years, building up the Province's debt during good times, so now we stand in the position today with a record level of debt, \$20,000 for every Manitoban on the credit card, with a minimum repayment requirement, which wasn't high enough as it was, of \$100 for every Manitoban.

Now they say they can't even make the minimum repayment, Mr. Speaker, millions of dollars of waste and mismanagement with a hydro line to nowhere, the MPI licence boondoggle—even those that are spelled correctly are being mishandled.

Mr. Speaker, will the government and the Finance Minister acknowledge that it's irresponsible, in light of the massive debt that Manitoba has today, larger than that of Saskatchewan and Alberta and B.C. combined, to continue to pile the debt on top of Manitobans more quickly than they can pay it off?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): Mr. Speaker, I would point out in the rant of the Leader of the Opposition that—and there are many items he's raised, so just let me deal with one, Hydro.

Hydro's debt was 86 percent debt-equity ratio when he was the chief of staff for former Premier Filmon. It also did not include the purchase of the gas company. It was off the books. And there was another \$450 million that the Auditor General identified of Hydro capital that was not on the books. In fact, the Auditor General had to put a reserve note in on the Tory books because of this issue. The Auditor General also had to comment that because they were not introducing proper accounting procedures under the former balanced budget legislation, that it did not include any of the liability for pensions.

So, Mr. Speaker, let me just deal with one issue. The debt-equity ratio has gone down from 86 percent to 75 percent. Not only has it gone down, all of the

issues of capital debt are on the books. When the Tories were in office, it was underneath the table.

Mr. McFadyen: However much the self-appointed historian for the 1990s continues to put out historical fiction about the 1990s, it doesn't change the fact that the debt of Manitoba today is higher than it has ever been, \$20,000 for every individual.

There was a minimum repayment requirement that was passed six months ago, Mr. Speaker, in Bill 38. Six months ago, the minimum repayment was there. The budget came in five weeks ago, and now they've changed their position even in the past five weeks.

Mr. Speaker, how can they justify creating a situation where even if they get to their level of \$20 million a year, it's going to take over 500 years and six generations of Manitobans to pay off the debt at the rate they're going?

Mr. Doer: Well, Mr. Speaker, if you take an issue of pension liability and, No. 1, don't have it on the books and, No. 2, don't pay a nickel down, it wouldn't even be 500 years; it would be ad infinitum in terms of paying down the debt. The parallel lines would meet in infinity under the Tories. So, this is, of course, the way they approach it.

So then when you don't pay a nickel down and you don't have it on the books, when somebody else comes into office, actually starts paying down the liability and actually puts it on the books, the Tories then feign indignation about the actual situation in Manitoba. It would be brilliant, Mr. Speaker, I suppose, to carry on the same practice as the members opposite: Don't pay a nickel down on liability, don't admit there's any liability on pensions and actually have it underneath the table and have a second set of books.

There's no question, Mr. Speaker, that paying down the liability and admitting there's a liability and putting it on the books does give a fuller picture to all Manitobans and to all people dealing with finances.

That's why, Mr. Speaker, we have received four—one, two, three, four—credit upgrades from 1999 because we are much more honest in dealing with the finances than any member opposite.

Mr. McFadyen: Mr. Speaker, up until a couple of months ago, the Finance Minister was saying they had six credit upgrades. He just said five, and now the Premier's downgraded it to four. I don't know

what's happening to the credit upgrades, but I think Manitobans recognize that the credit-rating companies that he's referring to are the same people that were giving double-A credit ratings to Lehman Brothers up until a few weeks before they went bankrupt. The credit-rating agencies have no credibility. They know that and that's why we have the problems we have today.

Mr. Speaker, we have creative financing techniques that haven't even yet been invented according to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) in Estimates last week. We have a debt that's reached record levels, and we have, today, a situation where now the government is saying they can't even make the minimum repayment on the Province's credit card debt.

I want to ask the government how they can justify a situation where the relatively small amount, \$100 for every Manitoban, is unaffordable to this government when they have money for a hydro line to nowhere.

*(14:10)

Mr. Doer: Well, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite mothballing hydro, they didn't build a transmission line that was recommended. They cancelled Limestone and, of course, we built it. They cancelled Conawapa and, now, we're proceeding with further hydro expansions.

We know the extreme agenda of members opposite is to denigrate the Crown corporations and then get ready to sell them. That's what we know it is. That's the agenda of the extremists opposite. First they'll sell Hydro and then they'll sell every river in Manitoba. They'll sell the rivers in this province, Mr. Speaker. They'll sell us down the river like they did in the past.

Mr. Speaker, eight provinces in Canada and some of the other governments in this country are running deficits. They don't want to run deficits. This Province, under GAAP financial budgeting, is running a surplus. All provinces in Canada have agreed to work with the federal government on a stimulus package. Most provinces are paying for that stimulus package with deficit financing. We are not. We are paying for the stimulus package with a reduced debt payment, but we are still balancing the budget.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I apologize for being a little more modest than the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger). He is absolutely correct; it was six

credit upgrades. I always want to be careful, but I would point out that we are investing in infrastructure. The infrastructure is advanced. The federal government is investing in infrastructure through deficit financing. That's the choice they're making. I actually think, in these tough times in Canada, they're making the right choice. Thankfully, because of our prudent budgeting system, we are able to now run a stimulus package without running a deficit. Yes, we've reduced the debt payment, but we are still only one of two provinces in Canada running a surplus budget.

When are members opposite going to realize they're on cloud cuckoo land and get with the agenda and vote with one of only two budgets in Canada that are actually balanced? When are they going to get onboard, Mr. Speaker?

Influenza A (H1N1) Preventative Measures

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Health: Laurie Garrett, an international authority on infectious disease pandemics, has emphasized the major difference between SARS and the H1N1 influenza virus. SARS is almost exclusively only contagious when people are actually running fevers. In contrast, with the H1N1 influenza flu people can be very infectious for 24 hours when they have absolutely no symptoms at all, before they develop symptoms.

Why is the Minister of Health disregarding the ability of people with no symptoms at all to spread the H1N1 flu? Why is the government saying it is impracticable, as they did last week, for people who come from Mexico to stay away from large groups of Manitobans for five days until we know that they are not infectious?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): As I've said in this House before and will say again for all Manitobans, we are taking our advice from our Chief Provincial Public Health Officer, Dr. Kettner, who, of course, is in active consultation with chief medical officers across the nation and, of course, is connected on an international stage as we follow the H1N1 flu.

I can inform the member that the doctor did say last week, it doesn't seem reasonable to me and it doesn't seem reasonable to every chief medical officer of health across this country to do what the member opposite was recommending concerning quarantine. Those containment strategies are not

practical and, certainly, under these circumstances, no one is recommending them except perhaps the Member for River Heights.

Mr. Gerrard: Mr. Speaker, and yet the sort of approach that I've suggested, staying away from large groups, schools, staying away from hog barns—people have been very surprised at how easy this H1N1 flu can spread from people to hogs as we've seen in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the Minister of Agriculture (Ms. Wowchuk) why she failed to bring such a measure asking people to stay away from hog barns for five days after they had come from Mexico or the site of a major outbreak.

Is the Minister of Agriculture going to stand up, and why did the minister not be ready to guarantee and work with Manitoba Pork to do their best to guarantee that hogs in Manitoba will not be infected with this virus?

Ms. Oswald: I'll say again that our Chief Provincial Public Health Officer is giving advice to Manitobans concerning contracting H1N1. He's offering prudent advice that he's not giving in isolation but in concert with the chief medical officers of health across the nation and the Public Health Agency of Canada. We know, of course, that our chief veterinary officer, indeed in concert with ministers of Agriculture, is sending very strong messages so as not to fearmonger on the issue of eating pork, which is very safe, Mr. Speaker.

I have to say that the member opposite is starting to sound a little bit like Joe Biden in the United States and a lot like China in his approach, which is not being embraced across the nation as the prudent way to go.

Nor'West Co-op Community Health Centre New Facility Request

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Speaker, back in April 2007 the government issued a press release, and it was just weeks prior to an actual election call, I understand, in which the headline was "Province to invest more than \$2 million in a health service centre in northwest Winnipeg."

They're talking about Nor'West Health. In fact, at the end of the press release it states, final site selection for the Access Nor'West is expected later this year. Mr. Speaker, like ending hallway medicine, those commitments were flushed down the toilet.

My question for the Minister of Health: Does this government have any intentions whatsoever to materialize on the promise of delivering a new facility for Nor'West in northwest Winnipeg?

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Yes.

Building Canada Fund Project Announcements

Mr. Gregory Dewar (Selkirk): As members know, our government believes in investing in rural Manitoba. In fact, just last Friday, Mr. Speaker, I joined the Premier (Mr. Doer) and the Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation and others to announce the three levels of government will be joining forces to announce infrastructure projects worth close to \$250 million including a \$9.7-million upgrade to the Selkirk water treatment plant.

My question to the minister is: Will he offer more details to the House regarding this announcement and explain how these projects will boost the rural economy?

Hon. Ron Lemieux (Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation): Mr. Speaker, we're pleased to partner with the federal government and various municipal governments on the Building Canada Fund which will provide economic stimulus for rural Manitoba and continue building well into the future.

Then, when we take a look, Mr. Speaker—the opposition taking cheap shots at the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) and other comments with regard to the Building Canada Fund—constituencies like Steinbach, Arthur-Virden, Lakeside, Brandon, Springfield, Turtle Mountain, Morris, Pembina, all of these constituencies of members opposite have many, many infrastructure projects right in their own backyard.

Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to building Manitoba. With this announcement, we'll continue to do so well into the future.

Hog Industry Economic Challenges

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, the H1N1 situation is having a negative economic impact on the pork industry. Countries like China are placing import restrictions on pork from parts of Canada even though this is not a food safety issue. Markets are falling, hurting Manitoba pork producers. This is a severe blow at a time when our producers are trying to recover from a prolonged

period of low prices, high input costs and the effects of country-of-origin.

Mr. Speaker, could the Minister of Agriculture please advise this House with an update and an economic impact study on the H1 situation and the economic package that's going to be put in place to save our industry here in Manitoba.

Hon. Rosann Wowchuk (Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Initiatives): Mr. Speaker, I want to assure the members opposite that the staff in Manitoba, the chief veterinarian officer, is working very closely with CFIA, working very closely with others to ensure that the information is put out that this is not a food safety issue and it should not impact trade.

I will inform the member that I have also had discussions with the federal minister on those issues and certainly want to assure this House that the steps are being taken to ensure that this is not used as a trade barrier with the United States. I believe we have to continue to work with other countries to ensure that those doors stay open and that the message is clear, that the food product from Manitoba is a safe food product.

Mr. Speaker: Time for oral questions has expired.

*(14:20)

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Minnetonka School 50th Anniversary

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Water Stewardship): Fifty years ago, a small six-room school named Minnetonka was opened on the banks of the Red River in the city of St. Vital. The attendees were children from the local neighbourhood, most if not all of them walking or biking to school every day, many of them living close enough to go home for lunch.

This was a school that I attended from grades 1 to 9. I remember walking into grade 1 and wondering just what school was really all about. My teacher, Ms. Unger, greeted us all at the door, and, because of her kind and welcoming ways, I quickly realized that school was all about loving to learn.

The years that I attended Minnetonka were interesting ones for the community. It was the time that Darwin School was developed. Minnetonka was expanded to include a gym, which was the start of the Minnetonka Mustangs. Much more instruction space, starting as an open-area concept, was

included, a music room, an open-air patio, and our very own library was developed.

Shortly after that, busing began and a whole new set of friends appeared every day from south St. Mary's Road and even beyond that exotic ring road called the Perimeter Highway. So much has changed since my time, but one thing that remains constant is the fact that Minnetonka is a true community school with at least the third generation of children from the surrounding neighbourhood attending.

As the local MLA who grew up in the area, I know that there are now the children of the children whom I went to school with attending Minnetonka today.

My education began at Minnetonka, and I have been able to receive a Masters Degree. I owe my life to my education. Doors have opened for me that I did not even know were there. As the youngest child of a working-class family, I would not have been able to access these opportunities through any avenue other than an effective public education system. It is because of the dreams of each and every child in Minnetonka that we need to continue to support public education and community schools today so that their dreams may become tomorrow's reality.

Happy birthday, Minnetonka, and here is to at least 50 more years.

Osborne House 35th Anniversary

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Osborne House, which commemorated its 35th anniversary this past Thursday evening at Government House.

I was pleased to be able to attend this event, honouring a special place that has provided countless women with somewhere to turn when options seem limited and somewhere safe to be when violence threatened.

The event celebrated the tremendous community pioneers that identified a pressing need in their community, coming together to create Osborne House. It was also an opportunity to recognize the many volunteers, staff members and board members that have overseen the successful operations of the shelter for 35 years.

In the beginning, a small initiative on Hargrave Street began to make a difference in the lives of Winnipeg women. In 1994, the first Osborne House was generously donated by June Menzies as a shelter

from the storm. In 1979, Osborne House moved to Balmoral Street, a 30-bed facility with only one bathroom, and in 1989 moved again to its present location, a 12,000-square-foot, 12-bedroom facility with several bathrooms and a wide range of services for women to access.

While we celebrate that a safe place like Osborne House is available to women in Manitoba, we could not help but be disappointed that our society continues to have a need for shelters like Osborne House. We cannot help but be saddened that in the 21st century we continue to see families devastated by domestic violence and women suffering abuse at the hands of their partners.

It is important that we all take an active interest in understanding the underlying issues that allow cycles of violence to continue and commit to ending that cycle.

I congratulate Osborne House on a very successful event on Thursday evening. Let us look forward to a world where violence is a thing of the past, and, until then, be incredibly appreciative of places like Osborne House and the good work that they do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Kevin Chief

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Mr. Speaker, a tireless community educator in our province who inspires inner city children to reach for their dreams was recognized and thanked for his hard work at the Premier's Volunteer Service Awards.

Kevin Chief is the co-ordinator of the University of Winnipeg's Innovative Learning Centre which brings hundreds of children onto the campus each year from the Eco-Kids programs to assist them in reaching their academic potential.

On April 22, 2009, Kevin Chief was recognized for this outstanding contribution to the community with a 2009 Premier's Volunteer Service Award. These awards are in co-operation with Volunteer Manitoba and are meant to honour the efforts and dedication of outstanding volunteers throughout the province.

Five individuals receive the award each year and this year, Kevin Chief was one of them. Kevin is passionate about serving the Aboriginal community. He has volunteered with the Aboriginal Council of Winnipeg since 2005, sat on the proposal selection committee for the Centre of Aboriginal Human

Resource Development, sits on the board for the Neeginan Development Corporation, was a volunteer basketball coach of Team Manitoba at the 2002 North American Indigenous Games, and is the Metis pavilion co-ordinator of Folklorama. He is also the executive director of the Winnipeg Aboriginal Sport and Recreation Association.

Kevin attended the University of Winnipeg on basketball scholarships. He obtained a Bachelor of Arts in justice and law and is currently working on his Masters in Education at the University of Winnipeg. He is an example to all of us of the outstanding people we have in Manitoba and of the great things one person can accomplish. His hard work, commitment and dedication are a testament to his strong character and an inspiration for the rest of us.

I would like to congratulate him on this award and thank him for his tireless efforts in making Manitoba a stronger community.

Hog Industry Economic Challenges

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I rise today to speak about Manitoba's pork industry. This valuable sector creates about 15,000 direct and indirect jobs and contributes approximately \$1 billion annually to the provincial economy. Mr. Speaker, for the past number of months, we've seen a downturn in the price of hogs, coupled with high input costs and the effects of country-of-origin labelling. It's been very challenging for Manitoba hog producers. However, there's been a bit of optimism in the price in the recent weeks when hog prices started to slowly move upwards.

Enter the H1N1 flu, which has had a tremendous impact on the pork industry. We're seeing hog prices down just when there seemed to be some hope of better returns. There has also been a trade impact and some countries have erected trade barriers, refusing to take hogs from certain parts of Canada. The timing could not have been worse for Manitoba hog producers as you try to recover from the prolonged economic challenges.

As I pointed out in my questions earlier, Mr. Speaker, this is a devastating blow to the pork industry. Producers need a helping hand right now, more than ever, if they are going to survive this latest challenge. Many have put their life savings into staying afloat, as they try to combat challenges over which they have no control, like country-of-origin labelling, like the hog moratoriums, among others.

As we know or always should know, the H1N1 flu is not about the pork industry. High quality Canadian pork is still safe to eat, but our producers are trying to manage the public misconception that there might be something wrong, especially when this flu was incorrectly named the swine flu at the onset. Changing the name to H1N1 was a step in the right direction. But we, as members of this House, need to get out in front of the issue.

We need to tell the world that Manitoba produces safe, high quality, tasty pork products that are highly sought after. If each one of us goes home tonight and has pork, there's a sign of commitment to our producers. Let's all tell our family, our friends, our neighbours what a great product we have grown right here in this great province of Manitoba. Let's not let the concern of H1N1 unfairly target Manitoba pork producers. Thank you Mr. Speaker.

**River East Transcona
English-Ukrainian Program**

Ms. Erna Braun (Rossmere): I rise today to highlight a wonderful event I had the privilege of attending last week. On April 30, I joined the River East Transcona School Division's Ukrainian bilingual program for their annual traditional Easter breakfast which was held at Springfield Heights School. This fun event joins together staff, students and parents from the schools offering the English-Ukrainian bilingual program: Springfield Heights School, Bernie Wolfe Community School and Chief Peguis Junior High School.

This marvellous Easter breakfast showcased with pride the heritage of the Ukrainian community in Manitoba. The morning offered many exciting sights and sounds with a program full of traditional songs and dance, as well as a tasty Ukrainian breakfast of cooked eggs, paska, babka, ham, kovbasa and traditional pastries. The highlight of the morning was the egg game, Цокання, which had students and adults alike lining up to claim the title of reigning champion.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to commend the Manitoba Parents for Ukrainian Education, who are an important organization of support to the parent associations of schools providing the English-Ukrainian bilingual program. They are dedicated to the promotion, enhancement and expansion of the program in Manitoba and support members of the Ukrainian community to access quality public education that reflects the needs of students.

Mr. Speaker, I ask the House to join me today in congratulating the students, staff and parents of the River East Transcona School Division's English-Ukrainian bilingual program on a job well done. Thank you.

**ORDERS OF THE DAY
GOVERNMENT BUSINESS**

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if you might resolve the House into Committee of Supply.

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

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

**COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY
(Concurrent Sections)**

HEALTH AND HEALTHY LIVING

* (14:40)

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

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Let me start off with a question on the H1N1 flu. The minister is very reluctant to even hint or suggest that it might be reasonable for somebody coming from a place where there's a major outbreak, like Mexico, to stay away from large groups in Manitoba. Maybe the minister can explain why.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): Well, the member's just incorrect in making a statement that he just did. I don't have any particular passion or reluctance concerning the H1N1 virus outside of what I'm being advised by medical experts. That's my responsibility. I would not substitute my judgment as a politician for the advice of our Chief Provincial Public Health Officer and medical officers of health across the nation. Indeed, the Public Health Agency of Canada, I would not substitute my individual judgment for their judgment.

What I did say to the member one of the last times we met was that I don't believe now is the time to play politics or to politicize a very serious issue, and I said that, regardless of manner in which the inquiry was made or the advice was delivered, I would listen and that I would consult with medical experts, not substitute my non-medical judgment. I would consult with medical experts.

Indeed, the issue of quarantine, isolation, is a part of pandemic preparedness. It is a part of our pandemic preparedness, Madam Chairperson. It's part of that plan and it was examined and discussed by medical experts, and it is not a protocol they are advising. I will certainly take my advice from Dr. Kettner, from Dr. Butler-Jones, the medical officers of health across Canada, and I will state that there will be differing opinions on a variety of protocols. We see this in the news every day. Some people are commenting that there are more news stories than there are confirmed cases of the illness in Canada. Whether that's a salient point, I won't comment. We see across the world there are varying opinions on whether or not to close schools. There are varying opinions on the use of antivirals for prophylaxis. There are varying opinions on surgical mask versus N95. There are varying opinions, indeed, on the subject of quarantine, you know, where we've seen some jurisdictions take what is by medical experts being called extreme measures.

But it is my responsibility as Minister of Health for the Province of Manitoba to take advice from the experts here in Manitoba and nationally, and it is not their advice at this time to follow the suggestions that the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) made last week.

Mr. Gerrard: I should make sure that things are clear and that the minister is not trying to misrepresent what I'm saying, just as she accuses me of trying to misrepresent what she has said. I have not argued for quarantining people. What I have suggested is that it's reasonable for the Minister of Health and the government to indicate to people who have come from a site of a major outbreak that it is sensible if they stay away from large groups of people in Manitoba for a five-day period, and, of course, if they have no symptoms in five days we know that they're clear of the H1N1 flu and that there's no longer a problem or a possibility of them then spreading the flu to somebody else. So I think that, you know, the minister—we need to be clear both ways here.

For example, there was a situation in Vernon, B.C., Madam Chairperson. Now I know the decision has been made differently here in Manitoba in terms of closing schools, but a school was closed in Vernon, B.C. because somebody came down, or a child, a student came down with the H1N1 virus and may have infected others in the school. As the minister I'm sure is well aware, at Kings-Edgehill School in Nova Scotia there were, in this case, several children who'd been in Mexico who came back, and I'm understanding that most of the 33 cases of the H1N1 flu in Nova Scotia actually are from people who were at the Kings-Edgehill School, and that this has spread within the school.

I mean, we know historically, we know from present-day examples that this flu can be spread reasonably easily when you've got quite a number of people in close proximity. The measure that I suggested, which was for somebody coming back from Mexico to stay away from a location where there is a large group of people for five days, would, for example, have eliminated the need for the closure in the school in Vernon.

It is too early, of course, to know exactly what the situation is going to be in Brandon with the child who has been diagnosed with H1N1 flu, and we will see how that evolves from the story and what we know. The minister may know more, that this child may well have been very close to the end of the period of having the flu when the child was in the school. So it may not have been all that infectious. I don't know the specific details.

In any event, I would just, you know, make that point to the minister so that we're clear.

Ms. Oswald: Again, I will reiterate to the member that, again, regardless of the forum in which the member will provide advice and raise suggestions, regardless of the forum in which he will not raise advice or suggestions, I committed to him that I would pass on that advice to the medical experts that are advising me and advising Manitoba Health and Healthy Living. I did that and there was discussion, indeed, on some of these points. There has been discussion on a national stage, including the Public Health Agency of Canada and Dr. Butler-Jones, and this was not the approach that was recommended.

I'm not saying that everybody in the universe holds a unified opinion on exactly what protocols should be followed on issues of infection control, but I am saying that the consensus, overwhelmingly, was

to follow through with the protocols that Dr. Kettner is recommending. They're consistent.

Again, I'm not going to engage in a medical debate with the member for a lot reasons; chiefly among them, he is a doctor and I am not. But the issue of separating people, asymptomatic individuals, for periods of time, five days, seven days, whatever is being recommended, is an interesting one in that we know that there is discussion about human-to-human transmission, and we know that the illness is being reported in—is it over 30 of the United States, now? I believe that's the case. And while there are contact traces being done concerning people coming from Mexico, or not, as I understand, from the medical experts, basic principles of transmission from human to human would, very possibly, have to include people travelling to all of those states as well, and it does become a complex matter.

So, again, I will concede the doctor's medical degree over mine, and I will tell him that I will continue to hear his advice on the issue of H1N1 and, in fact, I would argue, on other matters. While we spend a lot of time in combat in the Legislature, I know that the member and I, along with other members of the Legislature, have had constructive discussions about matters of health and have made amendments to protocols and to ideas. We've passed private members' bills, so it is not unprecedented for me to listen to the member opposite. I am just saying that in this case, or in these cases, there were a few ideas put forward when tested with our Chief Provincial Public Health Officer and, indeed, on a national stage with medical officers of health, the advice was not supported at that time.

If the member has more advice to offer, suggestions to make, I will commit to him to test them with those that are advising me. I don't believe now is the time for political football. I think that patients aren't served well when we do that. So I'll commit to the member to continue to raise issues and I will also commit to all Manitobans that I'm going to take my advice from our Chief Provincial Public Health Officer who, of course, works in concert with his colleagues across the country and internationally.

* (14:50)

Mr. Gerrard: Just a follow up comment in terms of whether you need to do anything for, at this point, countries other than Mexico. There is a general approach in terms of flu. When people talk about the flu being in a few people, whether it be in a state or

in a city, even Halifax, where it's in a school, there is a difference between relatively small numbers of people in an area and the flu getting out into the community to the point that you have hundreds of cases. Clearly, at this point, although the numbers are growing in different parts of the world, the situation in Mexico is the only one where, right now, it's widespread in the community and not just in a few isolated—whether it be family or an individual school, what have you.

So I think, when I'm talking about suggesting to people who come from Mexico, where it is widespread in the community, that one would treat that differently from a location where there have been a few isolated cases, and at that point it is still fairly well contained.

Let me ask a little bit more about another area which is important in terms of flu handling, and that deals with whether or not government is advising people to go and see their doctor, and, I mean, at this point it is a mild flu and it's not the severe form that we had with SARS. But at some point there are concerns of people who are infected going into a doctor's office and spreading it among patients, some of whom may be not well. It seems to me that the communication so far hasn't been entirely clear in terms of whether somebody should phone their doctor, whether they should visit their doctor in the doctor's office, or call Health Links, which is a third option which is being talked about.

Ms. Oswald: Madam Chair, well, I want to be clear with the member opposite that communications concerning the advice of the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer have been consistent and, indeed, in my belief, they have been clear.

There have been two very consistent themes for Manitobans: follow standard precautions against the spread of the flu and go to your doctor when you would ordinarily do so. So, if you do not feel that great but it is not a time that you would normally seek time with your family doctor, that would not be the time to go. If you are not feeling very well and it is a time that you would seek help from your family doctor, then the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer is advising that you go.

There are messages concerning Health Links for people who have questions and, indeed, we've added resources to Health Links to address a potential surge that might exist there.

I can inform the member that there's also a lot of work being done in communicating with groups across the population. There have been many communications going out to a variety of groups like schools and day cares, colleges and universities, to municipal groups, to the Manitoba Federation of Labour, to First Nations groups, many groups across the population with these consistent messages.

I can let the member also know that in the specific area of our first confirmed case in Manitoba, additional communications and work have been added.

We know, of course, that Dr. Kettner previously stated in his daily briefings that it really was only a matter of time until we had a confirmed case, and, indeed, now we do. I'm also very pleased to hear that so far this individual's illness has been of the mild variety. There are even some reports emerging that this individual has recovered. Either way, good news.

We communicated quickly with the public once the positive lab test result came forward. As soon as the facts were assembled and the family was contacted there was communication to the public made the next afternoon.

This individual, of course, is located in the Brandon Regional Health Authority in a specific school, and public health nurses and doctors have made information available to the family and to the school. The public health nurses are visiting all Brandon schools this week to ensure that students, parents and staff have information that they need about H1N1 and they started today within the school affected by the patient's family.

We've also been clear through Dr. Kettner regarding decisions and reasons why the school was not closed and those are consistent, of course, with the guidelines from the Public Health Agency of Canada. Even before this case, we had already distributed public health information about H1N1 to the schools in Manitoba. I can inform the member, as I did to others last week, that we have at the ready flu clinics available to be organized within hours should that situation present itself and be recommended by the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer as a strategy that we will use going forward to stream individuals that may be presenting with H1N1.

So I believe the communications have been consistent, frequent and clear and we will continue to make those statements concerning appropriate

infection control and appropriate response when an individual Manitoban believes that they have the flu, H1N1, or any flu.

Mr. Gerrard: Let me move on to another epidemic which is sweeping the province and which the government acknowledges on its Web site, the epidemic of diabetes, and just ask the minister what the latest numbers are, from which year and what the minister's target is in terms of reducing the numbers of people with diabetes in Manitoba?

Ms. Oswald: As I've expressed to the member before, of course, in Manitoba Health and Healthy Living we have a shared responsibility for topics, issues and files. The issue of diabetes prevention and promotion of healthy living is one chiefly held by the Minister of Healthy Living (Ms. Irvin-Ross).

Of course we share in our discussions with a shared deputy minister and, indeed, it is an area that the Minister of Healthy Living takes a lead on. We do have time set aside for questioning for topics under Healthy Living for tomorrow. I believe, in agreement with the official opposition, that time has been set for the beginning of the session tomorrow. Having said that, the Minister of Healthy Living has agreed to make herself available today in the event that there wasn't enough time within that hour for all members to question and she's quite prepared to answer this line of questioning now for the members.

So I'll turn matters over to the Minister of Healthy Living to answer questions on the file in which she is the lead.

*(15:00)

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister of Healthy Living): I thank the member for the question. We do not have surveillance information available at this time, but we will get it to you, and we will take it under notice and forward it to you.

We are very committed. At the Province of Manitoba, we're working with all of our community partners in dealing with this issue of diabetes. We have made a number of investments around Chronic Disease Prevention Initiative, which can directly impact individuals' health status through opportunities of physical activity, nutrition. We also have the regional diabetes program, which we support.

We provide information around awareness and prevention but also address treatment. We have a

program which we are funding, called Getting Better Together, where it is a peer support group where individuals come together and talk about the impact of their chronic disease and how they can continue to live a healthy lifestyle. So we make a number of investments across the board. We have funded healthy living activators across the province. Those activators will be sharing the word about prevention and working with our community partners to do that, as well.

Mr. Gerrard: Back to the Minister of Health on one of the areas which has been sort of problematic to say the least. That is in the area of shoulder surgery where the wait times have tended to be long, where I continue to hear of people having to go outside of Manitoba because the procedures are not available in a reasonable time here. Can the minister provide a bit of an update on shoulder surgery?

Ms. Oswald: Yes, the member and I have discussed this issue before, and, admittedly, while we have seen very good success in the area of hip and knee wait times being reduced, we know there are other quality-of-life wait times that have not been coming down as fast. In some cases there have been increases, but I am very happy that the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority has recruited Dr. Old, who is seeing patients already, who is already assisting in bringing down wait times we have had for shoulders. We know this is going to take a period of time to get through what might be defined as a backlog in times.

We are continuing to aggressively recruit. In this particular specialty area, we've already seen some success with the Winnipeg region being able to have success with that particular recruit, and we're committed to, as we have with hips and with knees, make a substantial reduction in wait times for shoulder surgery.

Mr. Gerrard: In this session, we have already, through first reading, and coming up in the next few weeks to the second reading, a bill requiring screening of newborns for hearing deficits. Such a measure is present in most states in the United States and is widely recognized as being important. I wonder whether the minister has had a look at the legislation and whether she would consider supporting it.

Madam Chairperson: Order, please. I would like to remind members that currently before this committee is the Estimates for the Department of Health and Healthy Living. I would note for members

Beauchesne's citation 832, which advises that, as creatures of the House, committees can only consider those matters which have been committed to them by the House.

Further, although we don't have the bill number right now, the bill the member has been mentioning is currently listed on the Order Paper under second reading. I would therefore respectfully note this committee is not the proper forum for the discussion of this bill. I would ask all members to focus their comments on the matter currently before this committee.

Ms. Oswald: I thank you for the clarification concerning making commentary on a specific piece of legislation or otherwise, and shall not go against the will of the Chair and the rules of this Legislature.

I will say, broadly, on the issue of newborn hearing screening that indeed we do have screening in Manitoba, not in every regional health authority. We do have funding that has been dedicated towards the infant hearing screening program called I hear Manitoba through the Children's Therapy Initiative, which is a joint initiative of Education, Family Services, Health and Healthy Child since 2004. That actually falls under the budget of Family Services and Housing.

We know that the goals of that program are important ones because they, of course, are centred around early intervention.

We know our largest regional health authority, the WRHA, screens what medical experts would define as high-risk infants only, and we will continue to work with our regional health authorities and take the best advice that we can as we move forward to expand screening programs, whether it's a screening program for this important initiative for the health and well-being of our children or other screening initiatives that are important for children and important for adults as well.

So we do have some screening. We don't, at this time, have universal screening, and we'll continue to work with those experts to move forward for the best possible program in the Department of Health when it comes to newborn hearing screening.

Mr. Gerrard: As the minister is well aware, the tragic death of Brian Sinclair in the emergency room at the Health Sciences Centre last September has sparked a lot of public comment and a lot of concern about the situation in the emergency room at the Health Sciences Centre and at others.

I just, in this context, want to ask the minister if she has information on recent wait times in the emergency room, if she has any other updates on the situation at the Health Sciences Centre emergency room in the wake of what happened last fall.

Ms. Oswald: We know that the tragic death of Mr. Sinclair was very jarring for all Manitobans, and I include myself in that group. We know that it is unthinkable for somebody to go to an emergency room, sit for 34 hours and not get care.

We have, as a government, taken responsibility for this tragedy and conceded very early on what we knew the Chief Medical Examiner would tell us, and that is that it was a preventable death. The inquest, as the member knows, has been called. We welcome the facts coming forward in a very unbiased, clear due process, and we welcome the recommendations that will come from that inquest.

*(15:10)

I can let the member know, of course, that immediately after the tragedy of Mr. Sinclair's death, there were initiatives put into place in the Health Sciences Centre emergency room concerning identifying people that were waiting for care and doing frequent follow-ups to ensure that people were appropriately triaged. Of course, the renovations that have occurred at Health Sciences Centre and that are ongoing in other environments across Manitoba will go a long way to address some of the initial findings after the tragedy occurred.

I can also inform the member that at the end of March we announced a \$5.7-million initiative to strengthen emergency care in Manitoba's busiest ERs, including adding more than 60 staff and a provincial adviser on emergency patient care, Dr. Ricardo Lobato de Faria, who is viewed by many in Manitoba, and indeed nationally, as a driving leader in emergency care, based out of Seven Oaks Hospital, will serve as that provincial adviser, and do consulting, advising and hands-on work with staff on the front line to really work to put the patient at the centre of the journey. We know that the Seven Oaks ER is viewed by many to be among the best, if not the best, in Canada, in terms of patient flow and a patient-centred approach. We know that much of that has to do with how Dr. Lobato de Faria has re-engineered processes and has worked as a member of that team to really transform care. So we believe having him as a provincial adviser on emergency care is going to be one of the most significant

initiatives that can come forward, allowing him to share his leadership.

That announcement in March also included the modernizing of ERs across the province and focussing on vulnerable visitors to emergency rooms. Of course, that would be a direct response to what we saw so tragically happen to Mr. Sinclair.

We know that we continue to provide as much information as possible to the public concerning how our facilities are working. There are investments being made in information technology that, as we go forward, will enable us to provide even more information to the people of Manitoba about wait times, particularly in the area of emergency care, and that action, of course, has been taken on all 46 recommendations of the Emergency Care Task Force. Some of them are not fully complete. As we know, they involve capital infrastructure that is currently under way. Some of it involves the investment in information technology, which is under way, but many of those recommendations have been completed, and we're going to continue to work toward finishing those.

We know that for some people in Manitoba going to the emergency room is their first point of contact with the health-care system. We know that we want that care to be as efficient, as compassionate, and as complete as possible. That's what we're committed to do, and that's what we're investing in doing.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Chair, I do have a series of, hopefully, what will be short questions and answers to the Minister of Health.

First, I must acknowledge, in regard to the Seven Oaks Hospital emergency situation, I do appreciate the gesture that has been made by the Minister of Health in terms of the arrangements of a meeting, which, I understand, is going to take place on May 13. What I'll do is reserve my questions regarding the Seven Oaks Hospital until possibly concurrence, or a later time.

I also want to acknowledge a pleasant surprise in today's question period in regard to Nor'West health. I didn't quite expect the minister to be as forthright as saying yes and then sitting down. I'm wondering if the minister can just elaborate as to when she anticipates that we could be seeing a shovel put in the ground for the new health service centre for Nor'West Community Health.

Ms. Oswald: Madam Chair, we did make this commitment, and we are following through with the commitment. The RFP for Access Northwest was released on Friday, so the due process that RFP takes and tendering and so forth will unfold naturally, and we'll get it done.

Mr. Lamoureux: There is a great deal of expectation. I know there was a proposal call that went out previously, I believe two years ago, and nothing really came of it. But, my understanding—because we don't necessarily have to spend that much time on the issue, my understanding is that the government is committed to making it happen sometime within the next two years. That's safe to say, yes?

Ms. Oswald: Yes, it is.

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Chairperson, another issue that I had raised was in regard to Dr. Postl. I had asked the question of the Premier (Mr. Doer) and the Premier indicated, he made the assumption that he would think that it would be public information as to how much Mr. Postl would be receiving in terms of tax dollars. The Minister of Health, can she give confirmation that the Premier's assumption is correct?

Ms. Oswald: I can let the member know there has been some discussion over time about this particular issue. By law, which is the same law that was passed by the Conservative opposition when they were in government, salary information for health professionals is available to the public upon request from the region. I can let the member know, because this has been made public as a result of this law, that in '07 Dr. Postl's salary was \$373,000; in '06, it was \$387,000 and change, in both cases. That was for 2006, his salary was 387. In 2005, his salary was 358—closer to \$359,000. His 2008 salary will be made public, which is the time that it's made public every year, I have learned, at the end of June as per the legislation.

Madam Chair, I can also inform the member that all medical fee-for-service amounts over \$50,000 are published in the Manitoba Health and Healthy Living Annual Report. In '07-08, Dr. Postl, you know, as per this report, received just about \$58,000 for fee-for-service remuneration for his work as a pediatrician. In '06-07, he received \$62,000 for this work, and Dr. Postl was not listed in the '05-06 annual report, which means he received less than \$50,000 for fee-for-service remuneration. I also think, given the line of questioning that has occurred

and the nature of the questions, it's very important to put in context that Dr. Postl is the CEO of the largest corporation in Manitoba, with a budget of about \$1.8 billion and 28,000 employees.

We know that Dr. Postl's work is respected locally, provincially and nationally, clearly not by everyone in this room but by many. We know that he was sought out to be the federal adviser on wait times. We know he stays connected to the front lines by continuing his work there himself as a pediatrician with children in Winnipeg and remote communities, even earning the Canadian Association of Paediatric Health Centre's Child Health Award of Distinction in '06.

* (15:20)

There is no dispute that Dr. Postl could do a lot better financially if he took offers in other parts of the country, of which there are many for him. His salary is lower than the salaries of many health CEOs in Canada and his commitment is to Manitoba, and, indeed, through the course of his medical career, to the most vulnerable children in our province. While I understand, on one level, the member's line of questioning about the public's right to know about his salary—that's why there's a law and it gets published Health and Healthy Living annual reports—I do not share his view on some of the other comments that he's made about Dr. Postl, up to and including the one where he says I am intimidated by him.

There are a number of things in this world—Madam Chair, if I might just finish—that frighten me. I'm frightened just about every day that maybe I'm not being the best possible mother to my son. I'm frightened that my brother's going to die of cancer, and I'm frightened that maybe this illness or some other illness is going to come and hurt people and everybody doesn't work together to do the best that they can do. But you know what? I went through childbirth and I taught junior high. There aren't that many things that scare me, and I would include Dr. Postl in that group.

Mr. Lamoureux: You know, I can tell the minister that what worries me is when a minister or a government loses control over bureaucracy, and I believe that has taken place in the province of Manitoba, that there is very little accountability within health-care bureaucracy today. But, before I go on the health-care bureaucracy, let me ask the question. The numbers that the minister gave—and I take it she has no problem with the complete, full

disclosure in terms of just how much money is actually being paid—if you take a look at it, '06, Mr. Postl would have received \$387,000; '07, \$373,000. On the surface, it would appear as if he actually had a decrease. What I am told is that there was actually an increase.

Can the minister indicate whether or not the gross pay for Mr. Postl was higher than \$373,000 in '07?

Ms. Oswald: Yes, first of all, on the issue of accountability, we know that we have worked in conjunction with our regional health authorities to have them become more accountable, not less. We have worked with our regional health authorities to ensure, particularly on recommendations from the external review of regional health authorities, that they provide more information to the public about spending, about programs, about what is available to Manitoba people as patients.

We know that we have worked with our regions to improve communications with the public. We know one of the recommendations that came out of the external review of regional health authorities was that while there were systems in place to communicate with the public when regional health authorities were set up—district health advisory councils—we know that they are not working in the way that they were set up to work. The regionalization working group that has been formed in response to the external review of regional health authorities has been tasked with this very complex contact with the public area that is not being addressed in the way that community members advise us they would like to be addressed. This is a very complex human dynamic, and that group is working very diligently on that.

So improving accountability is a very significant and important part of how regional health authorities are working. We know that regional health authorities are required to come forward with an annual health plan. We know that the financial reporting and statistical information has to be very clear to Manitoba Health. We know that year-end reporting requirements are very rigorous. We know that governance models are being worked on, amended and improved across Manitoba. So there are any number of accountability exercises that are going on including community health assessments, including coming forward with critical incident reporting, and management and learning. So

accountability within the RHAs is a subject of much discussion and much activity.

So the first part of the member's statement earlier certainly needs to be corrected in terms of how Manitoba Health and Healthy Living is working with our regional health authorities to improve governance. We know that there have been situations in the past where there have been allegations in regional health authorities and there have been concerns and, indeed, where individuals have been removed and there have been interim leaders put in to restore accountability in the confidence of the public.

Manitoba Health and Healthy Living is not shy from making that kind of a move. We continue to have work to do as evidenced by advice in the external review. But on balance, we know that the work that's being done to hold down administrative costs, redirecting those costs to the front line, and improving accountability and governance across the regions, is of paramount concern for Manitoba Health and Healthy Living.

On the specific issue of details of pensions of employees of the regional health authorities, I would not feel it appropriate to talk about such details of people's pension arrangements. These are personal arrangements between the board and the employee. I don't think that is information that's required by law. I don't feel appropriate discussing it at this table. I will seek clarification on that issue for the member, but I can say that that which is required by law concerning remuneration for Dr. Postl is available, as I stated earlier at the beginning of the answer.

Mr. Lamoureux: If a constituent asks me, as an MLA, how much do I make as an MLA, I'll let them know in terms of how much. I think it's around 81-82, I'm not 100 percent sure. But I would have, without any reservations, stating how much I make. That includes pension contributions.

Does the ministry not think that Manitobans deserve a straight-up answer?

Ms. Oswald: That's why there's a law that publicly discloses his salary and his fee-for-service remuneration.

Mr. Lamoureux: The question was, there is how much money we are paying and then there's how much money the law is actually requiring. It seems to be two different things.

Does the minister believe that the public has a right to know how much compensation that they're giving Dr. Postl?

* (15:30)

Ms. Oswald: I believe that the disclosure of CEO's remuneration is published every year, and I believe Manitobans have a right to know that. I believe, according to the Manitoba Health and Healthy Living report on remuneration of fee-for-service roles, that Dr. Postl or any other doctor working in Manitoba that makes over \$50,000, that should be made public. At this juncture, details of relationships between an employee and the board and the arrangements that are made concerning pensions, I don't feel it's appropriate to go outside of what the law is requiring, which is extensive in terms of public information. Again, I'll do more research on this issue about the public disclosure of the finite details of one's pension, and, you know, I'll commit to get back to the member more information about what is appropriate and what isn't. But, sitting at this table today, I can say to you that I am not certain that that's an appropriate thing for me to talk about. I will do more research on it, but I'm not prepared to give the details of that to the member today until I do that research.

Mr. Lamoureux: Is the minister prepared to give a personal opinion as to whether or not the public does have a right to know in terms of what full compensation a bureaucrat would be receiving through tax dollars?

Ms. Oswald: I think, in the context of my answer, you know, I've explained this a couple of times already to the member. I've said that there are laws in the public domain that regard the publishing of details about CEOs of regional health authorities and their salaries and doctors that bill fee-for-service.

I've also made my opinion very clear about my beliefs about the incredible gift that Dr. Postl is to the vulnerable children of this province. I have heard the member's editorial about Dr. Postl. I have read his remarks in *Hansard*. I have read the remarks of both he and his leader in print in the paper. I would define them as vicious personal attacks, and I do not share those views.

If the member is asking my opinion, I can say, wholeheartedly, that I do not share the opinion on the value of Dr. Postl to the Manitoba people of the Member for Inkster and the Leader of the Liberal Party. I believe that he brings incredible leadership,

particularly in the area of child health, but in work that's being done now in pandemic preparedness, in work that's being done in system innovation, in work that's being done in infection control, in work that's being done, indeed, in patient safety. So that is my opinion.

My opinion is that there are rules and laws that govern the disclosure of salaries, and I support those laws. It is my opinion that Dr. Postl could make a lot of money in a lot of other jurisdictions, much more than he's making here, plenty more. It is my opinion that Dr. Postl chooses to stay in Manitoba because he's committed to his patients and their families, he's committed to the system that he's working to build, he's been committed throughout his entire career to improving the status of health for First Nations, and he's committed to stay in Manitoba.

So, is it my opinion that people have a right to know how much public servants make? Yes, according to the law it is my opinion. Do I share the opinion of the member opposite that is so negative and vicious about Dr. Postl? I don't share that opinion.

Mr. Lamoureux: My final question with a bit of a commentary would be that the minister is right. We do have differing opinions.

I believe that health-care workers all over the province contribute immensely to the health care and protecting our children and providing everyone of all ages good quality health care. But I suspect that if the minister was to walk the front lines and get a true understanding of the system, she'll find that the Winnipeg Regional Health and other health authorities are not being graded that well. I think that she does a disservice by blindly supporting and believing what the CEO of Winnipeg Regional Health Authority does and says on all issues.

Believe it or not, her hero could be wrong. There is a possibility that he does make mistakes. After all, like her and like me, we are humans and we do make mistakes. I think that she needs to take those blinders off and to see that.

I would ask the Minister of Health, would she object to having Mr. Postl or other Winnipeg Regional Health Authority employees come before a standing committee of the Legislature?

I thank the Member for Charleswood for the opportunity to put forward a question.

Ms. Oswald: I stated a few times, when the member wasn't in the room, of course, how much we value the front-line workers. I heard the member say something that was contrary to that. I just need to correct the record, as usual, after he speaks.

As far as individuals appearing before committees, I know that these are matters that are addressed through negotiations with the House leaders, as does the member opposite. The member is asking me what I think. I said I think that those negotiations should continue. Are there parts of me that wouldn't mind witnessing a conversation between Brian Postl and the Member for Inkster? Yes, I would not mind that.

However, the issue of who appears when and in what forum, the four standing committees, certainly in my recent memory, have all been settled through negotiations through the House leaders, so it's my opinion that those protocols should continue.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Could the minister tell us if there are any triage nurses right now being asked to mask and gown in order to protect themselves from the flu, or are any being given the opportunity to voluntarily do so, if they feel like they want that extra protection?

Ms. Oswald: I can inform the member that information has been provided through the regional health authorities about the precautions that are recommended for front-line workers.

The recommended masking precautions, specifically, can be summarized as follows: In most circumstances, the standard surgical masks are being recommended. In some circumstances, described in guidelines provided by the Public Health Agency of Canada, the N95 respirator mask is to be used, and it has been determined that there are some grey areas where health-care providers may exercise their professional judgement on which mask to use. If any health-care provider is determining that an N95 mask, for example, is one that they need, then they should use one. That's what's being recommended and will be provided.

These are the recommended precautions by Dr. Kettner, and they are also recommended precautions that are consistent with the national guidelines issued by the Public Health Agency of Canada.

I can inform the member that Manitoba Health is, just this afternoon, meeting with the Manitoba Council of Health Care Unions to discuss

these recommended precautions, seek advice and check to see if any additional clarification is needed. After that meeting, another letter reiterating the guidelines is going to be sent out to front-line workers throughout the RHAs.

* (15:40)

So we believe that Manitoba, through the RHAs, has informed and will continue to inform front line health-care workers regarding the issues of masking and other materials as needed.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister tell us whether or not all RHAs have infection control guidelines developed and up to date?

Ms. Oswald: I can inform the member that guidelines and issues concerning infection control, this work is ongoing. I want to let the member know that all of the most recent best practice up-to-date information concerning H1N1 is being provided to all RHAs and those communications are being made through to front-line workers to ensure, regardless of where individual RHAs are in process of their infection guidelines, that they are up-to-date and working on the recommendations of the Public Health Agency of Canada and of course Manitoba's Chief Provincial Public Health Officer as well.

Mrs. Driedger: Some of my questions evolve from the accreditation report that was done of the WRHA a while ago but also in the Emergency Care Task Force. One of the concerns raised at the time was a number of departments having concerns about their ability to provide adequate infection control measures in light of concerns raised by SARS and pandemic influenza, and I hope that in that period of time—the task force was '04, SARS was '03 and certainly the accreditation report was '07, and even in '07 still, according to them, a number of things that should be done weren't being done.

So my questions are evolving just so that I have a clear understanding of progress that's been made since that period of time.

My other question—and I think it's a fairly significant one in terms of whether or not there's a procedure in place to manage surge capacity. My concern rests from the fact that right now our ERs are jammed up. There are a lot of patients in waiting rooms. People are waiting still eight to 10 hours in waiting rooms.

Hospitals, I'm told, are jammed up. There's no bed capacity. Our ICUs again have full beds. We don't have enough ICU and ER nurses in the system. There's a chronic shortage there that has not been rectified for a number of years. So, if a pandemic were to hit, my concern would be what will happen in our ERs and then following that onto the wards? How will surge capacity be managed?

Ms. Oswald: I can let the member know—we talked a little bit about this last week—that pandemic preparedness plans have been in the works for years. These would incorporate issues on infection control in emergency rooms and otherwise.

I know the member cites an accreditation report from the WRHA from about a year and a half ago, and we know that much has been done since then. Just to review a few of those things that we talked about last week, things that are now in place include: an information sharing agreement with all the organizations in the health-care system; a mutual aid agreement among the key organizations; the stockpile of antivirals; the cross-government incident command structure, which, of course, is alive and well each and every day as we go forward with H1N1; an interdepartmental committee on pandemic planning; ongoing participation in the national pandemic oversight committee. Of course, the proclamation of The Public Health Act has provided further tools for government and for the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer to issue orders as necessary in dealing with the minimizing of transmission of disease.

Also, of course, work has been done on infrastructure, on issues like isolation rooms. Since '99, we've invested about \$4.4 million to upgrade isolation rooms or build them from new in hospitals across the province. We know that the development of negative pressure isolation rooms has occurred, and we also know that through the context of the preparedness for a potential pandemic, our stockpiles of antivirals, of masks, of other equipment, have been, and continue to be, developed. As I said to the member before, we know that we are making plans with our regional health authorities, specifically on the issue of surge capacity, and when it's time to activate through our regional health authorities, there will be plans in place that can be operationalized within hours, such as H1N1 flu clinics.

All of these plans, of course, are being made incorporating the idea that the work force may be smaller because of individuals working on the front

line who may be sick or may have loved ones that are sick and, therefore, they don't want to come to work, they want to stay with their loved ones. So that's part of the plan is planning for a smaller work force. We know that there are plans to activate beds in intensive care units at the old Health Sciences Centre and Children's Hospital, if necessary.

There is a plan in place that would delay elective, non-essential procedures in clinic operations to free up space and to free up staff. There are plans in place concerning admissions to personal care homes, and these plans were tested outside of the H1N1 flu recently, during the flood when we had to, in very short order, move residents of the St. Adolphe Personal Care Home.

These protocols for dealing with what, for personal care home residents was a surge at that time, were able to be put into place and we were able to make a reasonably seamless move, probably not if you ask somebody from St. Adolphe that had to be moved out of their room to another place. But from a systems perspective, things went very smoothly and people were moved back very smoothly. That, of course, involved also taking care of issues like home care and so forth.

So the system does have plans in place to deal with a surge and will continue on that planning as the specifics of this illness continue to emerge and as we know more about the specific epidemiology and the specific needs that dealing with that illness will have.

Mrs. Driedger: If we looked at it really specific to something like Victoria Hospital—and I've actually been told by a nurse that the Vic is sometimes overcapacity in terms of the number of patients—so if we were to look at, say, 30 patients that needed to be admitted at the Vic and they have absolutely no beds, what happens then? Do we go into a code purple where people are prioritized to be able to go home and then if they go home, is home care then in place to be able to look after them because we are going to start to see this. In a pandemic, we could see all of that happening at every single hospital and we don't have the nurses to look after that, whether it's in the ER or the wards or ICUs, should it end up that a patient might need an ICU.

* (15:50)

So, as an example, if we're looking at the Vic and you've got 25 patients, what kicks in? Like, how does that all—what's the ripple effect to get 25 patients that need to be admitted—admitted

because, then, somebody's going to have to be kicked out of the hospital, I guess?

Ms. Oswald: Well, certainly, the member is describing the scenario that the regional health authorities are actively planning for. That involves, you know, you're describing what a surge is: 25 patients, 35 patients, whatever the number at whatever facility, the regional health authorities are planning their capacity, and it is going to depend on the nature and the severity of the illness. Again, those plans are being made as we go forward, whether it's, you know, closing down elective, non-essential-type services to redirect staff, whether it's halting admissions to personal care homes where possible. That's not always possible, but in situations where it is safe, all of these types of protocols are in place and it's all being done with the expectation that the work force will be smaller.

Every jurisdiction in Canada is experiencing a health human resource shortage. They are working on similar assumptions and these plans are extensive and, indeed, dynamic in the sense that they'll be responding to the severity and the type of the illness and the appropriate protocols. I know that we're working every day to build our work force. I feel a bit concerned that the public would get a message that there aren't enough people to take care of them. There are a lot of things about H1N1 that are very frightening to people and, while we have seen, by and large, a prevailing calm here in Manitoba and a confidence that people are going to be taken care of, I need the member to know that the plans are being made for an even smaller group of workers for the reason that I stated. I would be concerned if a message got out there that suggested that Manitoba was different from other jurisdictions in terms of having significant shortages of health human resources that didn't exist elsewhere and that people got unduly frightened about care that they might get. These plans are actively under way to deal with whatever kind of surge that we find and the conversations will continue as the illness emerges.

Mrs. Driedger: Well, I think people do need to be concerned when, you know, in the province we're short almost 1,300 nurses. That is something to be concerned about. Plus, in-home care, I understand that the shortages there also fairly significant. So I think the public would have a legitimate reason to be nervous.

But, even more so, when it comes to ER nurses and ICU nurses, because in the ICUs those numbers

are—you know, it's at a dangerously high nursing shortage, and the ERs aren't a whole lot better. These shortages have been chronic for some time and for some reason they don't seem to want to go away, and the ripple effect of all of that is nurses now being forced to work overtime and we know what happens. I mean, there's enough research on that to show that nurses that are working overtime make mistakes; they're tired. You can't have nurses being forced to work 16 hours or 24 hours and there not be some, you know, significant reasons for mistakes. So patient safety does become an issue in that.

While I know the other provinces are struggling with something similar, my concerns, you know, are about what's happening right here in Manitoba. I don't think it's a secret out there that there are some significant challenges with the nursing shortage, and it will have—heaven forbid that a pandemic strikes, but should it happen and people get really sick, then these challenges would be significant. So I don't think that can be downplayed in any way.

I'd like to ask the minister if there is a rapid response team set up right now in Manitoba that, for instance, if, in Swan River, there was a big outbreak, would there be a rapid response team that could come together really quickly and go into an area of the province and help out should a certain community be significantly affected?

Ms. Oswald: I can let the member know that there are plans in place to deal with specific, perhaps, clusters of illness that may emerge in a particular community. Our medical officers of health are actively involved in speaking with our regional health authorities about what the protocols will be concerning doctors or nurses or other health-care professionals that are needed.

I can let the member know, for example, in the situation of the first confirmed case in Manitoba that Manitobans learned of yesterday, work was done with the individual and their family on the journey of getting the test and getting the results. As soon as the facts were assembled and the family was contacted, the news became public, but while that was happening, in tandem, plans were made for public health nurses to visit all the schools in Brandon. Of course, Brandon was the area where the individual resides, the one who was a confirmed positive lab test result.

Public health nurses are going to visit all the schools in Brandon to ensure that students, parents and staff have the information they need. They

started today, with the school attended by the patient's family, to have that very specific kind of information getting to the people that might feel the most worried. I know the member would be happy to have the information that so far this individual has presented with a very mild form. Some reports are saying that this individual has recovered, which is good news.

You know, I'll wait until the final bell on that one, but the news is very positive about the progress of that individual, and there has been much discussion concerning whether or not a school closure would be recommended. That's not the recommendation of the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer, which is consistent with the Public Health Agency of Canada.

*(16:00)

Even in this situation where we are not having reported a severe situation, a response team has gone immediately to provide information about infection control and comfort to the community about going forward. So, you know, we do know that as far—going back to the nursing comments made by the member opposite, I don't disagree that all Manitobans want to ensure that we have plenty of nurses and plenty of doctors. That's why we've taken the steps that we have to bring more nurses to the work force and to build our complement of doctors as well. We know, specifically regarding ICU nurses, that additional intensive care training programs have been implemented. New protocols are in place concerning salary while nurses take that course that didn't exist before so that wouldn't be a barrier to those individuals that wanted to pursue training for ICU nursing.

We continue to work to build that work force, and I know that the member is not—I know this—that the member is not interested in creating any undue fear at a very frightening time across the world. I'm confident that the member knows the difference between creating fear and discussing an issue of nursing staffing and doctor staffing that is absolutely sensible to discuss.

This is on my mind these days. Over the weekend, or late last week, we received an email from some people living in the neighbourhood of the Seven Oaks hospital. They were very concerned because they'd heard that the emergency room was closing, and it was closed. While we all have our reasons for saying the things that we say in political terms, it's one of the reasons why I've been so

concerned about some of the rhetoric from another member in the House about this issue. It borders on dangerous in sending those messages.

Of course, we clarified the fact that Seven Oaks is open and among the best emergency rooms in the country with these individuals. But there is a line I think people in our line of work have to walk, and it is a time to take aggressive political shots—we all do it—and there is a time to work together to ensure that people are safe and feel safe. It's my belief that the member knows that, and I respect her questions about nursing, and I think she respects my point about fear—I think; I'm pretty sure.

Mrs. Driedger: I guess I would indicate at this point—the Minister brought it up. I certainly do think that we should not be doing anything to create fear in the public's mind. It's still obvious that there's a lot to be learned about whether we're even into the beginnings of a pandemic. That hasn't even been determined yet, so I think that people do need to sit back, wait.

The questions I'm asking are certainly around the issue of if this evolves to a pandemic. That becomes much more serious than a mild illness. Then I think we want to ensure that the system is ready to handle what might be, but certainly every indication right now—I don't sense that there needs to be any panic with what is happening in Manitoba right now, or even in Canada because it doesn't seem that the situation is more than a mild flu and perhaps isn't even much different than other flus that we see over the past number of years. So I can assure the minister that I'm certainly not going to be out taking political advantage of anything related to this and not fearmongering about it because I don't think, at this point and time, that's where anybody needs to be.

Madam Chair, can the minister indicate how many negative-pressure isolation rooms are currently ready to use in Manitoba?

Ms. Oswald: There are isolation rooms across Manitoba. We have 123 rooms and eight are under construction as we speak. I am informed, but I'm just double-checking, that that number of 123 is the number of negative-pressure, Madam Chairperson I'm going to double-check and confirm that there isn't a split between singularly isolation and negative-pressure.

I can say that there has been some discussion to date about whether or not a negative-pressure room is the appropriate environment for H1N1. That

discussion is still ongoing. There have been statements to date that that's not necessarily indicated, but that comes from medical doctors that are having many discussions about this. Certainly, what we've seen outside of Mexico is a series of mild illness. I know that there are reports, I believe, coming out of another jurisdiction in Canada today, of a more severe case. I believe it's a child, which is very concerning. It is a child in Alberta. I know that there is advice from the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer that it is a natural evolution of influenza to have transition go from where we are today to seeing a severe illness. It's logical and predictable, according to the medical experts. So we have, in the United States and Canada, certainly, been fortunate so far, but that doesn't mean that we can stand down in our planning, whether it's with negative-pressure availability or whatever is recommended in terms of isolation.

Really, the message from the Chief Provincial Public Health Officer has consistently been, to the public, do what you would normally do if you're sick. If you're sick enough to warrant going to the doctor, you should go. If you don't have a doctor, call Health Links and make a plan. If you're not sick enough, don't go. So there's a real conversation about maintaining a sense of what you would normally do.

His message to the health system has been quite the contrary. It's been: get ready and get ready for the worst possible scenario, and that's what we've been doing.

Mrs. Driedger: I had read that there was supposed to be a severe respiratory illness prep centre constructed at the Misericordia. Has that happened?

*(16:10)

Ms. Oswald: I will investigate the details on that particular item. Maybe if I can start with where she read it, it might help me locate it.

Mrs. Driedger: I don't have my files here, but it was probably in a news article a few years back and it—I'll go into the next question then because I think it came from around that same point in time.

There was supposed to be a preliminary course on surge capacity training for health-care staff to be developed and implemented in 2008, and I would ask her a question as to whether or not that happened.

Ms. Oswald: I will check the specifics on both fronts and return to the member.

Mrs. Driedger: There was also supposed to be a 25-member task force set up in 2007 to plan for a pandemic, and I'd like to ask the minister if that task force was set up, who was on it, who chaired it and who it reported to.

Mr. Doug Martindale, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Ms. Oswald: I just want to go back and confirm for the member that in terms of negative-pressure rooms, the 123-plus eight currently being developed, those are negative-pressure rooms.

Just to confirm on the issue of the surge capacity training, Manitoba Health and Healthy Living has developed and delivered surge capacity courses since 2006. Actually, the first course addresses physical surge capacity and trains participants to deploy the national emergency stockpile system. The second is on organizational surge capacity, and that is currently being delivered. I suspect they paused while we're dealing with surge capacity.

On the issue of the 25-member task force, Manitoba Health and Healthy Living uses the incident management system as a framework to prepare for the pandemic influenza planning. That system will also be used during health-system response. Incident management systems have been identified as best practice in emergency management.

So, within Manitoba Health and Healthy Living this system is called the pandemic preparedness and response executive steering committee and is headed by the Deputy Minister of Manitoba Health and Healthy Living and has a number of key departmental staff involved.

These include Arlene Wilgosh as the chair; Marie O'Neill the second vice-chair; Karen Herd, Chief Financial Officer; Terry Goertzen, ADM, Health Work Force; Bernadette Preun, ADM of Regional Affairs; Kim Sharman, ADM, Corporate and Provincial Program Support; Dr. Kettner; Dr. Weiss; Lorraine Adam, executive director of public health; Julie Kentner, communications co-ordinator; Gerry Delorme, logistics; Chief Director of the Office of Disaster Management Tony Messner; Finance Chief Controller Jean Cox; Operations Chief and Executive Director of Northern Rural Support Services Project Manager Lisa Gilmour; from the Office of Disaster Management, Carol Styles; Critical Issues Co-ordinator Dean Sigurdson from admin support.

This group meets monthly and reports to the Deputy Minister of Health. There are others under these people that work in conjunction with their representative on this team. I could probably go on, but I bet you don't want me to.

Mrs. Driedger: Now, in that list, Dr. Kettner seemed to be the only one that had a background and expertise in infection control, and I think what I had read in the paper, it might have been Dr. Margaret Fast that had talked about a 25-member task force to be set in '07 to plan for a pandemic. That sounds quite different from maybe what the minister was just referring to.

So I'm wondering if that initial task force never did happen, or if there might be another one out there that is more medically oriented versus administratively oriented.

Ms. Oswald: Well, yes, just to correct the member. Dr. Weiss is the medical officer of health for Brandon and the Assiniboine region, so brings much expertise in the area of public health and infection control. I can let the member know that, under this planning table, there are eight tables that bring in experts from the university, from RHAs, including infection control experts, that have been very actively involved in decision making and planning on pandemic preparedness.

I think Dr. Fast, who's retired now, if I remember correctly what you said, she probably would have been speaking only for the WRHA, not from a provincial planning perspective.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate whether or not ethical guidelines for pandemic influenza have been developed by Manitoba Health?

Ms. Oswald: Yes, there is a draft set. They've been shared and work is ongoing.

Mrs. Driedger: There was a movement a while back to transfer public health inspectors back to the domain of Health, and I'm just wondering if that indeed has happened at this point in time?

Ms. Oswald: Yes, it has happened everywhere except within the city of Winnipeg, and we're in negotiations with them now.

Mrs. Driedger: Is there a time frame in which the minister expects that to conclude?

Ms. Oswald: The sessions have been going on for some time now. Certainly, it's our hope that this happens as soon as possible, but those discussions

continue, and we hope to have them concluded as soon as we can.

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon West): Thank you, Mr. Acting Chairman. I fear your voice is a little hoarse. Is it flu? I hope not.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Martindale): No.

Mr. Borotsik: Through you to the Minister of Health. First of all, I'd like to thank her for the heads up just recently, and she knows of which I'm talking about. So I do appreciate that.

There are two issues. One that I have brought to this table before, and it's an issue that is very close and dear to the hearts of my constituents. That is the construction start for the CancerCare unit in the city of Brandon. We've had a number of announcements with respect to that facility, and I do know that there have been some changes in the design of it. Perhaps the minister would like to share with me, and through me, to my constituents, a construction start date and perhaps even a completion date, if the minister can be so forthcoming.

Ms. Oswald: I don't have my piece of paper in front of me with plans and dates, but I know the member asked me a question recently—I think it was in concurrence—about this, or in Interim Supply. He asked me if there was going to be an official beginning within a certain number of months. I didn't have that at my fingertips then, but I know now that I could have answered yes to that.

*(16:20)

We are certainly taking longer than was originally indicated. No question about that. The project did change considerably, though, from the initial announcement, and wisely so. We took good advice from the people at CancerCare Manitoba who came in and said, this isn't a bad dream you have here, but here's how it can be excellent. We are on track to deliver in this mandate. I know some initial work is beginning, but we are on target to get done within this mandate, and actually, I think, about a year ahead of that.

Mr. Borotsik: I take it a year ahead of that, so we're talking probably still a year to a year and a half before the beginning of construction on that particular facility. I know the minister recognizes the urgency. Southwestern Manitoba is a major catchment area, and with respect to cancer care, most, if not all, of the people now receive radiation treatment in the city of Winnipeg. It is very difficult

for families to make that trip on a regular basis. It's an area that can have and has a great demand for it so I guess the only thing I could ask is that any of the development be accelerated as quickly as possible. We do know we've never had the facility there previously, and we're looking forward to it. It's something that is appreciated by the community and the surrounding area so if you could accelerate any of the construction, design phases, as well as the tender process, it would be most appreciated. I thank you.

One issue that came up just recently from a surgeon in the city of Brandon I'd like to talk to the minister about. She's probably aware of an excellent surgeon by the name of Sonny Dhalla. We are very fortunate to have Sonny in the city of Brandon. He provides a very, very competent service. He works probably more efficiently and probably more hours than any surgeon I know of. As I said, we're very fortunate to have him.

Dr. Dhalla does provide a number of procedures within his office. He'll do minor procedures, surgical procedures, in his office. He has, up until April 1 of this year, which there's been a change by the minister's department, he has charged a tray fee. We all recognize what tray fees are. These are similar to a shop cost for a mechanic, but certainly much more detailed. His tray fees are substantially more than what is now being allowed under your department. Your department has indicated that the maximum for a major surgery is \$22 and Dr. Dhalla has been charging \$50.

The patients themselves are very agreeable. As a matter of fact, I've had four of his patients call me just recently to explain that the procedures in his office were well done, were timely, and they were more than happy to pay the tray fee that was being required.

Dr. Dhalla, because he's a surgeon, has additional costs. He has a cauterizing machine. He requires more sutures for more difficult procedures. The anaesthetic is now being charged off at a dollar, I understand, from your department. He says that is impossible to put anaesthetic forward at a dollar. Therefore, he says he will no longer do procedures in his office.

This is going to add additional burden to the hospital. As he said, we will now be able to do these procedures only in the OR so he'll have to book OR time. Costs of OR time, needless to say, are substantially more than \$50. They are paid for by the

Province, but there are other costs associated with nursing staff and OR time. So he's saying they could well cost, for a normal procedure he would perform in his office at \$50 for a tray fee which the Province doesn't pay, will now probably cost the Province somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$400 just for the OR availability.

He was hoping this was not in stone. He was hoping it wasn't in effect as of April 1, but I do have documentation before me from your department that says, in fact, it is April 1. Does the minister not wish to have any procedures done in surgeons' offices, and she wishes to have them all performed in OR space?

Ms. Oswald: Mr. Acting Chair, just to go back to the issue of cancer treatment, I can confirm for the member that it's true that radiation therapy at present in Manitoba is only available in Winnipeg, which really was the genesis of the whole idea for the project itself, was to be able to reduce the amount of travel time that people in Manitoba who required radiation therapy would have to spend. I spoke with a woman in Brandon. I don't have her permission to talk about her on the record, so I won't use the name, but she was a beautiful person who described it as windshield time, which has never left me; how true that is, in addition to everything else that you're going through, to have additional windshield time is very difficult.

So that's why the project, in and of itself and as itself, is going to go forward. I double-checked with the deputy and we are on target to actually begin construction this summer. That was a plan that was made, of course, before some of the world changed in economic stimulus projects and so forth, but we will be taking very seriously into account a little bit of delay that's existed with this, and I agree with the member to prioritize it. Community CancerCare programs for chemotherapy around Manitoba have really proven to be excellent in reducing that windshield time and getting this project going will be very important.

I can inform the member, regarding the elimination of tray fees. That, of course, was part of the new master agreement with, at the time, the Manitoba Medical Association; they've changed their name now to Doctors Manitoba, just for the member's information. Ninety-three percent of its members did ratify that contract—93 percent, pardon me if I didn't say that. Certainly, if doctors are disagreeing with tray fee rates, it is an issue that should be taken to Doctors Manitoba, and there are

mechanisms set out in the agreement as it exists right now to deal with concerns such as these between Doctors Manitoba and Manitoba Health and Healthy Living. Indeed, I can let the member know that there was an understanding at the time of the negotiation that the list of procedure tariffs for which a tray tariff is applicable can be reviewed and can be expanded. We're going to continue to discuss this implementation for the new tariffs with Doctors Manitoba and work with them.

As I say, 93 percent of the members did ratify this new agreement. We know that the elimination of tray fees will save Manitoba people about \$1.8 million a year in out-of-pocket expenses, but we recognize there may be some situations where amendments need to be made to what was a massive agreement and we're prepared to look at those and work with Doctors Manitoba to address these issues.

Mr. Borotsik: I appreciate that, Minister. That's fair, and actually, I do have it listed here that, in fact, Doctors Manitoba were part of that process.

I also know that, from a GP doing a minor procedure in an office, it's a lot different than a surgeon doing a minor procedure in an office because a surgeon's minor procedures are much more complicated. Therefore, the costs of that minor procedure are much more than what they would be for a simple procedure done by a GP. There is a difference, there's no question about that. There's additional costs that are incurred by the surgeons and if the department and Doctors Manitoba do not make an amendment and look at trying to increase the tray fee for certain procedures, I go back to my original comment: there's a huge cost that's going to be placed onto the Province of Manitoba and your department, but not only a cost; there's going to be a waiting list expansion that really is not necessary.

I think if you talk to the surgeons—and actually, the e-mails that I have here deal specifically with the surgeons, not with GPs—you'll find that there has to be some sort of a differentiation between the different types of procedures being done.

*(16:30)

So I would really ask the minister, and I know she's already given me her assurances that she will work to look at some of the necessary amendments, and I would also ask that if the surgeons are performing these procedures now, after April 1, not to come down too hard on them if, in fact, they're trying to do a service to the people in Manitoba. You

say there's a \$1.8-million saving to Manitobans because of the tray fee cost. That is true, but there could well be tens of millions of dollars of costs to the department if in fact this isn't dealt with and dealt with fairly quickly.

As to the CancerCare unit, the windshield time, I get those comments, Madam Minister, on a regular basis: people travelling a great distance to come in for their treatments, travelling home after great distance, sometimes once, twice, three times a week. It is something that has to be dealt with, and I do appreciate the fact that you said the construction could start as early as this summer. So I will hold you to that, Madam Minister.

I do have a document before me, Madam Minister, that deals with the tray fees, deals with the requirements of other costs of some of the surgeons. If you wish, I would leave this with you, and you can have a look at the ongoing communications between your office and the surgeons. There's also a communication here from a Dr. Rocha, who I know you do know, who is the chief surgeon I believe he is—chief of the department of surgery in Brandon. He also is speaking to the tray fee and the inefficiency of the tray fee at the present time after the changes on April 1. This has just come into place. This was a change; it came into place, and our surgeons are not being able to provide the services necessary.

So I'll leave this with you, Madam Minister, if you don't mind, and you can have a look at the chronological order as to how they were dealing with this particular tray fee.

Ms. Oswald: Just a couple of things on this point: first and foremost, yes, I'd be happy to have that document and investigate further; no, you know, there will be no recriminations against doctors. Doctors Manitoba wasn't just part of the discussion. I mean, they were the chief negotiator for the doctors, so they were as involved as anyone could be.

I know that, as I said earlier, the member's now aware that we are prepared to look at any disagreements with tray fee rates and amend, as appropriate, through negotiations. I'll let the member know that the rates set for our tray fees in Manitoba are very competitive with other jurisdictions, and you know, tomorrow might be the day when people start talking about how much money are we spending in health care, so I guess it depends on which day it is. We want to make sure that we're competitive, but

at the same time, you know, we don't put ourselves in a position where we're unduly paying fees that aren't being paid across the nation.

Madam Chairperson in the Chair

Lastly, on the issue of the elimination of tray fees, certainly we know that this will take costs out of the hands of patients which, you know, is largely a very good thing, but it will also address the fact that Manitoba has, in the past, been criticized for potentially violating the Canada Health Act on the issue of tray fees. So this isn't a decision that has been made off the cuff. It's one on which we have external advice as well, and we tried through Doctors Manitoba, at the time the MMA, to strike a fair balance on such issues as you're raising today on complying fully with some people's interpretation of the Canada Health Act and doing what we can to mitigate costs for Manitobans, arguably at a pretty important time.

Mrs. Driedger: I'd like to ask the minister about the issue of tuberculosis on First Nations. I certainly appreciate the sensitivities of never wanting to indicate that there is tuberculosis in the community, but, by not doing that, it doesn't give people the opportunity to have that increased awareness which then leads to increased self protection.

Also, what's happening, and I just received information that a nurse that worked in the north passed on information just in April to one of my colleagues, that the northern reserves have been hit by TB outbreak, and, basically, the chances of that tuberculosis then filtering down into the city is quite possible. In fact, this nurse says that it is filtering down south fairly steadily. And this nurse actually called it an epidemic.

I guess my question relates to whether or not there has been any discussion around the fact that we should be making outbreaks of tuberculosis known in communities so that people can protect themselves more and that we have a better awareness about the transmissibility of it, and people with TB perhaps coming into Winnipeg, and then we're losing track of what could be happening here.

Ms. Oswald: Yes, certainly the issue of working on tuberculosis control is one on which there has been plenty of discussion over the time since we've been in government. There has been an external review of the program, and there were announced investments to restructure and modernize elements of tuberculosis control. There were resources that were

targeted to areas of the province where infection rates have been historically higher—that's Burntwood and Winnipeg. Efficiency was improved by reducing duplication of work across the regions. Front-line case and contact management has been strengthened. Provincial standards and protocol for tuberculosis were developed; they did not exist before. Work has been done on the tuberculosis registry to improve data quality and care-provider access to the information.

Reporting has been standardized, and work is being done with the archives to assure the preservation and access to historical records of tuberculosis as well. Manitoba is actually considered a leader in the disclosure of communicable diseases. The number of TB cases are reported by region, age, gender, community, type—that is to say, provincial or federal—and the releasing of more specific information is not routinely done because there is, indeed, a risk of invasion of privacy and unnecessary stigmatization of communities. Certainly, we are relying on public health officials to make these kinds of specific decisions about whether or not an individual's privacy would be violated. We leave those decisions to the public health officials.

Certainly, when there's a public health need to notify a community, it's done. There was a case in Island Lakes some time ago, and information went out, several news releases on the advice of Dr. Kettner, concerning that issue. It is a judgment call that balances privacy of information with public needs, says Dr. Kettner.

* (16:40)

Having said all of that, more work is being done on this area so as not to violate these issues of privacy, but capture those issues that you raised in your question about balancing the awareness of front-line providers and, ultimately and most importantly, doing what we can with control, and doing what we can across the spectrum with all of the determinants of health that bring to bear on tuberculosis outbreaks; learn all that we can so that we can find ourselves in a place where we don't have to deal with it anymore.

Mrs. Driedger: Can the minister indicate whether or not there has been an increase in the number of TB cases in Winnipeg?

Ms. Oswald: I can commit to the member that we'll find the latest data that we can and get back to her.

Mrs. Driedger: That's fine. The reason for asking it would be to see if, in fact, what this northern nurse is indicating is now showing up in Winnipeg and we're seeing increasing numbers in Winnipeg, because then that certainly, you know, affects how people will be looking at this whole issue of TB.

Switching gears now onto something totally different, I'd like to ask the minister some questions about nursing numbers. My first one would be if she has the numbers of nurses that actually have been retiring year after year over the last, you know, four or five years.

Ms. Oswald: Madam Chair, certainly, each year the college—colleges, I should say more accurately, of nursing produce numbers of nurses who are registered. But the regional health authorities and Manitoba Health and Healthy Living do extensive work-force planning and, indeed, have actuarial analyses to determine pre-retirement funds that need to be considered in our budgetary planning. So on a couple of fronts, in work-force planning and for issues concerning pay, those numbers exist within Manitoba Health and Healthy Living and the regions in different forms.

Mrs. Driedger: I had been looking at a newsletter put out by the Manitoba Nurses' Union that was showing something like 250 nurses a year, approximately, 250 to 300 retiring a year, and if I look at that and then I look at the number of nurses that are now at a certain age and, you know, if I look from 51 on, we've got 4,291 nurses over the age of 51 that are now working. If we look at a breakdown of that in the age group 56 to 60, we've got over 1,400 nurses in that one age group. We've got 626 between the ages of 61 to 65 and, actually, we've got 197 nurses over the age of 66 that are working; 4,200 look like they could, if they want, be in a position of retiring fairly soon. We've got a nursing shortage right now of 1,300. We've got nursing numbers in terms of grads that don't look like it is keeping up with the retirements, because the net gains year after year don't appear to be addressing this issue of keeping up with the number of retirements.

I'd like to ask the minister, if they're looking at projection models, is she comfortable that they have projected well enough to ensure that we are going to have enough nurses to keep up with retirements, because right now it doesn't look like we are keeping up with retirement.

Ms. Oswald: Certainly, we meet with the union leadership, we meet with the colleges and discussions about work force projection go on all the time. Of course, there's likely a very long answer to this. Looking at the clock I'm guessing you don't want me to give it.

I'll say that's why we've committed to bring so many nurses to the work force. We know that the Manitoba Nurses' Union, in their publications, do provide some estimates. They're ever-changing. We do know that a lot of work has gone on with regional health authorities of the department concerning changing the nature of jobs for older nurses if they should choose to stay in the work force longer so that their jobs are appropriate for them. We've had a lot of positive feedback about being able to work with our regional health authorities and be receptive in that way.

Certainly, we're also seeing that national information is showing that, indeed, people are not retiring at the rates that have been projected. It potentially could be the economic situation, stock market, whatever. But having said that, increasing the number of seats in our nursing colleges or educational institution, I should say, doing recruitment exercises overseas, doing more work to broaden our work force for Aboriginal nurses, all of these initiatives are bringing more nurses to the work force and we know that's exactly what we need to do.

Mr. Ralph Eichler (Lakeside): I just have one question and that is to do with the drug called Lucentis, I believe is the correct pronunciation of it. I'm asking the minister if there is anything in her department as far as recognizing whether or not this drug may be covered under the new recognized drug—according to my information, it's being covered in Ontario, Québec and possibly B.C.

Ms. Oswald: There are discussions that are ongoing concerning Lucentis and its use in Manitoba. I know that the company has been before our committee on one occasion and has been instructed to go back and do more work. I believe that work is under way and we're anticipating that they will return with some amendments to the original proposal which were graciously declined by Manitoba in terms of being competitive. It is an important protocol for some people with some illnesses. We are in negotiations with the manufacturer with a block of other provinces. We hope that those negotiations will be completed quickly so that we'll be able to make a decision on this drug.

* (16:50)

Mrs. Driedger: The minister recently put out an announcement indicating that there were 245 more nurses practicing in the province over this time last year. Considering we probably had in the area, maybe, of 600 to 700 new grads, and I'm just sort of picking that number out of the air and ballparking it, but we're only seeing a net gain of 245 versus 700. Where did the nurses go?

Ms. Oswald: Certainly, the number of 245 is a net gain of nurses to the province of Manitoba, so, of course, the number—and I would have to get the exact number of graduates. I don't know it at my fingertips either, but we'll endeavour to find that number.

That means that a number of those nurses would be registering on the college registries, and indeed they would be taking places of nurses that are retiring, as you mentioned in your previous questions. So it's a net count of nurses, and we know that, according to the Manitoba Nurses' Union president, who was commenting on the settlement from the negotiations that completed the last time around, her statement was that the pay increases helping to retain between 90 percent and 95 percent of new grads, she said: I would say Manitoba nurses aren't leaving the province anymore.

Now, I wouldn't say that 100 percent of the graduates stay here forever, but those two factors, the contract that was settled and, of course, the fact that net gain of nurses of 245 would be taking into account those numbers that the member raised.

Mrs. Driedger: That certainly points, then, to a fairly significant number of nurses retiring, even if we were looking at 600 grads in a year across the board, and we've only seen a net gain of 245. That says to me that there would be about 355 nurses then that have retired. I do know that not a lot of nurses necessarily leave the province right after graduation. Research shows that many of them stay here, and it's after working for a few years then they decide to leave. But we do, I think, tend to keep a lot of our new grads.

So what this would mean then, keeping our new grads and graduating 600 and maybe only having a net gain of 245, that we're probably in a year seeing about 355 or in that vicinity then retiring, which means, with the age of the nurses out there, with 1,300 vacancies already, we're not even close to keeping up with what is happening, and I'm wondering if the minister has any concerns that

perhaps we need to be looking at graduating more nurses, adding more seats right across the board. When I look at RPNs, we've got the lowest number since 1999. It's year after year gotten worse and worse; 2007 was probably the worst, and then it went up a tiny bit in 2008. But we're seeing a significant drop in registered psych nurses, and I'm not sure what's accounting for that. And we're only seeing eight new grads in the last year. So there seems to me to be some significant challenges here that we're not graduating enough nurses to keep up with our retirements and our vacancies.

My question, I guess, would be: Whatever is happening right now isn't working, so is there something more that is going to be put into place fairly quickly to ensure that this doesn't get worse because it's already bad enough?

Ms. Oswald: Just for a point of clarification, can I ask, for the record, the 1,300 number that the member uses, could she tell me the source of the 1,300? Is that—well, just tell me.

Mrs. Driedger: Oh, through the minister's own documents. When we add up all the FIPPAs from the province, Madam Chairperson, it all adds up to, like, 1,200-and-something, and it's taking all of the FIPPAs from all of the RHAs and adding them all together.

Ms. Oswald: So, when the member says, adding up the FIPPAs, does that mean vacancies? Is that what she's saying, 1,300 vacancies?

Mrs. Driedger: Sorry, it is the vacancies, full-time and term position vacancies throughout the province. Actually, I think the number's fairly reliable.

Ms. Oswald: Thank you, I just wanted clarification on the source and how the numbers were being added. That's helpful.

I can again tell the member that shortages in health human resources exist across the nation and, indeed, internationally. This is not news to our government. It's why we have made the commitment to hire an additional 700, to add 100 new nursing spaces. We need to remember that this number, this net gain of 245, is exactly that, it's a gain. We are monitoring very carefully that we have to continue to watch the retirement numbers, watch numbers also very closely concerning nurses that might be on leave, for family leave or whatever. This is all part of the actuarial planning and process. We know we have added significant numbers of nursing positions to the system to be able to serve the significant

additional programs that we've added to the system. That's something that's worth bringing to bear into this conversation. We know other jurisdictions have had some success with net increase of health professionals, but in many respects have not been as successful as Manitoba, but we know that we need to continue to work with our educational institutions.

We need to continue with innovative and successful projects like our Filipino nursing recruitment initiative. We know we need to continue working with nurses on the front line to make their jobs even more attractive and amend them in such ways that are appropriate for a work force that is aging.

We are going to continue to use our Nurses Recruitment and Retention Fund, which has given us terrific success over time: over 1,000 nurses relocating to Manitoba, 368 positions filled with grants for nursing graduates that agree to work in harder to recruit areas like rural and northern Manitoba. We know that we're working to fill positions for nurse practitioners, which bring an even more diverse skill set to the front line; people who see a nurse practitioner almost entirely come away from that experience with a very positive feeling.

We know that we have almost doubled the nursing seats since 1999, and as stated by the president of the nurses' union, Sandi Mowat, they're staying and they're staying because of our ability to negotiate remuneration and work environments that are agreeable to nurses.

I don't dispute for a moment with the member opposite that there is more work to be done with nursing work force and with physician work force, but we're absolutely committed to do it. Our results are showing positive gains every year, and we're going to continue to be committed to bring more nurses to Manitoba.

Madam Chairperson: The time being 5 o'clock, committee rise.

WATER STEWARDSHIP

*(14:40)

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

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

Will the minister please call her staff to the front here. The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. David Faurschou (Portage la Prairie): I want to take the opportunity to correct the record, as a statement of mine contained inaccurate information last week when I declared the reeve of Portage la Prairie had declared a state of emergency. That was incorrect. The reeve had, though, declared a portion of the rural municipality in and about the Rat Creek area as a disaster area, so hopefully the Province will be recognizing the inordinate amount of damage that occurred to municipal roads. It wasn't an emergency but a disaster declaration, rather.

I would, though, state that I was also out at the area of the Assiniboine River Diversion where the breach had occurred. Just this morning they were able to close the breach. The information was that the intention of the department is to once again raise the water level in the diversion, potentially topping the fail-safe area. Can the minister bring us updated information regarding the Assiniboine River Diversion and future water levels?

Hon. Christine Melnick (Minister of Water Stewardship): Certainly, this spring has shown the need for a lot of balance and a lot of working with all the tools we had at hand, the Portage Diversion being one. We were running flows at quite a high level through the diversion through the last month so we could maintain a flow of about 500 cfs on the lower Assiniboine.

Now, we are working with the City of Winnipeg. The James Avenue level of water is, of course, a very important one for the city of Winnipeg in a variety of ways. The level at James Avenue this morning is 18.23. When it goes down to 18 flat, we will be increasing the flows to the lower Assiniboine. This morning it was at 595 cfs. We'll be looking to increase that at 1,000, so, just to make sure the Member for Portage la Prairie knows, we will not be increasing flows through the Portage Diversion this spring. In fact, we're looking to lower them as soon as we can.

Mr. Faurschou: I understand, because at the worksite they had received the information that there would be more trucks arriving with four-inch rock to top the fail-safe area and to bring the fail-safe to a level that is higher than it currently is so as to accommodate more water coming down the

diversion in the next few days. If that's not the case, then at least we'll be prepared for next year, so that would be interesting to know.

I do want, though, not to leave the topic of the Assiniboine River Diversion without making the statement that, as producers are trying to head to the field now, there are quite a number of areas that were dry on the weekend that are now wet, because, obviously, the frost is coming out of the diking. There are numerous water veins that are through the dike, just simply because that's the way the profile of the soil is. Once the frost comes out, the water starts to leach through. So producers are very, very anxious to see the diversion water levels down as soon as possible because their fields are getting wetter, as we speak, because of the underground seepage that's taking place.

So I leave that with the minister and department staff that it's not just now the producer, at the end where the fail-safe is located, it is now producers the length and breadth of the whole channel.

Ms. Melnick: Well, I thank the Member for Portage la Prairie for letting us know the concerns in the immediate area. Certainly, again, I'll just reiterate that there are, in fact, plans to do the opposite as soon as we can. So we'll make sure that we're maybe communicating with whoever is out in the field working on the fail-safe. Certainly, producers will, in fact, see the opposite of what they might be concerned about, I'm sure, by the end of the week.

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): I do have just a series of questions that are more administrative. I think we usually go through these every year. If you don't have them here, if you want to get them to me later on, that's fine. But we would like a list of all political staff, including the name, position and whether or not they are a full-time employee.

Ms. Melnick: The only political staff position is the special adviser to the minister. That currently is filled by Chris Pawley, and he is in a full-time position.

Mrs. Stefanson: Could we also get a list of all staff in the minister's and deputy minister's office?

Ms. Melnick: Yes, did you want me to go through this now or would you like to receive that in writing? I have it here, I could read into the record if you'd like.

An Honourable Member: Sure.

Ms. Melnick: In the minister's office are Karen Sabine, the appointment secretary; Linda Epp,

correspondence secretary; I've already mentioned Chris Pawley; and Jill Stockwell, executive assistant, she actually works out of the constituency office.

We have the deputy minister. In the deputy minister's office, of course: the deputy minister, Don Norquay; we have Grace Wereta, who is the administrative assistant to the deputy minister; and we have Huguette LaCroix, who is the correspondence secretary.

Mrs. Stefanson: Can we also get the number of staff currently employed in the department and whether or not this is increased or decreased since last year and what the numbers are?

Ms. Melnick: Last year we had 213. These are FTEs. This year, 222.

* (14:50)

Mrs. Stefanson: Could I have a list of the names of the new employees and whether or not they were hired through competition or whether they were appointed?

Ms. Melnick: Yes, that we don't have. So we'll have to get back to you.

Mrs. Stefanson: That would be great if you could get back to me on that.

Could we also have a description of any position that has been reclassified? I don't know if any have been reclassified in the department.

Ms. Melnick: We had financial services of budget analyst; Water Use Licensing, we had a senior licensing technician reclassified and two water power licensing engineers; in Fisheries, we had a senior information management specialist; in Planning and Co-ordination, two information management specialists; Water Control Systems and Management, we had the senior shoreline management engineer reclassified as well as the conservation district support engineer; in Planning and Co-ordination, we had—this also includes new positions, I'm being advised—Planning and Co-ordination, watershed planner; Planning and Co-ordination, policy analyst; Regulatory and Operational Services, the director, flood forecasting and flood response co-ordinator; in Water Science and Management, we had the supervisor of nutrient management and regulations; Planning and Co-ordination, the associate director; Office of Drinking Water, approvals engineer; Water Science

and Management, nutrient management program co-ordinator; Water Control Systems and Management, manager, water control works and drainage licensing; Water Science and Management, we had two hydrologists; in Planning and Co-ordination, the senior information management specialist; in Administration, the Water Stewardship financial administrator. I believe that completes the list.

Mrs. Stefanson: Would the description of those jobs be included in the Estimates books, or could we also get a job description if they're not?

Ms. Melnick: Those job descriptions are not included.

Mrs. Stefanson: Would it be possible to get a list of the job descriptions for those new employees as well as the reclassified employees for this year?

Ms. Melnick: Could I clarify? Are you wanting—if they're new positions, you're wanting the job description, and if they've been reclassified, you're wanting the new description. Is that what you're asking for?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes.

Ms. Melnick: Yes, we can get that.

Mrs. Stefanson: Are there currently any vacant positions within the department?

Ms. Melnick: There are currently 27 vacant. Of those, 13 are new positions that are having job descriptions developed for them.

Mrs. Stefanson: Okay, what are the—I'm just trying to think if you've already listed the—so if these are all the vacant ones, so the ones that you listed earlier have been filled, obviously. So, what are the vacant positions right now? The 27 and can you list which one—maybe start off by listing the new ones.

Ms. Melnick: Okay, Office of Drinking Water approvals engineer. These are the new ones. Let me follow this through here: Planning and Co-ordination, watershed planner; Water Science and Management, water quality management, Nutrient Management program co-ordinator; Planning and Co-ordination, information management specialist; another Planning and Co-ordination, information management specialist; Water Use Licensing, senior licensing technologist; Water Use Licensing, water power licence engineer; Water Use Licensing, water power licence engineer;

Water Control Systems Management, shoreline erosion project co-ordinator; Water Use Licensing, project co-ordinator; Office of Drinking Water, laboratory and special program contract co-ordinator; Office of Drinking Water, supervisor, drinking water officer; and Fisheries Branch, aquatic ecosystem management, aquatic ecologist.

Did you want me to list the remaining ones that are being filled?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, please.

* (15:00)

Ms. Melnick: Regulatory and Operational Services Administration, administrative clerk; Planning and Co-ordination, policy analyst; Water Control Systems Management, water control systems planning engineer; Office of Drinking Water, drinking water officer; Fisheries Branch, aquatic ecosystem management in-stream flow needs biologist; Water Use Licensing, senior water power engineer; Water Control Systems Management, engineering technologist; Water Control Systems Management, senior water control systems planning engineer; Water Use Licensing, environmental irrigation specialist; Fisheries Branch, Sport and Commercial Fishing Management, recreational fishing program manager; Water Science and Management Administration, senior scientific project leader; Office of Drinking Water, manager, Office of Drinking Water; Water Control Works and Drainage Licensing, special projects officer; Water Use Licensing, licensing technologist.

That's the list.

Mrs. Stefanson: Could the minister indicate, of the 13 new positions, is that coming from—those are brand-new positions to the department. Were they originally in another government department or are those brand new to government altogether?

Ms. Melnick: These are newly created. They haven't been transferred from another department. As we're moving forward on our water strategy here in Manitoba, we're recognizing the positions that are now needed in the Office of Drinking Water, for example. Certainly, we've got some watershed planners in the conservation district area of the department so they are able to provide services to the conservation districts, sort of on the front lines there.

The shoreline erosion project co-ordinator, certainly with some of the weather that we've been experiencing, the heavy storms that blew up on

Lake Winnipeg. For a number of years, we knew that there was need to work with communities through that and that need continues. Also, in the fisheries branches, we are learning more about what does maintain a healthy fishery. We're learning that there are certain areas of specification and qualification that are needed in our department.

Mrs. Stefanson: Can the minister just indicate—I noticed there isn't much of a change, the budget from last year to this year is relatively flat, so where would the money come from to pay for these positions?

Ms. Melnick: These are positions that have been created in-year, so the funding was available in the budget last year and now we're either doing the hiring or starting—each of these jobs is somewhere in the process of bringing a person on.

Mrs. Stefanson: Just trying to think if there—does your department contract out any services at all?

Ms. Melnick: We do have contracts with different organizations and individuals on an as-needed basis. A couple of examples would be lab testing that we might have to do. When we look in the water management side, I mean, it's flood mitigation and areas such as that. LiDAR surveys, for example, around the Shellmouth Dam, that was an area that we contracted out. Aboriginal consultations, we have contracted out the services needed around that area.

So, again, it's as we need to. Shoreline erosion technical committee, we do have a contract with a lead engineer there. So it would be those sorts of periodic and sometimes ad hoc type of contracting work that we would need to have done.

Mrs. Stefanson: In terms of the Aboriginal consultations, would that have been included in as part of the payment for the co-management plan for Lake Dauphin?

Ms. Melnick: I think the member is referring to the Dauphin Lake consultation for Aboriginal—*[interjection]*

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Reid): Hold on, folks. The Chair has to recognize both of you for recording purposes.

Mrs. Stefanson: I believe so. I mean, I know that the government has referred to this co-management plan, and I know when I asked this last week, the minister had indicated that I think there was around \$10,000 that went towards this. So if maybe I have the terminology wrong—it's called something else, is that the case?

Ms. Melnick: Well, what we were doing there is a section 35 consultation. So that was above and beyond services that were provided by the co-management office. Now we did run the monies through there, and we provided the funding to make sure that the Aboriginal people with whom we were consulting were able to attend meetings. That's one area where we talk about Aboriginal consultation.

Also, for Wuskwatim Dam, for example, there was Aboriginal consultation done again. Those were section 35 consultations and, again, there was provision of support to make sure that the Aboriginal groups that were most affected by each of these consultations—for example, with Dauphin Lake it was West Region Tribal Council. That is another area where we would be, you know, contracting services or requiring services be done, and so we would make an arrangement with—in the case of Dauphin Lake it was the West Region Tribal Council. In the case of Wuskwatim it was—there was a total of 21 First Nations communities that we were consulting with.

Mrs. Stefanson: Okay. I'm just trying to wrap my head around sort of who does what, which government department, because I know there's so many that come into play here.

The minister had mentioned last week that—it's actually, I believe, the Department of Conservation which negotiates the co-management plan. But what is the role of the Water Stewardship Department in that then? Like, what did the \$10,000, I guess, go towards?

Ms. Melnick: The \$10,000 that I was referring to is monies that were provided by the Department of Water Stewardship under which Fisheries reside.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Reid): Honourable Member for Tuxedo.

Ms. Melnick: Sorry, I wasn't quite finished what I—

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Reid): Okay, honourable Minister of Water Stewardship.

* (15:10)

Ms. Melnick: The \$10,000 that I was referring to is monies that were provided by the Department of Water Stewardship, under which Fisheries reside.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Reid): The honourable Member for Tuxedo.

Ms. Melnick: Sorry, I wasn't quite finished.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Reid): Sorry.

Ms. Melnick: The \$10,000 that we're talking about right now was provided specifically for a section 35 consultation around the closure of the spring spawn this year on the Dauphin Lake tributaries.

Mrs. Stefanson: Who would have been the recipient of that \$10,000? Was it West Region Tribal Council?

Ms. Melnick: Yes, it was West Region Tribal Council.

Mrs. Stefanson: Okay, thank you. I think, just while I'm on that, I just have a quick question. I know that on page 18 of the Estimates book, it talks, just under expected results. Again, I'm just trying to get an idea as to what the role is of the Water Stewardship Department versus what the role is of the Conservation Department, and it says underneath here that resolution of conflicts over competing interests in water and fishery resources.

I'm just wondering how that works because, it seems to me, by the description of what Conservation does, that that might be more in the role, especially when it comes to the Lake Dauphin issue. What is the specific role of your department with respect to that as opposed to the Conservation Department? I don't expect you to speak for the Conservation Department.

Ms. Melnick: The Department of Water Stewardship is a department that establishes policy, legislation and regulation. We work with other departments to ensure that it's carried out. For example, if we were talking about a closure, as we were this year, we would work, of course, with the stakeholders, but also the other departments, and others that would be partners as well. We've worked very closely with Aboriginal and Northern Affairs throughout this as well, Mr. Acting Chairperson. So that's where you would have us working with Conservation on some aspects of co-management. On other aspects, we would be working with MIT. At other times, we're working with Intergovernmental Affairs. For example, when there's a new development starting, Water Stewardship reviews the plans and gives recommendation according to our policies for plans of new developments around Manitoba. So that's the relationship that we have, not only with Conservation, but all departments in government.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Acting Chair, just a follow-up to that because I know, last year, we asked similar questions in this area and, again, just trying to wrap my head around Conservation versus Water

Stewardship. We received through Freedom of Information, last year, the co-management plan. There was about \$500,000 that went towards the negotiation and the co-management plan. How much of that came from your government department?

Ms. Melnick: Funding wise?

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes.

Ms. Melnick: None of it. All of it came from Conservation.

Mrs. Stefanson: Okay, thank you very much for that. Just jumping back to some administrative questions that I just want to clean up here. How many of the current full-time positions have been relocated within Manitoba?

Ms. Melnick: None have been relocated. Now, if we look at newly created positions, for example, the water resource officers, they are all located outside of Winnipeg.

I could give you a list of those locations, as well. That's where you might hear of new staff appearing. Those are new positions that are actually being created, but to actually move people around from either within Winnipeg to beyond Winnipeg and vice versa, there hasn't been any and I think we're just looking at the new positions and—great, thank you.

The water resource officers positions have been created in Brandon, Stonewall, Morris, Gimli, St. Laurent, Grosse Isle, Ste. Anne, Arborg, Dauphin, Shoal Lake, Swan River, Neepawa and Deloraine. So not one of those positions resides behind a desk within the city of Winnipeg.

Mrs. Stefanson: I believe the minister stated there were 213 full-time positions this year. How many of those are located in the city of Winnipeg?

Ms. Melnick: We don't have that breakdown handy, so we'll have to get that for you.

Mrs. Stefanson: Okay, I appreciate that. Is there like a rough estimate in terms of percentage that would be in Winnipeg versus outside Winnipeg? No? Okay.

Ms. Melnick: You know, rather than guess and maybe put some misinformation on the record, we'll get that for you.

Mrs. Stefanson: Okay, I appreciate that. In terms of ministerial travel, how many trips did the minister take this year outside the province?

Ms. Melnick: None.

Mrs. Stefanson: Okay. Were there any trips that were taken by the Premier (Mr. Doer) that were paid for by your government department?

Ms. Melnick: Certainly none that I'm aware of.

Mrs. Stefanson: Okay. How much is spent on advertising within your government department on an annual basis?

Ms. Melnick: Again, that's something that we don't really have in front of us, but, how are you defining advertising?

Mrs. Stefanson: Well, I guess I was going to ask you that, too, in terms of the breakdown, as well, between television, print. I know there could be brochures or direct mail or any of those types of things, as well.

Ms. Melnick: Are you including the posting of positions?

Mrs. Stefanson: I wouldn't include that in the overall advertising within the department, no. I mean, if we could specify, you know, take that out of it, I guess, and specify that separately, that would be helpful.

Ms. Melnick: So would we say any advertising excluding HR activities, would that be appropriate?

* (15:20)

Mrs. Stefanson: Yes, that would be fine.

Yes, switching to—I'm just going to jump over to the Ecological Services section in the Estimates book on page 29.

It looks like there's a department staff position that has been cut there. I'm wondering if you could give me the description of that staff position, and why it would have been eliminated.

Ms. Melnick: This is the position for the chief executive officer of the Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation. It was the only position within the department that was not reporting into the department, so we've provided them with a grant for \$135,000, and that was the balance there.

So, no monies were cut. It's just a distribution in a different way.

Mrs. Stefanson: So this person is not now a direct employee of the department, but the funding is still

going towards this position. So, the position still exists?

Ms. Melnick: Correct, because it really is a position for an organization outside of government.

Mrs. Stefanson: So, is the \$135,000, is that from the Ecological Services area of this budget, or where did that \$135,000 come from?

Ms. Melnick: Where it was a position in Ecological Services in previous years, it came out of that area in previous years. Now, it's a grant. So, it comes out of the area of the department that deals with the distribution of grants.

Mrs. Stefanson: Can I get an update from the minister on the implementation of the Manitoba Water Strategy?

Ms. Melnick: Most of what we do in Water Stewardship is dealing with our water strategy. So, this past year, in 2008, we passed the nutrient management regulation to manage land application of nutrients from all sources, including synthetic fertilizers, manure and municipal wastewater sludge; passed an amendment to the nutrient management reg, restricting the phosphorus content of fertilizers used on urban and rural residential properties; passed The Phosphorus Reduction Act to limit phosphorus content of cleaning products; passed The Shellmouth Dam and Other Water Control Works Management and Compensation Act to allow for operating guidelines and compensation available to Manitobans for artificial flooding; committed to the establishment of the water quality objectives standards and guidelines as a regulation under The Water Protection Act, with new nutrient standards for all waste-water effluent; moved forward on the integrated watershed management planning; initiated five more integrated watershed management plans in '08-09; we are initiating five more in '09-10 and five more to commence in 2010-11; conducted an extensive stakeholder consultation with Manitobans regarding the conservation districts strategic framework documents.

Looking at what we've done in the area of incentives: for water protection, initiated a wetland restoration incentive program as part of the sustainable agricultural practices program through the budgeting for outcomes project; continued our partnership with ALUS, which is a very positive pilot; moved forward on the Fisheries Enhancement Fund with an allocation of \$850,000. To date, we

have 37 projects totalling about just over \$800,000, so we have a few more to announce.

So those are some of the areas that we've moved on in the water strategy.

Mrs. Stefanson: Just on the Fisheries Enhancement program—sorry, Fisheries Enhancement Fund—you mentioned \$850,000 going towards seven or eight projects. What are those projects, and could we have a breakdown of how much of the \$850,000 is allocated towards those projects?

Ms. Melnick: Fish Futures, Red River Creel Survey, \$105,790; Department of Zoology, University of Manitoba, Lake Winnipeg genetic study, \$34,519; Manitoba Fisheries, Interactive Flex Fish Display, \$5,500; DFO, development of models to improve the design of an ecosystem monitoring program for Manitoba reservoirs, \$25,000; Sustainable Fisheries non-lethal sampling methodology for fish stock assessments on small high-use lakes—it's the electrofishing boat, \$137,500; Fish and Lake Improvement Program for the Parkland Region, Persee Lake Aeration Project, \$25,000; Fish Futures Provincial Youth Angling Co-ordinators, \$17,000; FortWhyte Alive, Lake Devonian Aeration Project, \$19,908; Turtle Mountain Conservation District riparian assessment along the Long River and Jackfish and Stony creeks, \$15,400; Manitoba Commercial Inland Fishers Federation, the commercial contribution of \$7,300; R.M. of Rosburn, Tokaryk Lake Aeration, \$25,000; Assiniboine Watershed Network, Truro Creek riffle rehabilitation, \$1,500; Intermountain Sport Fishing Enhancements, Ryz crossing fish passage, \$25,000; Manitoba Forestry Association, \$2,009; Manitoba Envirothon, \$25,000; Fish Futures provincial youth angling Web site, Manitoba Fly Fishers, Whiteshell River winter survey, \$5,775; Sustainable Fisheries promotion of the electrofishing boat at the Mid-Canada Boat Show; FLIPPR, the FLIPPR Web site enhancement, \$19,400; Manitoba Fly Fishers Association, Whiteshell River winter survey.

So I think from this—I haven't read the whole list, but I just thought I'd give you a variety of the sorts of groups that we fund and the sorts of initiatives that they have and the kind of funding they get. We could give you the complete list for the \$811,862, if you'd like that.

* (15:30)

Just to explain how the FEF works, we have a Sustainable Fisheries Inc.—on the Fisheries

Enhancement Fund, we have seven groups: the Manitoba Fly Fishers, and various angling groups make up the committee. They're the ones to whom the proposals are given, and they rate the proposals. They have a particular criteria that they rate the proposals on. They get the list together of what they would recommend. We have sort of four official intakes a year, if you will, but groups can put in proposals at any time. Then recommendations are made to myself as minister, and I know we have a great group, so I know I'm getting very good recommendations. The Fisheries Enhancement Fund was, I believe, at a total of about \$350,000 for a number of years. We raised it, seeing how helpful these groups were and how helpful the projects were to fisheries throughout Manitoba to the \$850,000.

David Carrick is the chair of the FEF and has been kind enough to be supportive of those initiatives. With the raising of the funds we've been able to increase, of course, the amounts that we're giving sometimes, certainly the number of projects that we've given. I would really like to take the opportunity to thank the folks throughout Manitoba who work on a voluntary basis, caring about the fisheries in Manitoba in all kinds of ways, as you can see by the sorts of projects that we are supporting and to work not only to put the proposals together but to receive the monies and then bring the proposals to life. I'd also like to very much thank the members of the FEF. I always say I sort of have the easy job of handing out the money once they've done all the work of deciding and determining. It's really a terrific initiative here in our province, and one that I know is very, very healthy, and I'm sure will continue for a very long time.

Mrs. Stefanson: I wonder if the minister could indicate where the funding comes from for the FEF.

Ms. Melnick: Well, this is a voted amount. The Fisheries Enhancement Fund works very much hands in hands with the recreational fisheries in Manitoba, so we, again, with the—actually urging of the FEF increased the angling fee licence by \$3. I think it was in the '08-09 fiscal year. This brought the increase of the \$500,000. The \$350,000 had been the amount that the fund had been held up for a number of years. Again, we worked with the Fisheries Enhancement Fund, who not only supported but encouraged us to raise the angling licence fee by \$3. That brought in the additional \$500,000, so we were able to raise the FEF to the \$850,000 level. Again, it's the project review committee who is very supportive of this and

who continue to be supportive of this. The work that they do is well appreciated.

If I could just mention the names of the groups who make up the Manitoba recreational fishery funding initiative steering committee. We have Fish Futures, the Manitoba Wildlife Federation, Intermountain Sport Fish Enhancement, Swan Valley Sport Fish Enhancement, Fish and Lake Improvement Program from the Parkland region, Manitoba Fly Fishers Association and the Manitoba Lodges and Outfitters Association.

Mrs. Stefanson: Basically, the majority of the money in the FEF comes from monies levied on the fishing licences itself. Is that where the majority of the money comes from for the fund?

Ms. Melnick: We had been funding at \$350,000. We did increase angling licences by \$3 in, I believe it was '08-09, and that brought in the additional \$500,000. So the total amount available in the FEF today is \$850,000.

Mrs. Stefanson: So does that mean that your department funds the fund, I guess, by \$350,000, and the other \$500,000 comes from the anglers, from the licences?

Ms. Melnick: Well, any monies raised from the angling licence fees goes into general revenue and then the \$850,000 is what is voted on.

Mrs. Stefanson: But, I mean, really, the department isn't putting any more money in; it's that the extra revenues that came in as a result of increasing the angling licence fee by \$3 that goes back into the fund is a reason for the increase of the fund. Right?

Ms. Melnick: Yes, what I'm trying to make clear is that the department doesn't collect the monies for the angling fees; it goes into general revenue and then comes into the fund through that. But it is, yes, monies from the angling fees that have created the extra \$500,000.

Mrs. Stefanson: General revenues of your government department, or general revenues of government?

Ms. Melnick: The angling fee monies go into general revenues.

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): It's my understanding that there are roughly 200,000 anglers in the province and also my understanding that the \$3 extra charge on the licences is a stamp that goes on the licence that is specified toward fish

enhancement programs. So the fishermen are actually paying most of the cost of fish enhancement programs in this province, not the provincial budget or the—I know you're saying it's a moot point. I know you're saying it's in general revenues, but it's a specified amount, as far as I can tell.

I'd be interested to know where the other—I think it was \$320,000—actually came from, whether it was coming out of licence fees too, and it may well be that the anglers in the province—not necessarily a bad thing—but it may well be that the anglers in the province are paying all the costs of fish enhancement when you take a look at that, and I know all these groups that you mention are actively fundraising to provide extra funds for fish enhancement, so they're probably—and I don't know amounts, I know the Intermountain group have something like about \$110,000 worth of projects on the table this year, \$10,000 coming from the Intermountain Conservation District, \$50,000 from the Intermountain fish enhancement group, and I believe \$50,000 from the Province, though which is probably coming out of this fish enhancement fund.

I think it's admirable. I think it's a great thing that they're doing this, but I think, if we're getting the real facts on the table, the fishermen themselves are paying for most of the fish enhancement in this province.

Ms. Melnick: It was the FEF who came to us with this proposal of raising the angling fees and raising the amount of the Fisheries Enhancement Fund, the sports fishing group, as I mentioned, is a member. They were very supportive of the initiative and remain so. Again, I want to give credit to the recreational fishing groups that I mentioned a few minutes ago about putting in the time to be a part of the FEF, putting in the time to recognize the needs in their local fishing communities, recreational fishing communities, and putting in proposals and then actually carrying out the work.

So I think it's a very positive situation, and, certainly, if they had proposals of a further nature, we would certainly be looking at it because we very much value their partnership.

* (15:40)

Mr. Briese: I have, I think, one more question and that's in Estimates the other day, in response to the Member for Tuxedo (Mrs. Stefanson), you gave a maximum estimate on the frozen fish fillets that are

being given out at the Turtle and the Valley River as being roughly \$70,000.

Where is that \$70,000 coming from? What part of the budget where—and I guess an additional question to that would be, what programs are you cutting to find the \$70,000 to provide for that?

Ms. Melnick: It is unfortunate that members opposite don't seem to understand the need to provide sustenance for families who would be traditionally fishing at this time but who are respecting the closure, recognizing the need to put sustenance ahead of everything if we are going to have a healthy fishery this coming year and in the years to come.

I would assume the member remembers there were some difficult times during the '80s, when restocking had to happen, and it's a bit disappointing that he wouldn't be supportive of what we're doing here. I know that there has not been the sort of sensitivity, I should say, to the provision of frozen fish for families who are often in very low incomes. He represents part of that area, and I would think he'd be a little more sensitive to the people that he is representing.

We did give an estimate of \$55,000 up into yesterday. We're still watching to see what is happening, what the needs are of the people who are coming to collect the fish. We did put in a six-fish limit per day for frozen fish as they would have had if the closure did not have to be extended to treaty rights holders for this year.

The money is coming from the Water Stewardship initiatives fund. We will not be changing any of the announcements that we've made. We'll certainly be working with the—continuing to work around the spawn to continue to ensure that families are not experiencing hardship during this time and also to thank them very much for their co-operation and understanding.

I think it's important for members opposite to recognize that this is a very key piece here in making sure that we are taking care of the fishery, but we are also taking care of each other and, in this case, families who may otherwise be going without at this time.

Mr. Briese: I think it's also an important aspect to realize that in the '80s that pickerel fishery was almost defunct. Through the efforts of many people and privately raised money in a lot of cases, there

were a lot of things done to enhance that fishery and build up the numbers, and turn it into a fishery that was recognized in several of the top fishing magazines in North America as one of the prime pickerel fisheries in North America, and take it to that point and then to—we're seeing slot sizes under five years old almost non-existent. To see this fishery going into decline like that and not take full action to make sure it's sustained in its present way—I think we're very close to the point. I'm not a fish expert, but I think we're very close to the point where this fishery could tip over on us and another species could take over. Then we'd see a real decline in the pickerel, or the walleye fishery.

I think there's a lot of credit goes out there to groups like the Intermountain fish enhancement group that have raised funds for years to build up that fishery and worked so hard to do it. We have seen it already disappear from those various fishing magazines as a top pickerel fishery.

The other thing that's occurring up there, in answer to my questions in the House, the minister responded that they cut down the catch limits on ice fishermen or regular anglers. It probably is kind of a moot point because in the slot sizes that they're allowed to take home, they can't catch any fish in those slot sizes. I heard that from dozens and dozens of anglers this winter.

To get one fish in the slot size they could take home, they probably had to catch and release 40, and most of them were catch and release anyhow. But it's kind of interesting that it wouldn't really matter whether the limit was zero because they can't catch fish in that slot size. I think there's still some lack of realization of exactly what needs to be done to sustain that fishery up there in Lake Dauphin. I'll leave it at that.

Ms. Melnick: I think the member makes my point from my previous comments, that it's a shame we're not seeing support from the other side of the House recognizing how concerning the situation was in the '80s. He's absolutely right when he talks about all the initiatives that were undertaken to save that fishery.

Unfortunately, when his party was in power in 1999, a press release was issued announcing a fishing closure for all Dauphin Lake fisheries. This conservation closure, to quote from the press release, is necessary to protect and conserve spawning walleye. The closure will prevent the harvest of fish before they have had the opportunity to spawn.

So that sounded pretty good on paper. Unfortunately, it was only on paper. The conservation closure was not enforced. According to their own records, 6,000 pounds of fish were taken from the Dauphin Lake tributaries during the 1999 spawn alone. No written warnings were issued to fishers who illegally fished during the spring spawn and zero charges were laid.

That's the record of members opposite, compared to our record where we have taken not only the steps to do a full consultation previous to this spring's spawn and then announce a closure and provide sustenance for families who would otherwise perhaps suffer quite badly during this time. Again, it's a shame the member doesn't recognize that some of his own people are gathering some of that fish, and we think it's appropriate that they would be gathering it.

In 2002, we prohibited spawn on all the tributaries and within one kilometre of their mouth, allowing First Nations to fish for sustenance with a special permit. In 2002, we also outlawed dip nets and gill nets for treaty fishing of walleye. Before 2002, the use of dip and gill nets was allowed. In 2003, individual commercial net fishing quotas were reduced from 750 pounds to 500 pounds. Since this measure was introduced, the commercial catch has been reduced by almost 50 percent. In 2002, the Province reduced recreational angler limits from six to four walleye, including no kill of walleye between 45 and 70 centimetres, to further protect spawning walleye. This has reduced the harvest by an additional 7,000 pounds per year.

*(15:50)

Also, in 2002, the Province committed to re-allocating 50 percent of the 30 commercial licences on the lake to the West Region Tribal Council as part of the co-management process. Today First Nations fishers hold 11 commercial licences.

So, is our record absolutely perfect? No. Is there more to do? Yes. Are we working with the stakeholders within the West Region Tribal Council and the fishery enhancement groups and any other groups that would be interested in the health of the Dauphin Lake fishery? Absolutely.

Again, it would be nice to see some support coming from the other side of the House on the issue of the closure knowing that we did the background work to bring in a closure and we continue to work

on it. I mentioned to the member today that the closure was extended until May 8 or until the spawn is over, whichever first happens. We're taking this very seriously, and taking actions that we think will be helpful and we will continue to monitor the lake as we have done in the past, and to respect the advice that is coming from the department, which is based on science, which is based on the monitoring year-round. So we will continue to stay focussed on Dauphin Lake and take the steps we believe will be helpful.

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): I just wanted to follow up on some questions that I posed on Thursday. One of those is I was talking about in the operating rules one of the requirements was for ongoing information, a 1-800 number should be established that would provide current information of gate operations, potential impact on water levels and forecasts for the next few days. The information should also be included on the existing Water Stewardship internal site. The minister wasn't able to give me that 1-800 number on Thursday. I wonder if she has it now and if it is on the Web site.

Ms. Melnick: The number is on the Web site. It's the floodway gate setting information telephone number. Because it is usually used by folks making local calls, it is 284-4550.

Mrs. Taillieu: Can the minister indicate when that number was put on the Web site?

Ms. Melnick: The number that I gave the member, the 284-4550 has been available since 1996, and on the main page of the Government of Manitoba Web site we put up, understanding the concerns of the spring, we put up on the main page of the Government of Manitoba a link to the gate settings which takes one immediately into the Water Stewardship Web site.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, thank you, I'll refer that information, because my constituent who was looking for the information was not able to find it. It was just not easy to find, and we'd also been asking about that number, as you know, in the House and it would have been helpful to have it provided then, but, thank you.

One other thing I just wanted to ask: In this current flood, was there a threat—is there a threat, or I'll say was there a threat, when the floodway gates were operated, of sewer backup?

Ms. Melnick: When we raised the gates, we were in very close contact with the City of Winnipeg, and

there was a lot of concern about the river level at the very south end of the city. At the very south end of the city, the James Avenue equivalent river level was 20 feet, with the river profile slope to James Avenue getting steeper more quickly than anticipated.

The river level at the very south end of the city was only two feet below the threshold at which the City's protocol would have called for evacuation of St. Norbert and Christie Road. As you remember, there was a serious ice jam at the Perimeter Highway bridge. This could have caused river levels to rise by as much as three feet in that area and there was a large ice pan atop the floodway itself.

If a serious ice jam occurred that raised river levels up to three feet, in two areas where the sandbag dikes were already quite high, at St. John's-Ravenscourt and Lord Avenue in St. Norbert, the dikes would have become vulnerable to ice damage that may have caused them to fail. The City was looking to see whether there were concerns with the sewer system. Whenever water is at that level, there can be concerns. But the primary focus was at the very south end of the city, a lot of homes who had taken the prevention they understood was necessary, and we were trying to balance between the upstream effects of the floodway and the downstream effects.

I do think it was very positive that there, in fact, was no artificial flooding as a result of using the floodway this spring. There was a lot of calculation, a lot of balancing and very, very careful activity around that.

Mrs. Taillieu: I certainly feel for the people that were inside the floodway that were impacted by this. There was a number of properties in south Winnipeg and St. Norbert. However, I didn't really think that I got an answer to my question as to whether there was an alert from the City that there was going to be a problem with a threat of sewer backups in the city. I'm not sure whether you answered that in your response.

*(16:00)

Ms. Melnick: The City is always conscious that there could be, in circumstances such as that, concern. However, the focus was what was happening at the very south end. Again, the James Avenue equivalent river level was 20 feet. So there were the areas around the south end, the sandbagging that had been done; what may have become a call for evacuation in the St. Norbert and Christie Road

areas; the ice that, at that time, was prevalent throughout the city as well as that pad of ice just hovering above the top of the floodway itself. So there was consideration to the sewer system, but the primary focus was the south end and what was happening around homes there, and also balancing off for the upstream effects of any usage of the floodway.

Mrs. Taillieu: What I'm trying to get at here, I guess, is I know the Premier (Mr. Doer) on April 9, said, and I'm quoting from the *Free Press*: The jamming of ice in the city would have meant a risk to the sewer system. That's highlighted, in fact, in that article, and I recall them talking about a threat to the sewer system. What I'm getting at is, I'm wondering, when there's a threat to the sewer system, is rule 4, emergency operation to reduce sewer backup in Winnipeg, brought in. That's my question.

Ms. Melnick: Again, rule 4 would be, as I was talking about last Thursday, a prairie thunderstorm, where there would be an awful lot of water coming down in a very short period of time, a large amount flowing into the river that may affect the combined sewer system. That's what rule 4 applies to.

Mrs. Taillieu: Okay, thank you. I understand that. There was a comment by the Premier saying that there was a risk to the sewer systems, so that seemed to be something that was taken into consideration at the time, on April 9, that's reported, and yet, you're saying to me now that there really wasn't a threat to the sewer system.

Ms. Melnick: Well, the member talked about the application of rule 4 this spring and that was not what was applied this spring. It was rule 1, the imminent flooding, and then, from rule 3, the section that talks about ice in the floodway. So when you're looking at the Premier's quote there, the City had been fully prepared in the case of having a problem with the sewer system for river levels one foot higher than the current levels if a significant ice jam had occurred. With a sudden rise of river levels of, say, up to three feet, they were concerned about being able to respond in time to ensure proper functioning of sewer gates and related work.

The quote that you've read from the Premier there is referring to this, but it's still under rule 1, and, I think, it's the third point under rule 3, this may have caused basement flooding. So, again, a lot went into the calculation and the consideration around raising the gates to what level, et cetera. But, again,

the real focus was on the south end of the city where there may have actually been, despite the preparedness of the folks there, cause to evacuate.

Mrs. Taillieu: This is just a clarification. Is rule 4 ever used in a spring flood event, then, or is it just set aside for something after the spring runoff season?

Ms. Melnick: In the past, it has been used for, basically, summer flood events such as I've described.

Mrs. Taillieu: I thank you. I realize that. But I'm wondering if you could just tell me whether rule 4 is ever needed to be used in a spring event.

Ms. Melnick: The short answer is no. But, if we could just go to rule 4, emergency operation to reduce sewer backup in Winnipeg, through to 4(2), this rule applies after the spring crest from snow melt runoff at Winnipeg, whenever high river levels substantially impair the capacity of Winnipeg's combined sewer system.

So, after the spring crest from snow melt runoff.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, there was a number of crests this year, in a number of different places, but I will leave that. Okay. I won't belabour that point.

I also on Thursday asked a question about the level at James Street would be—I think it was established 24.5 feet at James Street station would have to be getting to that level before the decision was made to operate the floodway. I asked: What was the actual level at James Street when the floodway was operated? You did not have that information, and I'm wondering if you had it today.

Ms. Melnick: Just to clarify, the floodway could be operated any time as long as an actual is maintained, which was the level during the time the floodway was developed in 1968.

So, the maintaining of the level that the member said, if you look again at rule 1, normal operation, maintain natural water levels on the Red River at the entrance to the floodway channel until the water surface elevation at James—it's James Avenue—reaches 24.5 feet, 7.46 metres, or the river level anywhere along the Red River within the city of Winnipeg reaches two feet below the flood protection level of 27.83 feet or 8.48 metres.

Mrs. Taillieu: I understand that the level did fluctuate from St. Norbert all the way to Winnipeg,

but I'm just curious as to what it actually was at James Street when the floodway was operating.

Ms. Melnick: The important part of the calculation to begin operation of the floodway was the level at the south end of the city, which was James Avenue equivalent, a river level of 20 feet. So that was the important area. Certainly the south end is higher, and as we go north, it goes down. So, that was the important measurement in that consideration.

Mrs. Taillieu: I don't want to belabour the point, but I'm getting more curious as I go along.

I admit that I'm not an expert in this. I'm just asking some questions here, but I don't think I've ever heard the term James Avenue equivalent. Was that a term used in '97?

Ms. Melnick: Yes, it was. James Avenue equivalent is used to talk about anywhere upstream or downstream of James Avenue.

So, wherever the concern is for any imminent flooding within the city of Winnipeg, you would use the equivalent as if it was at James, because that's the measurement by which we recognize that there could be some very serious situations developing.

Mrs. Taillieu: I think that, in '97, the point determined at James street to look at activating the floodway, I think that was higher. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think it was 28.5 feet.

* (16:10)

Ms. Melnick: At 28.5 feet James Avenue, Winnipeg would be flooded. The primary dikes would be overtopped considerably.

Mrs. Taillieu: Okay, and I think maybe I am getting a little mixed up, but there was a different level identified at James Street in '97. Am I not right?

Ms. Melnick: Well, I'm sure there were different levels identified at different times. Are you talking about the activation of the floodway at that point?

I think the answer the member might be looking for is, during the '97 flood, the James Avenue equivalent was 25.5 feet. This was related to the south end of Winnipeg, the same area that we had the concern about this year, Mr. Acting Chair. It was the former government who looked at the 25.5 James equivalent, realized that that was too high, that that actually created more risk for the south end areas that we were concerned about this year, and it was the former administration who changed the level of

concern James Avenue to 24.5 feet, or 24.5 James equivalent.

Mrs. Taillieu: Well, I guess I'm really asking these questions because, as you know, I represent an area that gets flooded every time the floodway gates are raised, and the minister has said there has been no artificial flooding this year. But I'm wondering how you can really say that when, immediately after the floodway was operational, the water rose very quickly and flooded roads and flooded people's property in a very short period of time. That doesn't seem to be natural. It wouldn't be natural to flood in that short a period of time, so I'm really not sure how you can say there was no artificial flooding.

Ms. Melnick: Well, a lot of elements play into the determination of whether or not artificial flooding has occurred. When we look at what would the water level have been had the floodway not been operated, had the Portage Diversion not been operated, had the Shellmouth Dam not be operated, it would have been considerably higher this spring, so we were able to determine, certainly by operation of those three water control structures, that the level in Winnipeg was lowered by 12 feet. We were able to determine that, by using those three structures, that, in fact, the water level had been lower, had those three structures not been there.

Mrs. Stefanson: I just wanted to get into some questions with respect to under your Ecological Services Planning and Co-ordination, under expected results it says, an active and effective conservation districts program in Manitoba that provides watershed planning and programs.

We have heard from a number of conservation districts and from people out in the communities that there are significant problems right now, and of course I know that the program is evolving, and that there are various changes taking place within the program. I'm wondering if the minister could indicate whether or not she believes the program is as effective as it can be right now and if she could indicate to us what sort of changes we can expect in order for it to become a more effective program?

Ms. Melnick: Well, when we look at the conservation program we look at a very dynamic program throughout the province of Manitoba and we look at a program that has not been under review for the last 40 years. So are there a lot of improvements to be made, are there a lot of changes to be made, is there a lot of updating to be made? Yes, there is. That's why we came out with our initial

document. We did a round of consultation on that. We formed a committee with AMM and MCDA who have put together a second draft, if you will. That draft right now is out with the AMM and MCDA, and they are taking them to their members through a series of meetings. We look forward to hearing what they will come back with.

Is there enough funding to do absolutely everything everyone wants to do? No, there's not. Have there been increases in funding since 1999? Yes, there have been millions of dollars of increases over the last number of years. The provincial contribution this year is \$6.3 million, which I think doubles if not triples the amount in 1999.

We have also increased the number of conservation districts that are now functioning. The conservation districts themselves, and very much to their credit, have leveraged over \$1.5 million in additional provincial, federal and non-governmental funding. So this would be through, for example, the Fisheries Enhancement Fund, which I just read the list a little while ago and various other programs.

So conservation district programming funding exceeded \$9 million last year and I think we have to keep moving in that direction. I think it's the right direction to go in, but we can't negate the improvements that we've seen both in membership in the square kilometres that are now covered under the conservation district program that wasn't previous to 1999. Quite frankly, again, I think a lot of this comes down to the people in the front lines in their community who are seeing improvements that can be made and are working to make those improvements.

It's not going to happen overnight, but when I see the schedule that we have for the integrated watershed management plans and knowing that conservation districts are working together in ways that—because they're recognizing the sharing of the watersheds haven't worked together before. There are some challenges there, no doubt, but they're really putting a lot of effort into that and I'd like to thank them and say it is an honour to be in the partnership and we've just got to keep moving.

*(16:20)

Mrs. Stefanson: I thank the minister for her comments on that and I know that—like there just is a fairly large degree of frustration, I think, coming from the conservation district, other board members or those out in the communities with respect to what the actual role of the conservation districts is, how it

is evolving. As you're going through your process of long-term—and you're talking right now about, yes, we need to evolve; we need to develop long-term strategies for the conservation districts and their roles. Certainly, I know within your department that there have been a number of instances where more—and I'm not saying this is necessarily a bad thing, just to say this again, but there's more responsibility placed on conservation districts and the local community, and we would certainly agree with that. Of course, when there's certain expectations and when rules and regulations come into play and changes are made that affect the conservation districts and their ability to be able to implement these programs, it becomes very, very difficult.

So I think that as the minister is developing her long-term plan, so are the conservation districts. The unfortunate thing is that there're so many regulations that come into play in the meantime that it's very difficult for these conservation districts to come up with their long-term plan. So there are a number of factors at play here.

But I also would like to know—and I know that the conservation districts, they come up with their annual budgets and their plans on an annual basis. Of course, a number of the things that are taking place with respect to the environment and so on in these individual conservation districts, a lot of it has to do with long-term planning and expenses to projects that will be in the long term as opposed to just this year or next year. As they're trying to develop their programs, often what they'd like to do is if they are budgeting for next year or the year after when they know there will be a fairly large expenditure, I know that there is a want for some flexibility to be able to carry budgets over to estimate when the expenditures will come into play.

So the conservation districts are trying to be fairly prudent when it comes to developing the long-term strategies and vision as set out for them by the government department, but there are some frustrations there, and I'm wondering if the minister would agree to at least look at or consider—or maybe she already is—looking at some long-term budget plans as opposed to just a year-by-year budget for the conservation districts.

Ms. Melnick: Well, when we look at CD participation, since 1999, we have 97 percent more R.M.s participating. Funding has gone up by 112 percent, so that's more than equal to the R.M.s that are now participating. Not surprising to hear

members opposite complain about regulations; we know they would remove all the water regs in the province, and that's a concern. *[interjection]* Well, that's what your leader said, and you brought him in.

When we talk about plans, the integrated watershed management plans are all about multi-year planning and multi-partnership planning. Now, to help the conservation districts with those plans, we've brought in five full-time FTEs specific to watershed planning. We know that integrated watershed management plans are not one year, a few months, six months, but that they do carry over, and this is the way that when we have a plan put together, it's a multi-year plan. We can look at funding year over year and do what we can to provide the funding that they have.

But, again, I'll point out that conservation districts leveraged more than \$1.5 billion in additional provincial, federal and non-government funding, so I'm seeing that not all the funding is being derived from the Conservation Districts program that we have, but we're also seeing a lot of creativity and a lot of movement to find other funders. Other funders are coming on board and are recognizing the need and are recognizing the benefits of the conservation districts. So again, it's kind of an exciting time, actually, when we're having the stakeholders discuss how to move forward.

Now, a plan that works in one conservation district won't necessarily work in another, and a plan that works even in one part of a CD may not work in another part of the CD, particularly if they're different watersheds. But that's where the whole idea of planning and partnership comes in.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Reid): Further comments, or—you're finished?

Ms. Melnick: No. I'm fine, thank you.

Mr. Briese: Just probably only one question or maybe there'll be a follow-up, but there's a proposal out there right now that went to the Lake Manitoba Stewardship Board about Lonely Lake, and there was a letter written to the minister, I believe, on it.

It's a proposal calling for raising the levels of Lonely Lake, and I know some of the background there. The levels that are there and maintained right now I think were first put in place in about 1940. I have another letter which I'll probably forward to the minister, but it's from the ranchers and the people that are around the lake expressing their concerns about the first letter's concerns. I just would like to

hear a few comments from the minister on what she's seen on Lonely Lake.

Ms. Melnick: Well, certainly we work with communities when there are concerns raised. My comment is I would very much like to get a copy of the letter that the member's referring to. That is not sounding familiar to me, but certainly we would be happy to engage the local community on the concerns that they have and perhaps even more so, suggestions that they have for ways to relieve the concerns and find solutions.

Mr. Briese: I'll get that to you, because I know the presentation was made. They just had the Lake Manitoba committee hearings, and I know it was made at one of those hearings. I'll go back onto the conservation districts now if I may.

In my constituency, I have three of the conservation districts; three of the four conservation districts that are responsible for infrastructure. I constantly hear from those three. I have the Turtle River. I have the Alonsa, and I have the Whitemud, and I constantly hear from them that they are underfunded on the infrastructure part of things. I know those conservation districts get the higher levels of funding, but I would certainly encourage the minister, and I'd ask her at the end of this, what her plans are into the future, but they're very, very efficient at making use of dollars. If the Province was doing the infrastructure that they're capable of doing, it would be costing considerably more than it's costing them.

In my view, and I want to get the minister's view on it, this is certainly a cheap way to get that infrastructure done, and is she considering more funding into those conservation districts that are responsible?

* (16:30)

Ms. Melnick: Recognizing the good work, as the member has mentioned, of the CDs who do provide infrastructure programming, last year, actually, through MIT, we brought in a capital program of some \$800,000. That was new money that went to the four CDs. So if you had more questions for the minister of MIT, if you had more questions specific to this, they may be best put to the minister from MIT. Certainly, we were working in a partnership way with MIT as well on that.

Mr. Briese: I think part of the problem—and it's probably some of the similar problem that we have from infrastructure all over—is they're funded to

about a one-in-100-year level of replacement on some of that infrastructure, and everyone knows that culverts and structures like that do not last 100 years, and so you get further and further behind.

There was—and I think it's still in place. I'm somewhat removed from it now. There was a pilot project on drainage and on drainage licensing in the Whitemud Conservation District, and I know you have quite a few more water enforcement officers—I think that's the proper title—which puts a lot more resources out there, but I still understand there is quite a backlog in some of the drainage licensing in the province. I think I heard a figure of about 800 in the Interlake area. I think was the number I heard.

An Honourable Member: Seventeen hundred and fifty.

Mr. Briese: Seventeen hundred and fifty? Okay, I was being generous. But is there any move to expand what was done? Because I live in that area. I know it worked extremely well. All the parties were taken out to whatever the project was, and they would almost literally stand out there until they made a decision and then went ahead with it, and they were turning around licensing in four to six weeks and it worked extremely well. They turned down some. They approved some that didn't have many impacts. So are you considering expanding that type of program? The water resource officers were certainly involved in it.

Ms. Melnick: Now I'm confused, because I have a member of the opposition supporting the water resource officers, and I have another one calling them the water police. So are you thinking this is a good thing or a bad thing? *[interjection]*

The water police—oh now that it's done, and the third one is: we support police, what's wrong with police?

What we've done around drainage is—I'll just list a couple of things here. You mention the Interlake, so I'll speak specifically about the Interlake and then we can broaden out. We have doubled the number of water resource officers; opened six additional regional offices; developed an expedited process for licensing projects expected to have minimal impacts; expanded the use of data collection and tracking software; and we've begun the process of developing software to further streamline the licensing process and allow greater public access to information.

So we are also going to be taking steps to further refine the licensing process and to developing

licensing partnerships again with the local conservation districts. There are five water resource officers operating out of three offices. These specifically are Arborg, Gimli and Stonewall and, given the higher percentage of backlog licences in the Interlake, water resource officers from across the province have been tasked to assist with processing Interlake licence applications.

So, as you know, there was quite an acute situation last August, a one-in-150-year rain event that left the ground quite saturated. So, when we talk about the broader issue of water control works and drainage licensing, we have 24 new positions, pardon me, 24 positions including 14 new water resource officers, again, Stonewall, Arborg, Deloraine, Neepawa, Shoal Lake and Swan River. There are new bilingual offices under way in St. Laurent and Ste. Anne, and the original offices remain and are maintained and staffed in Gimli, Morris, Dauphin and Brandon.

Water resource officers are assigned to conservation districts, as the member mentioned, and they work to inform rural municipalities and CDs, agricultural producers, environmental groups and other stakeholders of changes in licensing program. Again, we are preparing a policy to provide guidance on an expedited licensing process for minor drainage works, which was a concern that was raised. We've increased the technical support for the section through the addition of new positions in the Water Control System Management Branch, and we've also increased the senior management capacity through the addition of a new director for the regulatory services branch. I think one of the very important steps we took was regulation under The Summary Convictions Act, which was amended in March 2008 to introduce set fines for offences under The Water Rights Act.

Previously, someone who was accused of offending the drainage licensing process would appear before a judge. The justice would determine what fine would be set. It could be very little one day, high the next day. Now we actually have a unified code, so this change allows water resource officers to issue tickets immediately upon identifying an offence. Fines are increased over \$2,000 per offence, so assault of the drainage licensing process in Manitoba is no longer just a way of doing business with a little slap on the wrist, I think \$2,000 per offence, which may increase if there's not the remedy made in the time that's been outlined.

All the water resource officers received concentrated regulatory and enforcement training and training that focusses on the principles of integrated watershed management plans. This, in conjunction with the support we give to the CDs, I believe there are 23 integrated watershed management plans on the go, completed, or getting ready to be announced. Each is provided with \$25,000 as an initial start up. Again, the additional five new positions that have been created within the branch that is supporting the conservation districts within the Department of Water Stewardship.

We are taking action. When you live at the bottom of the ocean, it can be pretty wet sometimes, and certainly we are in a wet cycle right now, but we are taking actions we believe are reasonable and rational, but most of all will be effective.

Mr. Briese: Five years ago, or roughly five to six years ago, there was only a backlog of 800 to 850 licence applications in the province. I know that very well because I was involved with the AMM at the time. Now there are 1,750 in the Interlake and you're talking about all these programs you've put in place. Why isn't the backlog dropping? It's higher in one area of the province than it was across the whole province before.

I don't disagree that there has to be meaningful enforcement to make the whole thing work, but part of the problem is the frustration with the backlog and putting in an application and waiting two years to have the application dealt with. The frustration sinks in and there'd be a heck of a lot less breaking the rules or going against what's there if the licensing applications were dealt with in a timely fashion.

I heard you say you've expended some resources in the Interlake to try and address that backlog, but I still think the best way to address that backlog is through a program like they had in the Whitemud Conservation District. I believe it was in Cook's Creek to a degree. I think that should be expanded to all the conservation districts, and I just wondered if you'd comment on that.

Ms. Melnick: Well, a couple of comments to make. Just a correction, the 1,762 are throughout the province, not just the Interlake, so if we could clarify that.

An Honourable Member: I'll buy that.

Ms. Melnick: Okay. The second comment is we are undeniably in a wet cycle, and when there's not a lot

of water rolling around, you don't have the same need for drainage. Again, we've seen unprecedented conditions. In the Interlake, 150 year rainfall. We've seen the sort of high water levels this spring. We've seen a lot of precipitation coming down over the last number of years. Now, that coupled with the fact that it's no longer the wild west of drainage we saw in the 1990s. Rather, we're bringing in water resource officers. We're working with conservation districts on drainage. We're expediting the process; we have The Summaries Conviction Act.

* (16:40)

We're taking a lot more action on drainage, and so a lot more people, recognizing that this is a government that's serious on dealing with drainage, are coming to us. They are putting in applications and we are seeing progress. But, again, I think it's very, very positive that we are having more applications and that we are having a better way to respond to these applications.

Mr. Briese: I have to respond to that. I know we were in a wet cycle last year, but in '99 we had the whole southwest corner of the province under water for—a far larger area under water in '99 than we have right now. And she can refer to it as the wild, wild west if she wants, but we were still dealing with the licensing applications on at least as timely a basis as they are right now. We have gone from, I think, what were only three or four water enforcement officers to something like 24. I know you've used the number here and I'm not sure exactly what it was, but it's quite a number of them now. It's still, in my view, a heck of a lot better for us to facilitate the licensing. The carrot is still better than the stick, and you do have to have the stick to make the carrot work, but the carrot is still better than the stick. I think we need to be concentrating totally on cutting down that backlog.

Ms. Melnick: Well, I thank the member for making my point. In the '90s, I think you said, there were three or four drainage licence officers; we now have 14 new water resource officers. So we're still cleaning up from the wild west of the '90s where there simply wasn't the ability to work on a lot of the drainage issues. People were not as clear as to how to work on them. We've done a lot of education on how to work on them.

So those are the carrot parts but, of course, the stick part is for the first time ever there's the regulation under The Summary Convictions Act, so water resource officers are able to immediately

present a ticket when they see that there has been an infringement, and work with communities to deal with some of these very, very long-standing—and I know that the member and I don't agree on everything, but I know that we can agree that there are some very long-standing, very complicated drainage files that have been going on, outstanding even before the 1990s, and these can take an awful lot of resources.

But part of, again, what we're doing, is the expedited licensing process for minor drainage work so we can get some of the more easy-to-handle issues out of the way quickly and be able to work on more of the integrated ones.

Mr. Faurshou: Mr. Acting Chair, just wanting to ask a couple quick questions as it pertains to what's happening south of the border. We know that there have been significant expenditures announced for Devils Lake and the raising of the diking in that vicinity. Also, too, is the minister planning on attending the Red River Basin conference in the beginning of next month in Grand Forks?

Ms. Melnick: Just to clarify, the meeting with the Red River Basin Commission that the Member for Portage la Prairie refers to next year is actually a small group of the executive. It's not a major meeting that will be happening there. So it will be the executive who will be going. We are watching the developments around Devils Lake very closely.

Mr. Faurshou: Well, we may not be speaking of exactly the same thing, but there is a conference next month in Grand Forks that is going to be discussing international issues pertaining to water. I'm just wondering whether the minister and I are speaking about exactly the same thing.

Ms. Melnick: We'll have a look and if the member has some maybe printed information on what he is referring to it would be helpful to get that, and we'll have a look at that.

I think there might be—I'm not sure if there are a couple of different meetings we're talking about here. I'm hearing legislators' forum up in Gimli, but I am hearing an executive meeting of the Red River Basin Commission next month in Grand Forks. So, if you have any information, please make us aware of it.

Mr. Faurshou: Well, appreciate that.

Further to the water that is of concern to ourselves here in Manitoba, the pipeline that is being constructed for supply of water to Minot, are you

keeping abreast of the developments as it pertains to that project?

Ms. Melnick: I think the member is referring to the NAWS project and, yes, we are certainly keeping up-to-date on developments there.

Mr. Faurichou: Now, and further to just not only keeping up with what's happening across the international boundary, is the Province of Manitoba still engaged in litigation as it pertains to Devils Lake and water release through the diversion constructed by the North Dakota state?

Ms. Melnick: We're not engaged in any actions right now on Devils Lake. We are on NAWS, and I'm remembering the comments of the Member for Emerson (Mr. Graydon) last year, who hasn't appeared this year, who was not supportive of the actions that the government of Manitoba was taking to protect the water sources, so I'm hoping the Member for Portage la Prairie will be able to express his support for the protection of water here in Manitoba through taking every action that we can, not only around Devils Lake, but also around NAWS.

Mr. Faurichou: Well, appreciate the minister, and I think the minister knows me well enough that in respect to safeguarding water quality here in Manitoba, I'm certainly at the forefront. However, I am, though, wanting always to base my position on science and not to be looking for headlines in the papers and taking actions that are only designed to garner those headlines. So, definitely the water quality—and we do want to make certain that we are aware of what is happening in the catchment areas.

Following through on that point, we do have interprovincial water agreements with our province to the west of us. Could perhaps the minister update us as to the current inflow-outflows from Saskatchewan, say, that are impacting on Manitoba, and are we within the water agreements that we have signed on to?

* (16:50)

Ms. Melnick: I believe the member is referring to the Prairie Provinces Water Board, and it really was a pleasure to host the annual meeting last spring here in the Legislative Building.

Mr. Acting Chair, the original agreement with the Prairie Provinces Water Board was signed in 1948, and it was at that time that the apportionment

agreements were agreed upon, and those have not been changed.

You were talking about water coming in from Saskatchewan. We do have an interprovincial drainage task force that is working under the auspices of the Prairie Provinces Water Board, and this is looking at any drainage that may be coming in. Our interests are any drainage that may be coming in from Saskatchewan, making sure that we're aware of what's coming in and that the sort of licensing of drainage that we believe is necessary we're encouraging Saskatchewan to take.

Mr. Faurichou: Yes, I appreciate that it is very important that we know where the waters are coming from, so we're able to adapt and plan for the entry of water into Manitoba.

Mr. Acting Chairperson, just in regard to entering into Manitoba, does the department keep a record of inflow versus outflow within provincial boundaries? I know Manitoba Hydro keeps very accurate records of the outflows of the Churchill and Nelson rivers, but does the department have inflow-outflow statistics within the department?

Ms. Melnick: Yes, we have several different areas that we work. If we're talking about flow incoming or outgoing to the west of us, it's through the Prairie Provinces Water Board. There is a program that measures water flow rates and volume.

We also have partnership in the International Red River Board, which would do the north-south interchange, Lake of the Woods Control Board for Ontario, what's coming in and going out, and partnerships are with Manitoba Hydro, with the federal government. So there's a lot of calculation and a lot of measurement and watching what's coming in and what's going out.

Mr. Faurichou: Would I still be accurate in using approximately 110,000 cubic feet per second as an outflow out of Manitoba into Hudson Bay on an average daily basis?

Ms. Melnick: Is the member looking for an approximate outflow today?

Mr. Faurichou: Well, let the calculations lapse for now. I was informed that our average outflow is about 110,000 cubic feet per second, on average. That will go up and down seasonally. On an average, that was the figure that was given to me some years ago, and I just wondered whether it was similar or has changed.

The honourable Member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire) would like to ask you a couple of questions, but I just wanted to leave you with one thought. I've found that it is extremely disappointing how the vast majority of Manitobans are unaware of the Assiniboine River Diversion in Portage la Prairie. There's been a lot of work done on the flood control measures taken to safeguard Winnipeg. Is there any thought pattern of creating an interpretative centre, say, at The Forks, to let Manitobans know how Winnipeg is protected by the vitally important flood control infrastructure. I don't expect an answer today, but it's just something that I want to leave you with, and if you're at all interested in doing that, I would say it is important that Winnipeggers know what happens outside the Perimeter of Manitoba.

Ms. Melnick: I agree with what the member is saying. Certainly, for me, any reason to get out beyond the Perimeter is, I think, a good reason for me. I think we live in a tremendous province and we have incredible abilities here, natural. But, when we look at the effort that has been put in to deal with situations such as we experienced this spring, the Shellmouth Dam, the Portage Diversion, the Fairford Water Control Structure and the various other water control structures throughout Manitoba, I would agree, but I don't think that Manitobans are always aware of what has been done around the protection of all Manitobans and how important it is to work together.

So I'm not aware of any initiative to bring more profile to the Assiniboine, the diversion. That doesn't mean that something couldn't be done in the future. So I'll take the member's suggestion and see if, at some point, we might be able to do something to recognize the efforts that have been made by Manitobans past, but also how, by working together, we've been able to, I think, accomplish quite an incredible accomplishment this spring of how we work together to protect each other throughout Manitoba.

Also, I wouldn't want to leave this portion without saying that I, as the Minister of Water Stewardship, am very aware that there is still an awful lot of water on the land, and Manitobans in lots of areas of our province, are still dealing with it. We know that they're still continuing to work very hard.

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

COMPETITIVENESS, TRAINING AND TRADE

* (14:30)

Madam Chairperson (Bonnie Korzeniowski): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply has been dealing with the Estimates of the Department of Competitiveness, Training and Trade.

Would the minister's staff please enter the Chamber.

We are on page 49 of the Estimates book. As previously agreed, questioning for this department will proceed in a global manner.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Blaine Pedersen (Carman): Just to go back to Thursday, you were to supply me with some lists: vacant positions; staff hirings '08, '09; and untendered contracts.

Do you have those lists for me?

Hon. Andrew Swan (Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade): I understand from my staff that they're continuing to work on that. I'll do the best to get that to you quickly.

Mr. Pedersen: Also, I'd asked for any travel paid out of this department for the Premier (Mr. Doer).

Mr. Swan: Again, I can let the Member for Carman know my staff is working on that, and, as soon as possible, we'll get an answer, if there is an answer, to him.

Mr. Pedersen: So, I'm assuming that's the same, then, for staff travel in the 16 sector councils? Do you have those lists or are they not available?

Mr. Swan: That's being compiled, as well.

Mr. Pedersen: Going through our Estimates from last Thursday, I did have a couple of questions out of here from—the Invest in Manitoba Web site is being developed to focus on the international investment community.

Can the minister tell me what the budget is for that, and how soon it will be up and running?

Mr. Swan: Indeed, the Invest in Manitoba Web site is up and running. Is the member looking for detail on the cost of the development of that Web site?

Mr. Pedersen: The cost to develop it and, if it's up and running now, what the ongoing cost of it is, or what the cost of it is budgeted for this fiscal year.

Mr. Swan: Yes, we will get that for the member. It's mainly internal staff that have been working on that. I don't expect there's much in the way of contracts to external companies or external agencies. But we'll try to provide a breakdown for the member.

Mr. Pedersen: So you don't have the cost of it right now, for what it cost to develop it?

Mr. Swan: I don't have that today. No.

Mr. Pedersen: One of the other, reading through *Hansard* of last week, the minister said that, amongst others—and we were talking about apprenticeships, and the Northern Manitoba Sector Council has actually agreed to step in and be the employer of those apprentices.

Can the minister elaborate on that?

Mr. Swan: The Northern Manitoba Sector Council is a sector council. It's organized geographically, and it has some of the largest employers in northern Manitoba. Some of those are Manitoba Hydro, HudBay Minerals, Inco, Crow Flight Resources, which is a junior mining company, Tolko, and Louisiana-Pacific. I may have missed one in there.

The challenge, certainly, for someone in the north to become an apprentice is that the choices of where you can apprentice aren't as great as they are elsewhere in the province. In some cases, the challenge is that the work that's available for the apprentice is not 12 months in the year.

* (14:40)

The apprenticeship system, in general, is based on putting in time on the worksite to get your hours, and then there's a period of time in a classroom in a training facility, which is relatively small compared to the worksite. In most cases, someone can become an apprentice in a skilled trade within four years if they have full-time work. If, for example, there are only six months of work available, the time to become a journeyman can actually double. It could be eight years. If there are only four months of work, that time can expand to 12 months.

That's been difficult in terms of attracting people into the trades in terms of providing a career path that is doable, is easy for people to understand. At the same time, we have a number of industries in northern Manitoba which may follow different

business cycles. Right now, we know that both forestry and mining are in some tough times because of low commodity prices. However, there can be times when one sector is up and the other sector is down. For example, forestry may be doing very well and mining could be down because of world markets and world prices.

What the sector council has come forward with and which we agree with, is that instead of it simply being Louisiana-Pacific or simply being Inco, which is the employer that apprentices, meaning that if they don't have work for that apprentice, they lay that apprentice off and, technically speaking, the apprenticeship comes to an end. The Northern Manitoba Sector Council is prepared to be the employer and people can fulfil their responsibilities under apprenticeship in more than one employer.

So, in the perfect scheme of things, let's say for example that, as is the case, the kraft paper market is still doing very well, which is one of Tolko's major lines. If there were workers in Louisiana-Pacific who would otherwise be idle, the Northern Manitoba Sector Council would help out, let those apprentices drive another two hours north to The Pas, keep working and also keep accumulating their hours towards their next levels in apprentice.

So it's being a little bit more flexible. It actually makes it easier on apprenticeship staff because they don't have to record the termination of apprenticeship and then register a new apprenticeship when someone drives across the north or just down the road to try and find more employment. So it's a good mix. It's a private-sector-driven initiative which we think makes sense for the public apprenticeship system.

Mr. Pedersen: So does the Northern Manitoba Sector Council, are they picking up any wages in here or are the wages always picked up by the employer? I understand you're moving from employer to employer to get the hours in on the apprenticeship. Is there a financial cost to Northern Manitoba Sector Council by doing this?

Mr. Swan: No there isn't. Again, the sector council is the registered employer, but the place where the apprentice is actually putting in the hours is the one who's paying that hourly wage. So it's still each individual company that's paying the cost of doing that.

Mr. Pedersen: Okay. Just for clarification then, there is no employment paid by Northern Manitoba

Sector Council or there's no deductions that have to be carried by Northern Manitoba Sector Council?

Mr. Swan: The member is correct. The sector council is simply the registered employer for the purpose of apprenticeship.

Mr. Pedersen: Before we get into AIT and trade and things like that, I would ask for—I'm talking about advertising. The minister was telling us about advertising on *Hockey Night in Canada* and wherever else it was. Oh, *CSI*, that's what it was. I guess I should watch more TV and then I would know this.

I'm looking for a full disclosure of all advertising costs within the department. You have various branches within your department. What I'm looking for is a breakdown of advertising on the fiscal year.

Mr. Swan: We can pull that together. Probably the easiest way to do it is for the past fiscal year. From last April 1, '08, to March 31, '09, the existing campaign I was talking about, of course, is ongoing, so we don't have a breakdown of it for you yet, but we can provide the last fiscal year, and I expect we can pull that together reasonably quickly.

Mr. Pedersen: Just so I make it clear as to what I'm looking for, if I understand it correctly, in the Estimates book there are—on page 85 there are six different divisions within your ministry. Is that correct?

Mr. Swan: There are actually five, Madam Chair. I see where the member's looking on page 85. There are Administration and Finance, Business Services, Labour Market Skills, Community and Economic Development and International Relations and Trade. The final item, amortization of capital assets, is really just a spot the accountants tell us to put things.

Mr. Pedersen: I realized that after I said six; I should have said five.

So what I'm looking for is a full disclosure of all advertising costs within the Ministry of Competitiveness, Training and Trade, and breaking down into each department, and I'm talking about print, radio, television, development costs for Internet advertising. I would like a complete breakdown, totals and breakdown, as much as possible, and I realize that it could be confidential when it's about individual customers, but that's the information that I'm looking for.

Mr. Swan: We can provide that for, again, the last fiscal year, so from April 1 of '08 to March 31 of '09.

Mr. Pedersen: Okay, that's good. Again, with these other lists that I've asked you to provide, they're not here, and with this advertising, do we have a time frame for these?

Madam Chair, again, I'm not holding you to the day, but, like, are we within a week or within two days, a week, when? Just so we have it on record.

Mr. Swan: I was inclined to say it would depend on how many more questions you asked me but, in all seriousness, I'm told by my department that they'll make every effort to get this into your hands within two or three weeks. It may be that some items are easier to pull together, and if those things are available I'll undertake—I'll provide you those as they come available and I won't wait for the whole package. We won't wait for the most difficult thing to be done before we provide it to you.

Mr. Pedersen: Madam Chair, okay, we're going to switch into AIT, Agreement on Internal Trade, and so what I'm starting—

Mr. Swan: Just, when we do that, we're going to make a little bit of a personnel change here to get in the specialists on the Agreement on Internal Trade and labour mobility. Is it safe for me to let Mr. Knight go back to his office and get some work done, or should he stay around because he may be needed again this afternoon?

Mr. Pedersen: If I happen to stray back into his area then we'll just defer it until he can come down, but I believe we'll be spending quite a bit of time on AIT and apprenticeships and that type of thing.

Mr. Swan: Actually, Mr. Knight is the apprenticeship person, so we'll put him up on the comfy benches upstairs with everybody else for now. Thank you. We'll just exchange some of our staff here.

Mr. Pedersen: Madam Chair, then we'll just wait. You've got personnel changes coming?

Mr. Swan: Yes.

Mr. Pedersen: Can we just wait a minute then?

* (14:50)

Mr. Swan: For those of you without a program, we're joined by Alan Barber, who is the Executive Director of Policy, Planning and Coordination for CTT.

Mr. Pedersen: As of April 20—and I believe that was even a little bit later than that when I was in your

office last week on a bill briefing—Nova Scotia had still not signed Chapter 7 of the AIT. What is the current status of that today?

Mr. Swan: The member's question is very timely. I'm informed that on Friday there was a conference call among the departmental officials from every province responsible for this, and the Nova Scotia folks said that they now have Cabinet approval to go ahead and sign. I expect Nova Scotia will be—the responsible minister will be signing that very shortly, if not already.

Mr. Pedersen: What's the current status then of the dispute resolution process, because Québec, P.E.I. and Canada had not signed that agreement yet.

Mr. Swan: We've got no specific update on whether or not the responsible ministers have sat down and have signed, but, of course, all jurisdictions have committed to the process and, in fact, back on January 16, when the First Ministers met, they endorsed the process, including the new dispute resolution mechanism.

Mr. Pedersen: So, from a legal perspective, is the AIT, as I can call it, is it binding on provinces, on Manitoba particularly right now, because you've signed the agreement? Is it binding on you when there are other provinces that have not—and Nova Scotia still hasn't technically signed it—and for the dispute resolution agreement, when these jurisdictions haven't signed it, is Manitoba legally obliged under AIT?

Mr. Swan: Not to split hairs, I mean, it's not a legal agreement; it's a political agreement among the various jurisdictions. But the agreement itself says it does not take binding effect until all signatures of all jurisdictions are in place. But, again, not only has every jurisdiction agreed on the wording, both of the labour mobility provisions and the dispute resolution provisions, we've had the premier of each province confirming their acceptance of this, and we've had all departmental officials agreeing that everything is now completed except for, in some cases, the appropriate ministers putting their pen to paper to sign.

I can even go beyond that and say that we have no concerns about one jurisdiction now suddenly, in light of all that, choosing not to sign on to these new provisions of the Agreement on Internal Trade.

Mr. Pedersen: In the unlikely event—and I guess I'm thinking more in terms of dispute resolution process of it—and because we've got two provinces—if you're

saying Nova Scotia's executive council has agreed to sign it, so it's a matter of the minister inking the deal and it's done, that's fine, so that's for the Chapter 7. But if, say Québec, for instance, doesn't sign a dispute resolution, does this agreement really work?

Mr. Swan: Again, I mean, Québec, Prince Edward Island, and Canada, obviously, have all made it clear; they have no concerns about the term of the agreement. If, for example, in the short term, there's a further delay from one of these jurisdictions in signing on to the new dispute resolution chapter, there still is an existing dispute resolution process.

We know the new one is much better and much stronger for provinces to make sure that everybody's complying with their obligations, but there still continues to be an AIT. There still continues to be a dispute resolution mechanism. It is our hope obviously that these final three signatures will be done quickly and then we can put this chapter away and get working on some other chapters that are going to be coming forward in the months and years to come.

Mr. Pedersen: So getting back to Manitoba, then, on the Manitoba level, how many professional organizations did your department consult with prior to the formation and signing of the Labour Mobility Agreement?

Mr. Swan: Well, I can tell the member that the list of regulated occupations is a long one. There was about 140 different such occupations that were identified some time ago. To be honest, that list continues to grow and there are still some other regulated occupations in which more work is to be done.

But I think it's fair to say that there was approximately 140 different organizations that got word of the new provisions of the Agreement on Internal Trade and the labour mobility provisions in particular.

Mr. Pedersen: Of these organizations, does that include unions as well? We were talking about professional trades. What about unions? What kind of contact did you have with unions?

Mr. Swan: I can tell the member that the Manitoba Federation of Labour, being the umbrella group for a great many unions in Manitoba, was a stakeholder that was consulted in the process.

Mr. Pedersen: So can I get a list of the organizations that were consulted to date?

Mr. Swan: I can put it on the record, but it would be a very dull few pages in *Hansard*, so we can provide that to you, yes.

Mr. Pedersen: Thank you. We'll add that to the shopping list here.

The AIT has been talked about for a long time. Can the minister give me a time frame for the consultation process within Manitoba?

*(15:00)

Mr. Swan: I'll try to give a fairly short historical context. The idea of bringing in a labour mobility chapter to the Agreement on Internal Trade has been around for a couple of years. About a year and a half ago, the department actively began consulting with various regulated occupations. In July 2008, the Council of the Federation—so, the First Ministers—moved up that timetable to get things done, and in July they said that the next time the Council of the Federation met in the summer of 2009, they wanted to have labour mobility be the case across Canada. So I think it's fair to say that, from July 2008, that increased the workload on people in this department and they actively began engaging those stakeholders on a more expedited basis, if I can call it that.

The form of the labour mobility chapter was agreed upon by ministers in December 2008. First Ministers endorsed the new chapter on January 16, 2009 and of course the Council of Federation directed that we would have labour mobility in Canada as of April 1, 2009. So I think it's fair to say that every regulated occupation which had been identified up to April 1, 2009 had been consulted and given information on the new chapter in the agreement on internal trade.

Mr. Pedersen: Was there a budget process for this? Was there an amount budgeted within your department to do these consultations within Manitoba or how were the costs covered?

Mr. Swan: Well, that's certainly in Mr. Barber's division. That has been a major initiative over the past year. It's been carried on by—basically carried on by his division. They've used staff and as well we hired a new person on a one-year contract to assist us in doing this work. So it's come out of the department's budget.

Mr. Pedersen: So could the minister then give me sort of a breakdown on how the consultation process went? How did you contact the stakeholders and what was the process for dialogue with the

stakeholders, if I may call that—the professional organizations?

Mr. Swan: Sure, I can sort of set out the work plan, if we can call it that, of how the division proceeded. The first step was to develop the stakeholder communication and information sharing strategy simply to identify which occupations were affected. I know it may sound silly, but it was actually quite a task just to figure out how many different occupations are regulated in some way, whether it's by their own governing body, like many professions are, whether it's as part of a registered trade in Manitoba, whether it's an occupation which is regulated by a government department such as day-care workers, or whether there is some other way in which carrying on that occupation is regulated.

Madam Chairperson, there was also development of an interdepartmental communication and implementation strategy. Obviously, the government of Manitoba has a number of regulated professions. So we needed to make sure every department was aware of what was happening and of course every minister—put it another way, every piece of legislation has a responsible minister. We needed to let each minister know that they now had responsibilities within their department to make sure that everybody was aware that this was coming on.

There was co-ordinated preparation of information. There were briefings for senior officials and then as we got into the specifics the work plan was to develop information materials and tools for public presentations so that our staff could go out and give presentations to different bodies about this.

We continued to identify all the provincial regulatory bodies affected by the amended AIT, co-ordinated a process for engaging all the identified regulators to ensure that they meet Manitoba's obligations while also helping those regulators out to understand what's in the amended agreement.

That was a big job, I can tell you, to be out there with every regulated occupation we could find to make sure they were aware of what was going on. That process then proceeded. Staff met with interested stakeholder organizations, maybe more general organizations to review the proposed amendments, and then many, many meetings with the various identified regulatory bodies to talk about the AIT and labour mobility to assess whether any regulated occupation would possibly be seeking an exception based on legitimate objections and

compiling recommendations on that front. Staff continued to prepare more information as more came forward as we got closer to, first of all, getting the terms of the chapter worked on, and as we got closer to implementation date, and then, finally, developing a final list, if you can call it, of all Manitoba occupations, professions, trades, implicated by changes to the AIT.

I can tell you that that list of regulated occupations is now up just over 200. Technologists became a very big number, I suppose, because there's various kinds of technologists that either have some protection of title or protection of the actual scope of work that they do.

So that process, to be honest, is ongoing. We think that we've been able to work with every possible regulated occupation. We acknowledge there may be other regulated occupations that come forward, so to some extent, that work is ongoing. There may be other regulated occupations which come back and ask for legitimate objectives if particular issues arise, when people present their licences or their credentials for registration in Manitoba. If there is concern about differences in standards among various provinces, that remains a work in process. As well, there's a very short list of those legitimate objectives. Our hope is to continue to work and, in fact, perhaps reduce that list even more than it is at present.

Mr. Pedersen: So is there any one person in particular that was leading the team? Obviously, you're the minister, but do you have any one particular person that was leading the charge for this process, this consultation process here in Manitoba?

Mr. Swan: There are three officials, I suppose, and Mr. Barber certainly is the head of the division, plays an important role. Scott Smith was hired on a one-year contract to serve as a special adviser and was one of the key staff, and as well Stacey Burnette from the division also was very involved with the process. So Mr. Smith and Ms. Burnette probably did the most one-on-one meetings, information meetings, seminars and the hands-on work.

Mr. Pedersen: I missed it—what is Stacey Burnette's position? Is she within the department or, just to bring me up to date on that.

Mr. Swan: She is a full-time employee of the department. Her title is labour mobility co-ordinator.

Mr. Pedersen: Labour mobility co-ordinator. So was this a new position that was created to do this or

was she in there before, and is it an ongoing position then?

Mr. Swan: I am advised by staff that that position has actually existed for a long time in Manitoba, likely ever since the original agreement and internal trade process was begun, which would have been 15 years ago.

Mr. Pedersen: So out of your consultation process I would imagine you heard many legitimate objections, at least from the presenters thinking that they were legitimate objections. That process now, did you tell me that that process is ongoing? If particular professions, trades have ongoing concerns about the AIT, is there a chance that their legitimate objection will be heard here in the time coming?

*(15:10)

Mr. Swan: Well, first I can say as minister I really didn't have to—personally I didn't have to hear from that many different regulated occupations. I know that Mr. Smith and Ms. Burnette did. In many cases they reported to me that once all of the information was available on how labour mobility under the AIT actually works, on the ability of regulators to continue to take steps to make sure that standards are appropriate, there weren't that many who insisted on going to the next step in meeting with the minister. You're correct in that a number of regulated occupations did, at first, indicate that they thought there were legitimate objectives. A lot of the work that's been done, primarily in the past year, is to really work with different occupations to make them understand what labour mobility is all about. There have been barriers which have been put up by every province and territory in this country, which have been based on, in some cases, simply the length of time that somebody has gone to college or to university, that has been based on other rules which don't impact on the ability of someone to do the job.

The great shift that's now happened with labour mobility under the Agreement on Internal Trade is that if an occupation wants to have a barrier, it should be something which is actually based on the skill set the workers have, so it's not necessarily based on whether a university program is five years in Manitoba and four years in one other province in Canada. The real question is, what skill sets do people bring when they're entitled to practice their trade or their profession or their occupation in another province? It's fair to say that some of the regulated occupations found this an easy enough concept to work with and to do. I think it's fair to say

that other occupations express some concern about that, and it's taken a little bit of time and a little bit of effort and explanation to focus them on the skill sets. There's a couple of exceptions that exist at present; right now, I believe there's only three. Of those three, there could be changes if professionals or tradespeople in other provinces have additional skill sets. There could be other groups, though, that come forward and say, now that we're aware of absolutely everything, we see there's a problem with people coming from one particular jurisdiction because they don't have the skill set needed to fulfil the scope of that job here in Manitoba.

It's the hope of Manitoba—and frankly, every other province, I believe—to make those exceptions as limited as possible so that we truly do have freedom of mobility across the country, but there could continue to be a few issues that come up in future.

Mr. Pedersen: One organization that I know that you are very familiar with is the College of Medical Laboratory Technologists of Manitoba, and they're having some real issues with this legislation—not so much with the legislation; I guess that's not correct. What they're having concerns about is they are writing the Canadian standards in Manitoba and in all provinces except Québec, as my understanding is. Québec does not write the Canadian standards. The lab technologists' association, if I can just call them that, has concerns about people coming in from Québec with a lower standard, under AIT, than what the Canadian standard is. How do you address this in Manitoba?

Mr. Swan: I can tell the member I don't have details of that particular governing body, but I can give the general answer, which I think would fit. Certainly, having a national standard or a national exam is the best way to know that somebody has the appropriate credentials and skills. Certainly, for an example, for tradespeople, having the Red Seal certification is a great way to make sure that your credentials are recognized from province to province. In fact, tradespeople under the Interprovincial Standards Red Seal Program are quite a bit ahead of everybody else.

Québec does have its own system for giving credentials, not just in this occupation, but many others. There's still a system of accreditation, there's still a system of examination. The big issue gets back to the general obligation on receiving jurisdictions—Manitoba—if that college has concerns that workers that come from Québec with their

credentials do not have the skill sets necessary to perform all of the scope of work that these technicians in Manitoba do, then they may very well have the ability to raise a legitimate objective.

An example of that is midwives. In Manitoba, midwives are trained and are licensed to carry on a wide range of different tasks, including intubating newborns, which is obviously very important. I believe, also, resuscitation of newborns is something that midwives in Manitoba are trained to do. That is also the case in some provinces; that's not the case in other provinces. The midwives have identified certain provinces where the skill sets are simply not there for someone who wants to engage in the entire practice of being a midwife in Manitoba.

So they've made their case, and we've agreed that there is a legitimate objective in having some limits on individuals coming from those provinces. Someone coming from that province should then go and get the additional training to make sure they have that skill set.

It can work the other way. Pharmacists in certain provinces are able to prescribe medication. In Manitoba, they can't. So if a Manitoba pharmacist wants to go to, I believe, Alberta, a jurisdiction where they can prescribe, there would be conditions put on the Manitoban's ability to practice. They would have to go and get more training—in that case, likely, a lot more training—in order to be granted simply unlimited status to carry on the entire practice of a pharmacist in Alberta.

So it can work in a number of different ways but, again, the focus for any regulated occupation is not to look at the particular pathway, whether it's university, college, an apprenticeship program or something else, and to focus on the skill sets that are necessary for someone to appropriately carry on a profession or trade or other occupation in the jurisdiction.

Mr. Pedersen: So using the lab technologist as an example, if a lab technologist from Québec wants to come and work in Manitoba, can the College of Medical Laboratory Technologists of Manitoba not issue—is that lab technologist from Québec automatically able to be a lab technician in Manitoba based on the Québec qualifications? Do they have to write the Manitoba—Canadian—can they not issue—I understand that they have to be issued a licence to be a lab technologist in Manitoba.

Coming from Québec to Manitoba—and I'm using the Québec example because they have somewhat lower standard according to the lab technologists of Manitoba—if they come to Manitoba, can the Manitoba body not issue them a licence based on not having the Canadian standard, written the Canadian standards or is that a violation of AIT?

Mr. Swan: Yes, Madam Chair, the general way that the labour mobility provisions of the AIT work is licence-to-licence recognition. The obligation is on a receiving jurisdiction, in this case, Manitoba. If they believe that it's not appropriate to issue a Manitoba licence to somebody who has a Québec licence, the obligation on that college or that organization is to determine what skill sets are missing.

* (15:20)

Now you've used the term, there's a lower standard in Québec. I have no knowledge of whether or not that's the case. If there were particular skill sets, though, that aren't taught in Québec, and those skill sets are necessary for someone to fulfil all of the usual occupational requirements here in Manitoba where there is a concern about safety, where there's a concern about the public interest, then certainly we invite the college or anyone else to make their case for there being a legitimate objective. But it's fair to say that across Canada, now the obligation is on each governing body or each governing provincial department to step up and raise those concerns and ask for a legitimate objective.

If a regulator simply chooses not to do that work and they don't issue a licence, that may very well be a breach of the Agreement on Internal Trade, and it could allow the sending jurisdiction, if I can call it that, Québec in this case, to complain that Manitoba is not complying with its obligations under the labour mobility chapter.

Mr. Pedersen: I'm trying to make sure that I've got this straight then. The lab technologist comes out of Québec, applies to Manitoba. Manitoba refuses because they haven't written the Canadian standard, and that seems to be the crux. The Manitoba lab technologists' argument is that Québec does not write the Canadian standard.

I don't personally know what the standards are either. All I'm doing is taking their word for it. That Québec lab technologist could then come to you, as minister, and say, Manitoba has unfairly declined me

a licence to practise here in Manitoba under AIT, and what happens then?

Mr. Swan: Again, you and I are—it's fair to say neither one of us knows exactly the nature of the concerns. But you're right. The Canadian standard, or an exam, is not the be all and end all for the entitlement to be licensed in another jurisdiction. The obligation is on this college or any other regulator to step up and say that somebody does not have the appropriate skill sets.

If there was a lab tech from Québec who came and was aggrieved because they didn't get their licence granted by Manitoba, their recourse is to go back to Québec and to convince the Québec government to raise this as an unfair practice, if you call it that, under the Agreement on Internal Trade, and I would hear about it from the Québec government.

The way this is intended to work is that if there is a concern, it's raised government to government. The first step that we would take, and I expect every other jurisdiction is going to take, is to immediately sit down with the regulator to find out exactly what happened, find out exactly what the concerns are. It would be, I suppose, that the provinces' role at that point is to decide whether indeed we were talking about a true legitimate objective, in which case Manitoba would respond to Québec and say, you know, we've looked at this; we think that this governing body actually had the right to make the decision they did for these reasons, or we would say to the governing body, no, we don't think you've actually identified a gap in skill sets. We believe that there's a problem, that if Québec pursues this and makes a formal complaint against Manitoba, we might very well lose before a tribunal and have to pay compensation to another province.

So, Madam Chairperson, it's always done on a government-to-government basis. But, on our front, our policy all the way through has been to involve the professions, involve the trades and occupations. We would continue that.

That's why I said that there's always the possibility of groups coming forward in the future and saying there should be an exception for a legitimate objective. That possibility exists. There could be situations. The college may be entirely right. They may be able to demonstrate there are some major gaps in skills that can't be reasonably

dealt with by somebody taking a course on the job or some minor upgrading. Maybe it is major enough.

We agreed for midwives that there was enough of a gap. We agree that for lawyers coming out of Québec, their training is so different in the civil law that it would be inappropriate to grant a Québec lawyer the unfettered ability to practise law here in Manitoba, and Québec has taken the same position with common-law-trained lawyers from English provinces.

Mr. Pedersen: I'm using this group as an example, the lab technologists. I believe they've sent you a letter. I don't have a copy of it but that's what they told me. They've also issued press releases from Ottawa with concerns about AIT but, practically speaking, if you've seriously looked at the Manitoba College of Laboratory Technologists, their argument for a legitimate objection—and you've decided now that there's not a legitimate objection—this scenario of a Québec technologist coming here really doesn't hold much weight. It's going to be very difficult for the lab technologists in Manitoba to pursue their point because if there is no legitimate objection to start with—and you've investigated, you've looked at it and you've told them no, you don't have a legitimate objection—their concern is how, down the road, will they ever convince government, whoever it is, that they do have a legitimate objection. That is the message that was coming across from them, so I don't know how you're going to address that in the future.

Mr. Swan: Well, on the first point, I presume there's a national governing body, if press releases are coming out from Ottawa. I presume it's a concern. They're not just raising it in Manitoba. They've presumably taken this argument to other provinces. As you can tell, it's difficult for Manitoba regulators to know exactly what the standards are in every other Canadian province. As part of the consultation, we have asked each regulated profession to make sure they pull together as comprehensive as possible a list of the various skill sets you need to practise the regulated occupation in Manitoba.

There may very well be examples that come up where someone comes from a different jurisdiction and doesn't have those skill sets. Again, I don't know details on the discussions with this particular college, but even if they've decided at this point not to formally request a legitimate objective, that doesn't stop them from coming back and saying, at some point, there should be—even if there's a group, a

regulator, who has come forward and has not been approved for legitimate objective, if they come back with more information, with more details, with more proof of how someone coming from another jurisdiction does not have the skill sets necessary to carry on that regulated occupation in a safe way, in a way that is good for the public interest of Manitoba, if that comes forward, of course we'll take a look at it and would always consider expanding the list of legitimate objectives.

Mr. Pedersen: Well, their concern is that they've expressed their concern. In a technical way, they've expressed their concerns to your committee, to your review committee, to the consultation process. They're concerned that public health—and we don't want to be alarmist here—but what their concern is, does it take a public health mistake to be the legitimate objection in here?

Mr. Swan: If that college or any other regulator in Manitoba has identified a gap in skills that they think poses a problem, then they should be contacting Mr. Smith or Ms. Burnette to put their case across. As well, I would expect they would want to be speaking to whichever minister is responsible for their legislation—if, indeed, there is such a minister—to put their case.

*(15:30)

I want to make it clear that a regulated occupation which says, well, in Manitoba, it's a three-year program, in New Brunswick, it's only a two-year program; therefore, we're not going to recognize the credentials from New Brunswick, or vice versa. That is not enough due diligence under the agreement on internal trade. There has to be an analysis of what skills are lacking by the person coming into a jurisdiction. Everything is based on being able to demonstrate there's a gap. If an organization cannot show a gap, it's highly unlikely that they are going to be granted a legitimate objective by Manitoba or by any other province. If a skill-set gap can be shown, then we can determine how best to fix it, whether it's outright refusal of a licence, that may be the case in some extreme situations. In some cases, it may be some ongoing or continuing education courses that are necessary. The idea is to find the shortest possible career path.

What's interesting is that, really, on an entirely different front, we're asking regulators to do the same thing when it comes to new Canadians. People come here from all over the world. They may have their own credentials in their home country which, by and

large, are not recognized here in Canada, and we've also worked with regulators, through Minister Allan's—I'm sorry, through the Minister of Labour and Immigration's (Ms. Allan) leadership, to make sure that there's a fair, transparent process for people to be able to present their credentials from outside of the country. So we're actually asking regulators to, kind of do the same thing, both for people coming from outside of Manitoba and elsewhere in Canada, and people coming from outside of Canada, that we stop focussing entirely on the length of time or the colour of the certificate and we look at the skills that those people have.

With the labour mobility bills that we moved to committee, it may be that we'll hear from some other regulators that have concerns. I would hope that each of those regulators, though, has pulled together the information that they should to try and demonstrate there's a gap that would support the request.

Mr. Pedersen: Is it Scott Smith, then, and Stacey Burnette—are the two people that are overseeing this co-ordination, because there are obviously going to be lots of groups coming out and claiming legitimate objections. Some of them will be quite shallow, if I can call it that. So is it Scott Smith and Stacey Burnette that will be overlooking this in the next two years?

Mr. Swan: I think there are a few adjectives we can use for the work that Mr. Smith and Ms. Burnette do there. In some ways, as minister, I see them as gatekeepers of trying to deal with issues that come up as we go. I think it is fair. I think you used the term overseers. I think that's a fair way to describe the work they do. When a regulated occupation comes forward with concerns, generally what the two of them will do is work with the technical experts in whichever department that profession, or that occupation, that trade is regulated.

So, for example, the lab tech example that we've been talking about; if there is a concern that arises, it would be Mr. Smith and Ms. Burnette's job to sit down with the experts over in Health to determine exactly what the nature of the problem is, determine what the nature of the skill-set gap might be. Of course, also assess what the risk is, if any, to public safety, to the safety of Manitobans if somebody is simply given their licence without any additional training or any additional proof of their credentials.

Mr. Pedersen: So we're just getting into the AIT across Canada. The last of the provincial governments are signing onto it, and we're still

working on dispute resolution. Is this a time frame for the next two years to get it working? The dispute resolution, there will always be disputes down the road. What do you see in terms of implementation, workload, getting it working? Is it the next two years, the next five years? What's the time frame in there? At least, what is your projection of a time frame, because we don't know these things, how they come. But, obviously, there are going to be some bumps on the road, if I can call them that, in the first couple of years getting this implemented and getting it going. How far down the road until it's actually working smoothly do you project?

Mr. Swan: Just to clarify, the dispute resolution chapter is completed. It's just a matter of getting those final three signatures.

I'm hopeful that the great bulk of the work has already been done. At least it's been done in Manitoba because of the amount of work that's been done to deal with the different regulated occupations, with the regulators, with the governing bodies to make them aware, to have them undergo this process of identifying skills which again parallels the work they've been doing because of The Fair Registration Practices in Regulated Professions Act. So I think that the bulk of the work is done, but I think over the next two or three years you are going to have some challenges. You're going to have individuals who show up on the door of a regulator in another province and who say, I'm licensed in Manitoba or I'm licensed in Newfoundland, you need to give me my licence here in the receiving jurisdiction.

There are going to be some cases that spring up across the country, and I expect the majority of those disputes are going to be resolved short of a formal hearing. I presume that every province is going to do the same as Manitoba, but from Manitoba's point of view, if a province raises a concern, the first thing we will do is sit down with the organization and try and come up with a solution to try and get to the heart of why they're not issuing the licence and go from there.

My hope is that's not going to be an exhaustive process, but I think we can expect to have a number of those situations happen over the next two years. My guess is after two years there'll be very few situations that haven't already been dealt with, but it'll be an ongoing obligation of Mr. Barbershop to be aware of—Barbershop—Mr. Barber's area to take those situations as they arise.

Mr. Pedersen: So Ms. Burnette is within the department. Scott Smith was hired on for a one-year contract, is that correct?

Mr. Swan: That's correct. I believe his contract runs out at the end of August.

Mr. Pedersen: So will he be hired on again or what's the term for—how long will he be hired on in this consultant role, special adviser for AIT?

Mr. Swan: You know I think Mr. Smith has done a great job at dealing with all of these regulators. We'll have to assess as we get closer to the end of his contract whether it's appropriate that he be kept on the same contract for some period of time or not. We haven't made that decision yet.

Mr. Pedersen: So why would he be—when he was hired on—and if I can, just give me half a minute to find the press release of him being hired on for his expertise and knowledge to get AIT up and running, what would be the purpose of continuing or renewing his contract?

Mr. Swan: Well, the one-year term—Mr. Smith was hired on soon after the Council of the Federation came up with a fairly aggressive and tight time line to get labour mobility up and running. By the time Mr. Smith's contract expires, we'll have had the next Council of the Federation meeting at which time we hope First Ministers will appreciate the work that's gone into this and the positive strides we've made.

* (15:40)

As the Member for Carman has said, though, it is possible there will be issues that come up. We will have to assess whether we think the majority of the work is now behind us and Ms. Burnette and the other people in that division can handle it, or whether we need some additional help for an additional period of time. We simply haven't made that decision yet.

Mr. Pedersen: I would really have to wonder why you would need to keep Mr. Smith on when the AIT is up and running unless it's involved in dispute, in legitimate objections or—no, I'll phrase it this way: Is Mr. Smith involved in legitimate objections or will he be—and it's not in a dispute resolution because that's minister to minister or province to province for dispute resolution? Would Mr. Smith be involved—is he involved now in legitimate objections and would that role continue?

Mr. Swan: I can advise Mr. Smith is heavily involved in the entire issue of legitimate objections, objectives, sorry, first of all, in terms of meeting with the various regulators, pushing out the information to them on how well labour mobility will operate in terms of receiving their concerns; in terms of meeting with, in some cases the regulator, in some cases even the training bodies here in Manitoba to address any concerns they may have in terms of dealing with some issues on a national basis; talking to people in other provinces about the experiences they're having and which professions, which trades, which occupations have legitimate objectives in those jurisdictions. Again, if there happens to be a dispute before we even get into the formal dispute resolution process, there's going to have to be, at least in Manitoba we're quite certain there is going to have to be early contact with the regulator which is being challenged.

Now, again, if there's not work for Mr. Smith to do, he won't continue on in a contract basis with my department. If there is substantial work for him to do in terms of the types of issues which are arising, I think he's shown over the past year in the hard work he's done, then there will be an additional contract offered. I simply don't know that right now.

We've had labour mobility for, I believe, a month and three days. We'll see what the Council of the Federation has to say at their meeting which I believe is taking place in July, at which point, I believe, the expectation is that they'll simply be able to check off labour mobility as being completed. I don't know what other issues could arise before then.

Mr. Pedersen: Well, I guess if I was to speculate, I would say that Mr. Smith will be on for at least another year because in his role if you're dealing with legitimate objections from trades and from professions within Manitoba, because you're bound to see a number of them come up in the first couple of years, but I really do question why you need to hire outside when you have department staff already in here. This is your department. You shouldn't have to hire outside people to come in and do this. Now that it's up and running, even if there is a bit of a backlog at first, it wouldn't be the first time government ever acted slowly in dealing with something due to a backlog of work. I would really have to question why, when Mr. Smith was hired as a consultant it was to help implement AIT and it's done now, you're going to be changing his role. I would suggest you're changing his role if you continue to hire him on for at least another year.

Mr. Swan: Well, I suppose you can suggest that. Again, I'll be honest with you, I haven't even discussed with Mr. Smith or with anybody in my department what his role, if any, will be at the end of the contract. There are a couple of things in there that I do want to respond to. Mr. Smith was hired because of his particular knowledge, having been a Trade Minister for the Province of Manitoba. He certainly has experience in working with the various regulators. He understands the national process and the way that things are done, not just within Manitoba but in other provinces.

It's interesting to note that the province of Ontario and the province of Québec have also hired former trade ministers to assist in some issues, as Ontario and Québec negotiated a form of arrangement between the two provinces to deal with some long-standing issues of concern between those two provinces. I also note that Québec hired former premier Mr. Johnson, who actually represented Québec at the mission to China last fall. So there were some other provinces, Ontario and Québec, to name two, who've also found that using the expertise of former ministers, and in Québec's case a former premier, is actually very helpful to getting things done.

For Mr. Smith's position, I think that the dialogue we've had over the past half-hour on this issue, has demonstrated that there have been a number of pieces of the work plan that have been necessary. It's been an ongoing process of getting the information as it's come available out to the various regulated professions. It's been getting feedback from those professions and trades and occupations, trying to solve some of the issues as they come up, but also keeping our eyes open to see there may be more issues that we have not thought of. Other provinces, I expect, are going to have the same experience.

I also want to state that when I was at the meeting in December, it was abundantly clear that Manitoba was far ahead of most other provinces in terms of the work that we had done to actually get the information to consult with, get feedback from the various regulators. It was abundantly clear to me that other provinces hadn't even really started down that path at a point where Manitoba could say that we had contacted and met with and dealt with every regulated occupation we could think of at that time.

Having said that, there are more regulated occupations now than we thought there were in December. But that process is still continuing and, to

be honest, it's still evolving. So I guess we'll just have to see where things go over the next couple of months.

Mr. Pedersen: So the dispute resolution process, government to government, is not complete yet. Québec, P.E.I. and Canada haven't signed. What is the major holdup here? Is it going to happen? When is it going to happen? What are the holdups? Why hasn't it been—because AIT to really work effectively it has to have a—dispute resolution goes hand in hand with the trade agreement. We're all in favour of freer trade but it's the roadblocks that we've put up between provinces and this is where the dispute resolution provision comes in. What is the major holdup on this?

Mr. Swan: You know, the First Ministers of every jurisdiction, including the Prime Minister, the Premier of Québec, the Premier of Prince Edward Island have all confirmed their acceptance of the dispute resolution process and the need to get on with it.

As far as my officials know there is no specific concern in any of these three jurisdictions. Our best guess is that it's simply the matter of internal process. Whether it's had trouble getting on the Cabinet agenda in Québec or Prince Edward Island or Canada, I don't know. I know the Canadian government has had their hands full with a bunch of other issues; Québec, as well. I'm not sure that the P.E.I. Cabinet agenda is quite as long as some other provinces. All I can tell you is that there has been no signal from any of these three jurisdictions that there is any difficulty. There's been no signal that any of these three are going to refuse to sign, or they're going to require changes or anything else. It's being represented to us that it's simply a question of the internal processes that have to be followed before their minister can put pen to paper and sign on it. So we are proceeding on the basis that every jurisdiction is going to be part of this deal.

Mr. Pedersen: So have you, as Minister of Competitiveness, Training and Trade in Manitoba, picked up the phone and talked to your counterpart in Québec and your federal counterpart to see where this is at?

Mr. Swan: No, actually I had a very good discussion with Mr. Bachand, who is the minister from Québec. As you probably know, Québec finally opened the door to real margarine coming from other provinces.

* (15:50)

I respect the role of the chair, Ida Chong, who's the minister in British Columbia, who has been serving as the chair of the group doing this, and I've left it to her to follow up.

So I have not phoned up my counterpart in Prince Edward Island or Québec or my federal counterpart to demand that they sign, because I don't see there's any problem that's been identified in getting this completed.

Mr. Pedersen: I wasn't inferring that you should demand they sign, because we all know that that's how things don't get done, is when you demand them.

So, have you checked with the chair, then, the B.C. minister—it's called lobbying. Have you lobbied the B.C. minister, as chair, to make sure that we get on with the dispute resolution system to make sure it's in place, because that's how this whole AIT will work seamlessly across Canada.

Mr. Swan: You know, I haven't had any indication from my officials that there is any particular problem that would warrant me, as Manitoba's minister, going ahead and taking any of those steps.

If there was word—and the officials are in regular contact across the country—if there was a signal that there was a problem, I would certainly be involved. Of course, the British Columbia minister is in the middle of an election right now, but I would certainly take those steps. But there has been no indication at all that there is any problem in getting this completed.

Mr. Pedersen: Now, it's not part of labour mobility, but it's part of interprovincial trade, and is there any work ongoing to free up interprovincial trade? The labour mobility is the chapter 7 of this agreement, and that's what you've been working on now, is to get labour mobility. But there are many other items.

It used to be that we had freer trade with the U.S. than we did between provinces, and I'm particularly thinking in the meat-packing business. We have our provincially regulated meat-packing plants that cannot sell outside of Manitoba. Is there any work going on now to lessen the barriers between provinces?

Mr. Swan: Yes, and I'll talk about three main areas. First is agriculture—and I hope the member doesn't think I was being flippant when I was talking about margarine in Québec, because it's actually a long-standing issue that's finally been resolved.

An Honourable Member: No. I know about it.

Mr. Swan: Yes. Equally surprising, perhaps, are some of Ontario's rules on the size of the non-dairy creamers that can be used, which is another long-standing issue.

Agriculture is one area where there's been a lot of work done to try and liberalize the ability to ship products back and forth, keeping in mind that most provinces do have various marketing boards. There's some work that's being done on that.

I'll just consult with my official, but I believe there was some draft wording being put forward for a new agriculture chapter under the agreement on internal trade. He's nodding, so I think I've got that right.

I understand that the next meetings of responsible ministers will also deal with energy issues. There are some differences of opinion between some producing provinces and territories as to how energy should be treated, so there's a chapter which, hopefully, is going to be concluded in time for the next meeting of ministers in June 2009.

A third area where there's work being done is transportation. I think the member and I would agree that it doesn't make sense that you load up your transport truck in Vancouver to drive to Montréal, and you've got to deal with a patchwork of six different sets of regulations. That would be just an example. Trucking—it's a major expense and a major hassle for trucking firms and for the individual owner-operators or employees to comply with this patchwork of regulations across the country.

Now, each province has their own ideas on things. There may be provinces that resist some harmonization if they're concerned about the impact, for example, of heavier trucks on their roads. Each province will have to come to the table and negotiate something.

But agriculture, energy, and transportation are three of the next fronts, if you will, and I think there is a lot of interest from the Prime Minister. There's a lot of interest from the First Ministers to keep getting wins on the IT front, keep getting chapters concluded and moving on to take down some of the barriers which do serve as a restraint on trade without really benefiting the safety or the public interest in various provinces.

Mr. Pedersen: I can tell the minister I have personal experience in the transportation industry. If you think

it's bad here, just wander south of the border and start going between states. It's a mess down there, as well as here too.

So you're meeting again in June, July, whatever it is. These subjects, they will be on the table then for—and we're mainly talking about the three, agriculture, energy and transportation. Are those on the agenda to begin negotiations on a Canada free trade agreement? We can almost call it that—or interprovincial free trade, I guess, is what I should call that.

Mr. Swan: I understand that the energy chapter will be on the agenda at the next meeting of the internal trade ministers. I'm told that because some of the sensitivities, I suppose, the agriculture chapter is being negotiated by the provincial agriculture ministers across the country. So that's on their table. I understand they'll be meeting this summer after the internal trade ministers meet.

Transportation is perhaps a step behind. There's work being done at the officials' level to determine some of the—I guess even some of the terms to be discussed and hopefully harmonized as we go. The Council of the Federation, though, has given some pretty clear signals that they want the various jurisdictions to make some moves on all three of these areas.

So I think there's interest at the highest levels of continuing to work to get more successes under the Agreement on Internal Trade. Labour mobility and the dispute resolution process were a big step forward, but there's still a fair amount of work to do.

Mr. Pedersen: Particularly in transportation, because your department will also be working with Infrastructure and Transportation on this, I'm sure. I know this sort of defeats a bit of the interprovincial cross-Canada agreements, but has there been any work with Saskatchewan and Alberta on—just if you could harmonize some of the regulations between Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta in the transportation sector, it would go a long way with our grain trade.

There's also the—and I haven't got the right term, but when you're pulling two trailers, overall length. There are different lengths within the provinces. Is it possible to work out some of those small—well, relatively small, issues. Every issue is never a small issue when you're talking between governments, but is there any focus from your department on just harmonizing a few of the regulations?

* (16:00)

Mr. Swan: I can advise that the lead for this is within Infrastructure and Transportation, but they do report to my officials. I'm told they already do favour a regional approach, so the various departments in the prairie provinces may get together to see if there are things that can be done to harmonize some of the regulations where there's no impact on highway safety or on highway construction.

The approach that's been taken is to also consult with the industry stakeholders to find out where the real bottlenecks are, where the real irritants are, to work at taking down some of those barriers. I mean, again, highway safety is an issue, and just because one province may allow longer trail areas or tandems or some practices, it doesn't necessarily mean all the other provinces will agree. But for the majority of trucking across the country, whether it's grain trucking or other commercial trucking, I think that the member and I agree that there's still some work to be done to make it easier for goods to flow across the country.

Mr. Pedersen: Just as a final note on that, I'd certainly urge the minister to work with his counterpart within Cabinet on transportation and work in here. If we're serious about CentrePort and being the road, rail, and transpiration hub of North America, we really do need to work on this. There is a serious shortfall in this, and it certainly sets the standards for how serious you are on becoming the transportation hub of North America if we can at least work on harmonizing some of these standards. I know this all takes time, but I'm just sort of urging the minister to work very hard on this. Diligent, I think. Isn't that the word we hear quite often? Working diligently? Work diligently on this one.

I just want to switch a little bit onto the Red Seal program and in how it relates to The Labour Mobility Act. Do we need a shift in personnel here or are we okay?

Mr. Swan: It all depends how complex your questions get. I think I can start answering the question. The interprovincial Red Seal for a number of skilled trades, again, is a national standard that means if somebody comes from another province with the Red Seal certification, and it's a trade where there is an equivalent Red Seal in Manitoba, then that person should have no difficulty being approved to work. That's actually been the case in Manitoba for decades. Any province which recognizes Red Seal has allowed actually a much higher degree of

labour mobility than professions in other regulated occupations. So the labour mobility provisions perhaps even enhance the benefits of the Red Seal program. It just seems the trades were quite a ways beyond some other areas.

Mr. Pedersen: Does Québec have a Red Seal program?

Mr. Swan: While we're waiting for the executive director of the Apprenticeship branch to come down to make sure we get you the right answer, to save time, do you want to ask some other questions or do you want to wait until he's down here and can answer?

Mr. Pedersen: No. I think we'll wait because I've got a couple more questions about Red Seal and then I want to go in to a couple of trades. So we'll just—we have time.

Ms. Erna Braun, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Seeing how we lost our help here, we'll switch a little. I want to talk about job fairs. Manitoba missed out on a job fair last June, I believe it was. There was another job fair in Toronto and, again, another one here—I'm trying to think when the date was, end of March of this year—and Manitoba was not there either. Is that correct? He didn't have a booth there, is that correct?

Mr. Swan: I don't know which job fairs you're talking about. Do you have more details?

Mr. Pedersen: There was a job fair sponsored—well, it was in Toronto and it was last fall. It was in November of 2008. Saskatchewan had a huge presence there and they were sponsoring barbecues. The Premier, Brad Wall, was down there. Just a minute, maybe I can even get you the date here. Manitoba was not there. There was another one here currently in the spring of—March 23, I believe, in—a National Job Fair & Training Expo in Toronto, again, and Manitoba was not there.

Was there any particular reason why you're not attending these?

Mr. Swan: I can tell the member that a number of Manitoba companies use various job fairs—and I believe they might have even been at the job fair in Toronto—to deal with the specific needs that they may have. One example of that is Magellan, or Bristol Aerospace, which is a greatly successful company here in Winnipeg as the member is proudly aware. There are not enough engineers in Manitoba to fill all of the great opportunities available. So

Magellan, for example, has been a company which has gone to various job fairs.

I do know there was a bit of controversy last November. Some individuals saw Saskatchewan as capitalizing, maybe unfairly, on some of the issues that were going on in Ontario. I believe that Premier Wall was actually seen, you know, running around having barbecues in some of the most distressed areas in Toronto, which isn't necessarily the approach that we thought we needed to take in Manitoba, given our success in attracting people from various places.

* (16:10)

So the idea of promoting Manitoba as a good place to work, a good place to invest is certainly a positive one. As the member is aware, we introduced our new Web site last year based on some of the balanced opportunities and great things we have here in Manitoba. There is an advertising campaign which is directed outside of the province of Manitoba to try and encourage more people to gather more information. We do believe that companies, though, which are looking for particular workers can do the most efficient job of going out there and attracting workers.

Mr. Pedersen: Well, Madam Acting Chair, just to quote the minister here from last Thursday when he was talking to the Member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Faurshou) about training in schools: maybe an out-of-work welder in Ontario might be interested in coming to Portage la Prairie. I would suggest that there were probably quite a few out-of-work welders and tradesmen in Ontario, and I'm at a loss to see why you wouldn't take advantage of that. When I say take advantage, I mean there are people who are looking for work that are skilled workers looking for work. Why wouldn't you go there and show them what Manitoba has to offer?

Mr. Swan: Yes, a few things. Again, we've embarked on a national campaign to promote Manitoba as a great destination. But really, I could go, or someone else could go, to a job fair in Toronto and talk about opportunities, I would think the best possible way that you recruit is to have a company who actually has positions for welders make the initiative of recruiting specific workers. Employers in Manitoba do that, I gave Magellan as the example, but employers large and small across the province work very hard at recruiting people. Our job as government is to set the table, so to speak, and

simply raise Manitoba, perhaps the awareness of Manitoba among other provinces.

So, if the Member for Portage la Prairie knows of companies that need welders, my hope is that he would work with them to help them do what they need to do to recruit people. I would do that with employers in my own constituency or any other community across Manitoba.

Mr. Pedersen: So the Minister of Labour (Ms. Allan) went to Iceland to promote Manitoba and to promote jobs. What's the difference between Iceland and Ontario?

Mr. Swan: Well, I believe that the Minister of Labour and Immigration, of course, did go to Iceland, and I think did a great job taking advantage of some of the historic links between Iceland and Manitoba. In that case, of course, it was really the country of Iceland that was incredibly interested at pursuing opportunities for its workers in Manitoba. We didn't just pick Iceland off the map as an appropriate place to go. It was seen as being a historic and a cultural way to provide some support for a country which has, frankly, provided some of our best and brightest, including the family of my very own deputy minister.

Mr. Pedersen: Now don't get me wrong, I think there are opportunities for people to come from Iceland too, but I'm just wondering why the minister's department didn't aggressively go into Ontario as they did into Iceland. You can give all the same arguments. We have cultural heritage, we have cultural links, we have family connections and everything else in Ontario also. You have a huge pool of tradespeople in Ontario that we could have taken advantage of, and I really think the minister and his department missed—if we really are as short of skilled workers as what they're telling us they are, and I have no reason to doubt them—I think you missed a huge opportunity here.

Mr. Swan: Well, we can agree to disagree. I am told that the cost of Premier Wall's mission to southern Ontario cost the taxpayers of Saskatchewan about \$300,000. We've made some different choices on where to spend money to attract and recruit people to Manitoba.

Mr. Pedersen: We'll leave that then as one to disagree because I could show him more press releases from Saskatchewan, but, obviously, we're way behind them in terms of attracting, so I would

like to turn to the apprenticeship training, and the government has a goal of 4,000 new apprentices. What was the goal, when was the time line for those 4,000 new apprenticeships, and where are we at in terms of getting those 4,000 new apprentices?

Mr. Swan: I've been joined by Scott Sinclair, who's the executive director of the Apprenticeship branch. The commitment for apprenticeship seats, which was made actually in 2007 as part of the election campaign, was to create 4,000 new apprenticeship positions over four years, and our commitment is to achieve those positions by the end of the 2011-2012 fiscal year—for the 2011-2012 school year. So, so far we've purchased an additional approximately 1,600 seats, so we're almost halfway to reaching that target.

Mr. Pedersen: I want to specifically talk about the plumbing apprenticeship program. There were some changes made. Can the minister inform me as to what changes were made to the plumbing apprenticeship program recently?

Mr. Swan: Yes. The apprenticeship program for plumbers in Manitoba was changed from a five-level program to a four-level program, meaning that, in most cases, if you had full-time work as an apprentice you can obtain your journeyman status in four years as opposed to five.

Madam Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Pedersen: And when were these changes made?

Mr. Swan: I'm told that the regulation, of course, has recently been changed, but there's still a bit of work to do for the next school year to confirm that everything's being done in four levels.

Mr. Pedersen: So an apprentice plumber who is in the five-year program right—well, let's say last year, in the past year, are they still in a five-year, or has that been changed to a four-year?

Mr. Swan: I understand that anybody that was in the fifth level of the program has been given their certification as a journeyman.

Mr. Pedersen: So, just so I understand, we've changed from five years to four years. Okay, so a plumber apprentice who was in year four will now, at the end of year four, be granted a journeyman plumber, pardon me if I don't have the right terms, but an apprentice who was in for five years, at the end of year four now will have full journeyman status?

Mr. Swan: Correct.

* (16:20)

Mr. Pedersen: So what happens with an apprentice plumber who is in year one right now? What is his status? Where are they in?

Mr. Swan: It'll be a four-level instead of a five-level program. So, again, assuming there's full-time work available for the apprentice plumber, they can look at getting their journeyman status after four years as opposed to five, which is the way it used to be.

Mr. Pedersen: What are the hours of certification now for the apprenticeship? It was at a certain level. What has it been changed to?

Mr. Swan: The old requirement was 9,000 hours. The number is now 7,200 hours.

Mr. Pedersen: What happens with the pay scale, then, because it was hinged upon a five-year apprenticeship level, it's now four. What happens with the pay levels?

Mr. Swan: Instead of there being five increments to get to the top, to the journeyman level, it's now four. So, effectively, every apprentice, it's as if they've been moved up one increment.

Mr. Pedersen: What was the rationale for changing this?

Mr. Swan: Just to take a step back to look at how the apprenticeship system works. Of course, apprenticeship is a partnership between, or among, journeymen, the apprentices, employers and our training partners, colleges and others. Within each trade there is an organization called the Provincial Trade Advisory Committee, or PTAC for short. Those PTACs have representatives of employers and employees, as well as a chair. The PTACs are actually the organizations that are given, what I could call, the heavy lifting. They are the organizations which make sure that the certification exams continue to be up to date, to make sure that the curriculums continue to be appropriate for the trade and to work on various and sundry issues dealing with apprenticeship for that particular trade.

As I understand it, the decision was made by the PTAC and approved by the apprenticeship board. The five-year program wasn't really necessary for plumbers to achieve all of their competencies and all of the expertise they would need to be a journeyman plumber. As I understand it, they looked at the curriculum, they looked at what was

being taught and they decided that plumbing could be like most other trades and could fit a four-year program.

Mr. Pedersen: Again, I'm looking for a date. When did the plumber PTAC organization apply to the Apprenticeship and Trades Qualifications Board to change it from five years to four years?

Mr. Swan: Madam Chair, I'm told those discussions began back in 2007 about the possibility of changing the apprenticeship from a five-year program to a four-year program, five-level to four-level, I'm sorry.

Mr. Pedersen: So discussion started in 2007, and when was the final decision—when did PTAC, then, go to the Apprenticeship and Trades Qualifications Board with the recommendation to change it from a five-year to a four-year?

Mr. Swan: I understand that was in June of 2008.

Mr. Pedersen: So what happens then? It goes to Apprenticeship and Trades Qualifications Board. What's the process then?

Mr. Swan: After the board gave approval in principle to the new regulations, I understand that was in June of 2008, then the regulation goes to Legislative Counsel who draft the regulation in the approved lawyer form for how things are done in Manitoba. That regulation was returned to the board in October 2008 and then it was forwarded to my office as minister.

Mr. Pedersen: When you mention the board, that's the trades qualification board. It came from PTAC in June 2008. The trades qualification board then got it, worded it correctly and then the trades qualification board brought it to your office in October 2008.

Mr. Swan: That's correct. The Apprenticeship and Trades Qualification Board, you're right.

Mr. Pedersen: Then what happened when it got to your office?

Mr. Swan: After the board passed the regulation in October '08, then there would have been a memo prepared by the chair of the board. It would have then been sent to my office and we would have analyzed it and then, I believe, sought approval from Cabinet for that regulation.

Mr. Pedersen: So when was Cabinet approval granted for this?

Mr. Swan: I'm expecting it was shortly before January '09 when the regulation was approved and took effect.

Mr. Pedersen: The PTAC, the plumber's PTAC, do you have a list of those people that are on it? I'm assuming this is a public body. It's not covered by privacy protection. Do you have a list of the people who are on the plumber's PTAC? Can you provide that to me?

Mr. Swan: Yes.

Mr. Pedersen: So you don't have it here? Mr. Sinclair doesn't have it?

Mr. Swan: No. There's, I believe, 53 PTAC's in the province of Manitoba. So we can find that out for you. We don't have it here today.

Mr. Pedersen: But I'm specifically talking about the plumber's PTAC? That's what I would like.

Mr. Swan: Understood. I didn't want to burden Mr. Sinclair with carrying the composition of every PTAC with him. So it's accepted. You're looking for the composition of the plumber PTAC and presumably at the time, that this decision was made by the PTAC.

Mr. Pedersen: That's correct. So when the apprenticeship, when it gained Cabinet approval, prior to January 9, what happens then?

Mr. Swan: Then I sign the regulation and then it comes into effect.

Mr. Pedersen: What notice is given to the affected trades, workers' trades, et cetera? What is the process for making this change public outside of the plumber's PTAC?

* (16:30)

Mr. Swan: When a new regulation is passed, the details will be sent out by way of an update newsletter, and I'm told that notice goes out to every registered employer of apprentices in that trade, every union which represents workers in that trade, or apprentices, as well—each individual apprentice that's registered in that trade.

Mr. Pedersen: So, was this done? Is there a record of this being done?

Mr. Swan: Yes, the update has gone out.

Mr. Pedersen: Madam Chairperson, according to the people that I have been talking to within the mechanical trades and within the union, nobody

received notice of this January 8th change until—March 9, there was a memo sent out by the union to the employees, the apprentice employees, which, then, turned around and talked to their employers who knew absolutely nothing about this.

Mr. Swan: Yes, I can tell the member that what happened in this case is that there was some concern addressed by certain individuals involved in the plumbing industry who had concerns about the nature of the changes to the regulations.

So, as minister, when I heard the concerns that were raised, I referred the matter back to the Apprenticeship and Trades Qualifications Board for their consideration. I sort of highlighted what the concerns were.

The board then went out and did consultation. They talked to various employers, both open shop and closed shop, the union and various contractors. The board decided that the regulation was acceptable as it was, confirmed its decision, and it's after that time that the formal notice went out.

So, things didn't happen in the usual course because of the concerns that were raised by certain parties. So we thought it best to have the board take another look at it. After that was done, then the regular procedure of sending out the notification to every employer, to every union and to every apprentice followed the normal course.

Mr. Pedersen: So does this mean that notice was not sent out prior to January 8?

Mr. Swan: No, it wouldn't have been sent out prior to that because there wasn't the law yet. The regulation was only approved in January of 2009.

Mr. Pedersen: Pardon me. I meant to say January of '08. The changes have come into effect January 8, 2009. So, when those changes came into effect on January 8, 2009, was there notice sent out at that time to contractors and unions?

Mr. Swan: Yes, just piecing together this situation, of course any regulations that are passed are published in the *Manitoba Gazette*, and that happens, actually, quite quickly after regulations pass.

I'm presuming, although I don't know for certain, that concerns were raised by somebody who had seen that in the *Gazette*, even before the standard form of notification would've gone out. So, in that case, or in that situation, what I'm assuming happened, somebody saw that, had a concern, and that's when it was raised with me as minister, that

there were at least some stakeholders that had some concerns about the other regulation.

Mr. Pedersen: So it was not sent out as an update in the newsletter in a timely fashion when it came into effect January 2009?

Mr. Swan: Well, it wasn't sent out in a more timely basis than the publication of the regulation in the *Manitoba Gazette*. Again the *Gazette* comes out quickly after. I'm presuming that that was how an individual raised concerns about the effect of the regulation.

Mr. Pedersen: You told me here a few minutes ago that normal course of action is to send it out as an update in the newsletter, so that was not done in this case?

Mr. Swan: In this case the concern was raised before the branch was able to send out, in its normal course, details of the changes to the regulation.

Mr. Pedersen: But we're talking two months here. This is the beginning of March, March 9. I have a copy of the letter from the Piping Industry Training Committee of Manitoba. Union 254 is sending this out to advise that there have been changes to the apprenticeship program and plumbing trade. This is a full two months after. My information is that no one in the industry, no one in the union knew about this ahead of time. Is my information wrong?

Yes, it could have been published in the *Manitoba Gazette*, but you've told me there's a newsletter—I don't think contractors and unions are typically reading the *Manitoba Gazette* from cover to cover whenever it's published.

Mr. Swan: Well, I think the Member for Carman has addressed a concern that's been raised, not just in this trade, that there's not automatically knowledge of when a regulation that goes to the minister is going to take effect. The existing legislation, which I believe dates from 1997—I'm sorry, 1987, is less than helpful. So we've actually identified this as a concern. It's been expressed to us by various industry stakeholders it'd be more helpful if, when the board was to send on a regulation for approval, there would be a fixed date that that regulation would take effect.

That seems to be something that makes sense to me, and we're going to be making sure that this will become the practice. You've highlighted a problem that I receive or the minister receives the regulation—when I sign it, it takes effect, but there's not an immediate process by which the industry is

immediately made aware of the impact. So I've actually asked my staff to see how we can improve that situation.

Mr. Pedersen: Madam Chair, through you to the minister, this whole issue raises many questions. Amongst others is that we now have the issue of approximately two months' back pay that contractors owe their apprentices and my information, although not confirmed, but my information is that there are—because most of the trade union shops will know about this, but there are independent contractors out across the province that still do not know about this change and we're looking at serious back pay.

Have you looked at the issue of back pay for these contractors? Do you have any handle on how much is owing here to contractors?

*(16:40)

Mr. Swan: First, all contractors, whether they're open shop or closed shop, have now been notified of the new pay scales because that notification has gone out, as I said, to every employer with registered apprentices, every union that has apprentices and every apprentice.

In terms of the pay, the regulation took effect as of the date in January it was signed. Had it been communicated the next day, the pay would have been owing, so there really isn't any difference in the circumstances. It's money which would have been paid had everyone known of that regulation the next day. There is an expectation that apprentices will be entitled to receive whatever they're entitled to.

Mr. Pedersen: You said the notices sent to open shop and closed shops. When was that notice sent?

Mr. Swan: I'm advised that likely went out just a couple of weeks ago, after the board had the opportunity to reconsider or to consider its decision. Its decision was to proceed with the four-level system and the new pay scales as they originally suggested.

Mr. Pedersen: Is it fair to suggest that it was after April 20 when the chair, Leonard Harapiak, sent a letter back to Peter Wightman, executive director of—just hang on half a minute—Peter Wightman is the Executive Director, Construction Labour Relations Association of Manitoba.

So that notice would go out after April 20 when—I have a letter dated April 20 from Leonard Harapiak to Mr. Wightman. Would that notice have gone out after that?

Mr. Swan: I expect it would have, because I believe that's the letter in which Mr. Harapiak was advising Mr. Wightman of the decision by the board.

Mr. Pedersen: Well, I would suggest to the minister that there's some serious problems here, because the contractors bid on jobs, were performing jobs in this two-and-a-half month period. The time in question here, they were completing jobs, then, based on an outdated labour rate, and they're bidding on new jobs all the time and not knowing, unaware that they had to factor in a new wage rate.

The contractors are telling me that this is significant money because, typically, a contract will be about 50 percent materials, 50 percent labour. Out of that 50 percent labour they'll have about a 50 percent apprenticeship. Now we're only talking about the plumbing here, so it's only one segment of it, but I am told that the wage rates are \$1.15 to \$2 an hour increase, which is—we're looking at some significant back-pay issues for these companies on the jobs they've completed, and it's going to affect their bottom line on the jobs that they have bid on and have not factored this in.

Mr. Swan: Well, there are two things. One is that this didn't proceed in a normal basis, because there was, as I say, concern that was raised and I was satisfied that the concern raised was serious enough that it warranted the board taking another look at it. As minister, I made the decision to return it to the board. The board had a special meeting, if you will, after consulting with all the stakeholders and then made their decision not to change the regulation.

The other piece of it, though, and I frankly agree with the member's concern for this trade and other trades, we agree that the process which has been in existence for the past 20 years is in need of modernizing, that if there is to be a change in the pay scale, an increase in pay, it would be helpful to everybody involved if there's a set date for that to occur. The existing practice—again, which apparently has been around since 1987—of it taking effect the day the minister signs the regulation, probably is in need of modernizing. So I think we agree with that.

Mr. Pedersen: Has the minister gone out and asked the open shops, the closed shops, for a monetary value of the back pay involved here?

Mr. Swan: No, but the apprenticeship board went out and did seek the views of various parties. I know there was a meeting that was held, I believe in the early part of April, at which the major contractors'

associations were invited, representing both the unionized shops and the non-union shops, as well as the union and some others were invited. As I understand it from my officials, the main concern was fixing the issue I've raised that's been around since 1987, fixing it for the future so we avoid problems like this rather than any concern about back pay. Again, I've taken steps, I've told my department that I think we can do better on that front and I'm hopeful that's exactly what's going to happen.

Mr. Pedersen: So has this situation arisen before that you're aware of, where there's been lack of notice to contractors and to open shops, closed shops?

Mr. Swan: In all truth, I have to tell the member that every time a minister has signed a change in pay under a regulation, there has been a delay between when the regulation was signed and came into effect and the date that it was communicated to employers, to unions, and to apprentices. So it appears to be a systemic issue which has been around for two decades and maybe it's because of this example that we're going to get it fixed.

Mr. Pedersen: You're telling me that this happens regularly? Is this a one-off where the lag time, if you call it that, was unusually large or is this a systemic problem that happens all the time?

Mr. Swan: I think it's fair to say it's been a systemic problem that the Apprenticeship branch, for as long as anyone around this table can remember, has communicated the changes after the regulation has been signed into force by the minister.

Mr. Pedersen: I'm not understanding something here, because I'm missing something in this, because a PTAC is made up of employers, employees, and government, mainly as a liaison role. Somebody had to know something here, between the employers and the employees, that there were changes, there were major changes coming to the plumbing apprenticeship and yet no one—now, I have to qualify this—from the people that I've talked to, no one knew about this for over two months after it happened. There's something is not adding up, because if a PTAC is working properly, it has employers, employees involved all the steps along. How could they not know about these changes?

* (16:50)

Mr. Swan: Without criticizing the PTAC, I had some concerns about the decision that was made, and

to some extent—not so much the decision, but the level of consultation, the level of knowledge that was out there, which is why I did refer it back to the apprenticeship board. The board did some work—perhaps work that should have been done by the PTAC in the first place—to consult with the stakeholders in that industry, and upon doing that, the board, which is, of course, comprised of employers and employees and others, decided to leave the regulation as it was.

So I understand where the member's coming from. I think the member has identified a problem, and I can assure him that I've directed the branch to make sure that we find a better way to communicate these decisions in future.

Mr. Pedersen: The steamfitters and the plumbers work very close. I think your apprenticeship board knows this also. Does it not raise concerns that you've now offset plumber apprenticeships and steamfitter apprentices? They tend to work very close. In fact, I am told that the first several years it is very similar work until they become farther along in the apprenticeship when they specialize in their respective fields, but does this not concern you that you've now set them offside of each other? There's not going to be a harmony between the plumbers and the apprenticeship—pardon me, the plumbers and the steamfitters, or are you planning on changing the steamfitters apprenticeship also?

Mr. Swan: Well, there are always steps that have been taken to improve and strengthen the apprenticeship system. Of course, a lot of those are contained in the new apprenticeship act, which we'll be discussing in some detail. One of the intended benefits of that act is to be more flexible in terms of how specific decisions are made so that there can be committees struck across trades to try and figure out the best way to do things. I can tell you that a meeting of all the various piping trades of the stakeholders has been set for later this month to discuss this and other issues which may be important to the various piping trades.

Mr. Pedersen: So at this upcoming meeting is there any—and we can't prejudge the meeting because it hasn't happened there, but will there be discussion about delaying the plumbing apprenticeship change from five years to four years to make it cohesive, keep in step with the steamfitter, whether that means changing the steamfitter to four years similar to plumbing, or is there any discussion about at least

delaying this change to the plumbing apprenticeship until, I believe, the next course starts?

Mr. Swan: No, there is no intention to delay the changes to the plumbers. Again, the matter is referred back to the board. The board is the governing body, if you will, which has expertise and knowledge for every trade in Manitoba. Based on their consultations with stakeholders and based on the information before them, they chose not to make any changes to the regulation. They chose not to delay or to put a pause on implementing this. In their view, the best approach was to simply go ahead. I don't know what's going to happen at the meeting later on in May. If the steamfitters step up and say there should also be a four-level trade instead of a five-level trade, I'll instruct the branch to give whatever support needs to be done to that PTAC to make the change.

There are not that many five-level trades left in Manitoba, but I defer to the expertise of the PTACs again with employers and employees involved. I defer to the expertise of the board which represents the various stakeholders which have to make these difficult decisions for trades in Manitoba. As well, it is important that the PTACs make a practice of consulting with the stakeholders, and the new legislation that we'll be discussing in more detail will make it more clear that that should be happening.

Mr. Pedersen: So, if I may, and maybe I've already asked it, but what was the rationale for changing from five years to four years?

Mr. Swan: I understand that there was actually no technical training that was being delivered in the fifth level of the program, that the advisory committee could not demonstrate any particular additional skills that were being attained during that fifth level and, maybe most convincingly, I understand that Manitoba was the only jurisdiction across Canada that still had a fifth level for the plumbing trade.

Mr. Pedersen: So why wouldn't you change all the piping trades at the same time? Why pick one and offset it with the others?

Mr. Swan: Again, generally I would defer to the particular knowledge of the Provincial Trade Advisory Committee, and the PTAC for the plumbing trade decided to go ahead and ask for a regulation to change the way in which apprenticeship is delivered. It wasn't something that came out of my office or something, for that matter, that came out of

the Apprenticeship branch. It was a request made by this committee, which is comprised of stakeholders in the industry, and they decided that that was the appropriate way to go.

Mr. Pedersen: Well, I would suggest to the minister that you've got a real mess on your hands here. You have the issue of back pay—fairly significant from the couple of contractors that I have talked to—and I have been trying to assess and trying to get a total on the amount of back pay owing, and it's significant just from the couple of contractors I talked to. I would certainly urge the minister to go back and look at that.

If I understand correctly, the new—the level 1 apprentice plumbers will not start until October 2010. Is that correct?

Mr. Swan: It's not that clear because somebody can begin apprenticing at any given time. I mean, today there could be a new apprentice registered in Manitoba because they get—they're taken on by an employer and have a supervising journeyman.

October 2010 is the date for, as I understand it, the next level of technical training. So there's no magic in today or tomorrow or October.

Mr. Pedersen: Madam Chair, I need to understand the mechanics of this: a level 1 plumber would take technical schooling first, before they go out and apprentice.

Mr. Swan: No. A first-level apprentice would, generally, simply start working for an employer and, some time within their first year or collecting their hours for their first level, would then go and do a period of training, whether it's at one of the colleges—in some trades it's a union training facility, for other trades it may be a different kind of training facility. But if somebody walks onto a job site as an apprentice and they begin collecting their hours, so to speak, and being paid—someone who walks onto a job site as a level 1 apprentice is now going to be paid under the new schedule which came into effect in January of this year.

Madam Chairperson: The hour being 5 p.m., committee rise.

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Speaker: The hour being 5 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow (Tuesday).

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Monday, May 4, 2009

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