

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

Official Report
(Hansard)

*Published under the
authority of
The Honourable George Hickes
Speaker*

Vol. LX No. 38A – 10 a.m., Thursday, May 8, 2008

ISSN 0542-5492

MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Ninth Legislature

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

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May, 8, 2008

The House met at 10 a.m.

PRAYER

Mr. Speaker: I'd like to remind the House that this morning, as previously agreed, two sections of the Committee of Supply are sitting concurrently with the House and, also by agreement, there are to be no recorded votes or quorum calls.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): I understand there's leave to proceed directly to Bill 214.

Mr. Speaker: Is there agreement to proceed directly to Bill 214? [*Agreed*]

There is agreement, so I will call Bill 214, The Labour Relations Amendment Act (Information in Employee's Language).

**Bill 214—The Labour Relations Amendment Act
(Information in Employee's Language)**

Mrs. Mavis Taillieu (Morris): I move, seconded by the Member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Cullen), that Bill 214, The Labour Relations Amendment Act (Information in Employee's Language); Loi modifiant la Loi sur les relations du travail (renseignements fournis dans la langue des employés), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mrs. Taillieu: I'm pleased to speak to this bill today. This bill, in another numerical number, has been before this House before, first introduced by the Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler) awhile back now. This bill, No. 214, The Labour Relations Amendment Act, is a bill that amends The Labour Relations Act to require a union, when soliciting memberships, to provide each employee solicited with information regarding union fees and dues in a language understood by the employee.

I do want to commend the Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler) who first brought this before this Legislature. The government did not see fit to even debate or pass on this bill to committee. I

really don't understand what they would have against people being spoken to in their own language or a language of their choosing so that things could be clearly outlined and understood by both parties.

Again, we want to bring this to the attention of the government, and I think certainly because, right now, the government is bringing in some legislation to protect foreign workers.

I'm just looking at a headline, "Law to protect foreign workers," from April 18 of this year. So I know that the government is looking at ways to protect foreign workers, but this isn't in that bill. Certainly, we'd like to propose amendments to that bill that's coming forward because, if you're taking the opportunity to open up an act and look at things to better address foreign workers and how to protect foreign workers, I would believe that this would be one of them, to allow workers to be spoken to in their own language that they understand when a union is soliciting fees and dues from them and memberships, Mr. Speaker.

In 2007, there were some migrant workers at Mayfair Farm in Portage la Prairie who signed union cards without fully understanding the implications, because they were not provided with information in a language that they could understand. I know the situation that they found themselves in: Here they are in another country without the supports of their family and friends and the system that they live within, unfamiliar as to how to proceed. Someone comes along and befriends them and tells them that we're like a family and we're here to help you and trust us.

I think that anybody in a situation where they're away from their own support systems and feeling vulnerable at a time when they don't understand exactly what's going on would jump at the opportunity to say, oh, yes, I want to accept your help. Certainly, the nuances of language between cultures and between languages, whether that be the spoken word, the written word, verbal or body language, it's all different in different cultures and people understand things a bit differently.

I think it's really important that they be able to be communicated to in a language that they understand. Otherwise, people can agree to things

that they really had no intention of agreeing to. This is what we heard that happened at Mayfair Farm, Mr. Speaker.

I think we can appreciate the fact that people in a vulnerable situation would have wanted to understand that there was help for them and later felt a little bit betrayed, that it wasn't exactly what they thought it would be. Many said that they were coerced, that's what they said, they were coerced into joining the United Food and Commercial Workers, UFCW Local 832, and that the language barrier prevented them from fully understanding the implications of signing the union form.

As I said, the language barrier is a significant thing because of the nuances of language, Mr. Speaker. I could certainly think about being in another country and trying to communicate in a language that I fully didn't understand. I'd be very careful and demanding, I think, that I have the ability to communicate in my mother language so that I had a full understanding of what was going to happen to me.

* (10:10)

In July of 2007, the Manitoba Labour Board allowed a union to form at Mayfair Farm in Portage la Prairie. Many of the farm workers said that they don't want to be part of the UFCW and are concerned for the future of their jobs in Manitoba. They just aren't familiar with the systems that we have here. Certainly, every union is allowed to do what they need to do, Mr. Speaker, but there is a line that should not be crossed and that line is that no one should be coerced, particularly when they don't understand what the process is and what the implications are.

I think that is the key here: unions have a role to play. That's their role, but we have to protect foreign workers so that they understand what circumstances they will find themselves in.

As I said, we have a bill that's going to be presented in the Leg—or has been presented in the Legislature, protecting foreign workers, but this wasn't one of the things. I really don't understand why this wouldn't be a very important piece of any kind of legislation to protect foreign workers, Mr. Speaker.

Our caucus was concerned that the NDP government is not doing enough to protect the democratic rights of workers, and therefore we brought this bill forward. It has been brought as a

private member's bill. We know from debate earlier this week that private members' bills are frowned upon by the government as unnecessary, because they have all the ideas. This bill was brought before this House last year. There was every opportunity to incorporate portions of this bill into the new legislation and the government refused to do that.

We are concerned that the government has not gone far enough in protecting the rights of foreign workers, temporary workers coming to our province. We hope that this does not curtail the people, foreign migrant workers that are coming into our province because we know we have a desperate need for workers in this province in the agricultural sector, in many sectors of our economy, because we have a labour shortage here in Manitoba and, indeed, in our country.

We don't want to be doing anything that's going to curtail people to come in here and help us in our economy, Mr. Speaker. I think that, when you scare people away with tactics like this, we compound not only the situation for people to come into the country but we also put in jeopardy the businesses that rely on migrant workers coming into our country every year.

The minister will say that this is not necessary, that it's in The Labour Relations Act. That is not the case, Mr. Speaker. The act states that information needs to be provided, but nowhere does the act address the language that the information is provided in. The legislation is lacking and, unless the NDP are trying to trick unsuspecting workers into union membership, they should support this bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Ms. Jennifer Howard (Fort Rouge): Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to be able to speak a bit to this bill today. In looking at this bill, considering the bill and listening to the Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu) speak about it, I just want to perhaps remind members that we do already have provisions in The Labour Relations Act that speak to the requirement for workers, when they are being talked to by unions, when unions are soliciting memberships, that the employees are able to understand what the information is that's being given to them.

I just want to perhaps draw to the members' attention section 45 of The Labour Relations Act. I'm going to just read it for her. Section 45, subsection 3.1, says that a union or a person acting on behalf of a union that solicits the support of an employee for an application for certification shall at the time of the

solicitation provide the employee with information respecting the amount payable or that is reasonably expected to be payable by a member of the union for any initiation fees and regular membership dues.

That section goes on to say that proof of compliance with subsection 3.1 may consist of the signature of the employee on a statement that the employee has been provided with information respecting (a) any initiation fees and regular membership dues of the union, or (b) where any such initiation fees and regular membership dues are not determined, the manner in which the initiation fees and membership dues are determined.

I wanted to pay a special attention to this clause: "...and that the employee understands the information." So, there are already provisions in the act to make certain that employees can understand the information that is given to them.

Now, I know that it's common for members on the other side of the House to be very suspicious of unions. It's been a theme, I think, throughout their tenure in government and it is an underpinning of the ideology of their party to be very suspicious of any time workers come together to organize and improve their lot in life. But I do find it particularly patronizing to suggest that workers from other countries cannot understand their rights, cannot possibly be capable of understanding the importance that a union can play in their life. I find that particularly patronizing.

And I want to just reflect on some experiences that I've had talking to people who have come here from other countries. I'm very fortunate that in my constituency there are a great number of new Canadians, particularly coming from African countries. I'm very proud of the success of immigration that our government has seen in this province, getting to record levels of 10,000 immigrants coming to Manitoba, and now setting a goal of 20,000 immigrants.

We know that it's very important that those people are going to be able to participate in the work force, but it's also very important that when those people participate in the work force, their rights are protected. I want to just share a story. Recently, I went to speak to a class at Red River College. It was a class of people who are learning about Aboriginal self-governance and community development, and in that class, there was a man who was a recent immigrant from Africa. He had a background in agriculture. I think he was an agronomist by training,

and in part of my discussion, I always try to talk about what the role of government is and what we do, and I talk about the sort of laws that we introduce and pass.

I think, during that week, we had introduced changes to the Employment Standards Code that would take into account agricultural workers for the first time. So, I spoke about this to the class, and afterwards, that man, a recent immigrant from Africa, who had worked in agriculture, came up to me and shared his story with me and told me that when he had first come to this country, the work that he had done was on farms as an agricultural worker because his background was in agriculture.

He said to me, you know, I never knew until today what the NDP was about, and today, when you told me that you were bringing in legislation, you were bringing in laws, to ensure that the rights of those agricultural workers were going to be protected, now I know what the NDP stands for. I just thought that was such a tremendously moving example of how government and the laws that we introduce can affect the lives of people.

I also just want to share with the members a recent documentary that I saw, and I think it was, perhaps it was in Alberta. I think it was based in Alberta, and it was a documentary about a strike at a meat packing plant. The strike was led and organized by workers who had come from other countries. It was very clear to me in watching that documentary that not only did those workers understand their rights, not only did those workers understand the benefits that a union could bring to their lives, but they were active participants in leading that union, in organizing that union, in leading their fellow workers. I thought that was a very good example of the way that people who come to this country can get involved in making sure that their rights are protected in the workplace.

I also want to talk a bit about the efforts of unions, that they have made to adapt their own organizations to the changing work force. I'm going to, particularly, talk about the United Food and Commercial Workers, who I have had some familiarity with, and the way that union has changed the offerings, their class offerings. They have now, of course, a larger percentage of workers who are coming from other countries, particularly to work in plants like the Maple Leaf plant in Brandon. They have had to change the way that the union does its business, and that has meant language training for

some of their staff because they are very interested in being able to communicate with their members. It has also meant offering for their members training in English as a second language. So, I think that unions have shown themselves to be very interested in advocating for the rights of their members and very interested in making sure that their organizations are reflective of their membership.

* (10:20)

Now, one of the things the member has said, I think, wrongly, and needs to be corrected is that this side of the House has no interest in private members' acts, private members' bills, and I think that cannot be further from the truth. We did pass, in the last session, The Apology Act, that was brought forward by the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard), and that was a good piece of legislation, it's a good bill and it's making a difference. I think we are open to good ideas that are going to make a difference for people, but this bill, I think, frankly, is already covered in the existing act.

I think it should be noted that those clauses that I read for the member have been in place since 1992, and they've remained unchanged since then even despite the complete assault on trade union rights that took place in 1996 by the previous Conservative government.

I also think that it's important to note, as the member did, that this matter has been before the Manitoba Labour Board, is my understanding, that the board was asked to rule on the status of these employees and on June 26, 2007, found that these workers were employees under The Labour Relations Act and that they were included in the bargaining unit. The board further dismissed the employer's application for review and reconsideration on August 20, 2007.

Now, the other side of the House may not have confidence in the Manitoba Labour Board and that is their right, but I think it's important to note that the board is a quasi-judicial arm's length administrative tribunal. It has representatives from employers and labour. It's led by Mr. Bill Hamilton, who served for many years on the board, and his nomination to be chair was a consensus nomination by employers and labour. We on this side of the House have every confidence in the Labour Board.

In fact, I think it's important to note that the Conference Board of Canada in their April 2004 report noted that the Manitoba Labour Board enjoys

the strongest satisfaction of all labour boards on the part of employer and labour stakeholders. The other side of the House may want to not have confidence in the Manitoba Labour Board that it knows what it's doing, but I think we on this side of the House do.

I think, just in conclusion, Mr. Speaker, we're not going to take any lectures from members opposite on how to protect the rights of workers. I think they've shown themselves time and time and time again to be no friend of workers in this province. I think this attempt, this latest attempt is nothing more than patronizing immigrant workers to suggest that they don't know enough to know their rights, and they don't know enough to know when they're joining a union.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. David Faurshou (Portage la Prairie): I do appreciate the member's remarks. I will say, though, that the MLA for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu), who is bringing before the House Bill 214, was in fact herself a union leader. I would believe that the member who just spoke did not have that knowledge and to make some of her statements relevant to the debate on this bill I think that particular point of information was not considered.

Mr. Doug Martindale, Acting Speaker, in the Chair

Now, this particular bill is very important for workers' rights. I noted that when the member spoke she stated that it was the union that was taking on language instruction in the case of Brandon Maple Leaf. It was, though, a statement made that you had to join the union first before, in fact, you got language instruction, so, thereby acknowledging that there was a language and a barrier that provided difficulties in understanding what was being communicated to them. Therefore, this bill, in using the information provided for the Member for Fort Rouge (Ms. Howard), makes this bill even more relevant to come into force. I take it from those comments that in fact the Member for Fort Rouge does support this bill in saying that private members' bills are vitally important. Again, I take that to be support for this bill. So I thank her for her comments.

Appreciation of unions: I, too, have been a member of a union throughout my working life, and I do appreciate all of the good work that unions do on behalf of the workers. I also say, as being a member of the Portage la Prairie School Board, did appreciate the efforts of the union to bring before the

school board information of concern so that it could be dealt with through contract negotiations.

In fact, when Portage la Prairie School Division did negotiate with the Union of Public Employees, we did in good faith and worked very well together. There was a situation where the union and the school board had come to an agreement, had a signed contract; then it was learned afterwards that there was a wage adjustment that was taking place in other school divisions. We felt, as a school board, that we should reopen negotiations to adjust the contract to reflect what was being received in other school divisions, because we did not want to see union members in the Portage la Prairie School Division hampered by an early settlement. We did just that and I believe it is very, very good to have that type of working relationship between union and employer. I do believe, in most cases, this does exist.

I will continue, though, in debate specific to the reason for this bill. It has been brought before the House and it emanates from a situation in Portage la Prairie where, in fact, there was union sign-up taking place involving migrant workers who had come to Canada, for employees during the summer months working in a vegetable farm. I will say that the relationship between the employer and the employees was extraordinarily good. The reason for the union sign-up membership drive emanated from an activity that took place after hours, away from the employer's responsibility. It came about because of an infraction that involved the RCMP. It did not have anything to do with the employer, yet the employer, because of the union involvement, was engaged after the sign-up took place.

Also, what hasn't been considered here is that, during the union sign-up, the translation of what was in English and in French on the sign-up cards was translated using a terminology "family." They were being asked to sign the card so that they could join the family.

If you're using the Spanish language, family is a very, very strong word which those from Latin America take very seriously and understand it to be a support network, one of caring and understanding. There is another term for "union," which engages persons in the work place rather than on a social basis, which was, effectively, the term that was being used by the translator. Many of the workers felt that they were duped into signing the membership cards under the impression that they were joining an organization that was prefaced on family.

Mr. Acting Speaker, the reason for this bill is, indeed, to bring fairness and understanding to those individuals that are considerate of joining a union. I think it is a friendly amendment to existing legislation. I don't believe that there should be any opposition to making the sign-up and the joining of a union by using the first language of an individual, so full comprehension can be had by the individual looking to join a union.

I believe that there's no controversy over this bill and this bill should go forward to second reading in order that there be public input on it.

* (10:30)

In regard to the Manitoba Labour Board, indeed, the Manitoba Labour Board does have a very, very good relationship and does enjoy a high rating amongst both employer and union and the Labour Board does do, in fact, very good work.

What I will say though, it is very expensive to make representation in this process. The farm—I do believe members opposite understand the complexities and the pressures on farming these days—had to expend more than \$30,000 in their representation to the Manitoba Labour Board and would have pursued this fully if the dollars were more readily available and unfortunately, in present-day farming, they were not. So that is the reason that no appeal was made to the full Manitoba Labour Board in this regard. It is very disappointing that this is such an expensive process and one that one has to expend a great deal of dollars in order to participate in.

I do want to say that this legislation does not—this bill is not redundant, in other words. The Minister of Labour has stated that it is, but nowhere in the current Labour Relations Act does the act address the language in which workers are informed of the union.

I think it is vitally important to show respect and understanding for those individuals that have come to Canada to contribute to our economy, contribute to our great nation of Canada. As we all can appreciate, we are, at some juncture in our family tree, immigrants to this country and I think this bill shows that respect due newcomers to Canada. Thank you.

Hon. Nancy Allan (Minister of Labour and Immigration): Mr. Acting Speaker, it is a privilege to speak in regard to this particular act to amend The Labour Relations Act.

I find it quite interesting that members opposite think that there's absolutely no controversy to this bill, you know, there's just nothing to this, this is going to be absolutely no problem. I guess they think, because I, as minister, have passed 12 pieces of unanimous labour legislation, that when they come up with a piece of legislation there's going to be absolutely no problem with it on their side of the House.

I just want to remind members opposite that one of the reasons that we have been so successful with our labour legislation on this side of the House is that we have done an incredible amount of consultation with our stakeholders, with our employer community, with our labour community and, as well, with our stakeholders that are affected by legislation.

I want to thank all of the members of my senior management team that do that consultation, and I'd also like to thank the Labour Management Review Committee here in Manitoba. It's one of the unique bodies, we're the only jurisdiction in Canada that has an LMRC and our LMRC is 41 years young here in Manitoba. All of those employer reps on the LMRC and the labour reps on the LMRC have done an incredible job.

Mr. Acting Speaker, in regard to providing advice to my senior management team and to the stakeholders that we work with—and they've worked through some very, very, thorny, thorny issues that can be very, very diverse for employer representatives and labour representatives. They've really done a terrific job.

I guess the first thing I'd like to ask about Bill 214, the act to amend The Labour Relations Act that is being proposed by the MLA for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu) is—I was just curious, and I asked this question before, when the previous labour critic introduced the bill into the House prior to the election campaign. I'm just curious who she consulted with. I certainly know that no employer groups have mentioned anything to me about this legislation, and I meet with them on a daily basis. Not on a daily basis—I wish I could. I know we had a labour liaison meeting with some labour people and they never mentioned anything to me about this piece of legislation. It's been around, I believe, for over a year now. So that would seem to me to be quite a length of time for the opposition to have the opportunity to perhaps chat with some of the stakeholders in our community about this legislation.

I find it quite interesting, I also met with the Keystone Agricultural Producers in regard to the Employment Standards Code and ag workers being covered under the code, and they did not raise this piece of legislation with me at all. So I'm wondering if anybody else knows about it other than the MLA for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu) and the MLA for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Faurichou). I am just curious if they've done their due diligence in regard to their consultation because it would be interesting to know if they had, you know, any feedback from any of the stakeholders.

Now, I think it's really important, Mr. Acting Speaker, because I don't know if they've had a really good look at The Labour Relations Act, but there already are requirements in The Labour Relations Act which require information to be provided to employees and proof of information that the employee understands that information. I know that the MLA for Fort Rouge (Ms. Howard) had the opportunity to speak to this particular legislation prior to me speaking, and I know that she took the opportunity to read out those sections of the act, 45(3.1) and 45(3.2), which talk very clearly about the information that must be provided to any individuals that are going through the certification process.

So I do believe, Mr. Acting Speaker, that this piece of legislation is redundant. I know this is going to be heartbreaking for members opposite, but I don't think we're going to be supporting it. I'm sure they're upset.

I did want to take a few minutes, Mr. Acting Speaker, to just chat about work stoppages in Manitoba. Since the previous Minister of Labour changed The Labour Relations Act, I believe it was in—my memory is kind of foggy—I believe it was in 2000. You know, since that legislation was passed, we've had harmonious labour relations here in Manitoba, and we have reduced the days lost to strike and lockout here in Manitoba. We're very proud of that as a government. We don't believe that it's good for anybody in our province, for our employer community or our labour community, to have situations where we are having strikes, where we are having lockouts. That is not what is good for the Manitoba economy. So I think it's important to talk about the work stoppages prior to 1999 and after 1999.

Under the previous government the average monthly person days lost under the previous government—average monthly person days lost—was

over 5,000. Under our government, since we passed The Labour Relations Act in 2000, it is 1,917. That is a huge decrease in the number of days lost to strike and lockout. I think that that's very, very important when you want to have a stable labour relations climate in your province because that is really what is best for Manitoba's economy.

So I just want to put that on the record in regard to The Labour Relations Act, and I know that I can honestly tell you, Mr. Speaker, that if we were going to make any changes at all—Mr. Acting Deputy Speaker—if we were going to make any changes at all to our Labour Relations Act, we would certainly want our stakeholders at the table. We would want advice from them. We would want to have a dialogue with them in regard to what those changes would look like. We would really want to look at what would be in the best interests of our stakeholders in the labour community.

So we will definitely, unfortunately, not be supporting this legislation.

I'd also just like to just touch base with the House today about the comments that the MLA for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu) made in regard to the piece of legislation that we have on the books about the protection of temporary foreign workers, and the fact that this legislation is going to drive temporary foreign workers out of the province.

* (10:40)

Well, if that's what the MLA for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu) thinks is going to happen to temporary foreign workers when we pass this legislation, I think she should get in touch with Shannon Martin and get him to start writing her speeches, as well as her questions in the question period, because that's not what is going to happen, Mr. Acting Speaker. I certainly hope she wouldn't be fearmongering in the community with that kind of political rhetoric, because that is not what's going to happen.

We have spent a lot of time consulting on this legislation. I presented the legislation to the FPT meeting in Québec city with Honourable Jean-Pierre Blackburn, who, the last time I checked, is a Tory. I've talked to Monte Solberg, I think that person's a Tory, and I've talked to Diane Findlay—[interjection] Chirp, chirp, chirp.

So, Mr. Acting Speaker, you know what? I really hope that the MLA for Morris takes some time. We had a briefing with her. I hope she's figured out the bill by now so that she knows that what this act is

going to do is it's going to provide protection for temporary foreign workers.

It's going to provide protection from unscrupulous recruitment agencies. It's going to provide an opportunity for us to work with temporary foreign workers so that we can provide them with their basic minimum rights under the Employment Standards Code. And the employers, Mr. Acting Speaker, in this community, are supportive of this legislation as well. So I think that's what's important.

We've done a lot of consultation on our legislation, and we believe it's going to be the model for every other jurisdiction in Canada. We have the federal government on board and everyone is looking to—we have had phone calls from five other jurisdictions in Canada about this legislation, who want to replicate our made-in-Manitoba solution for protecting temporary foreign workers.

So I'm very excited about the legislation. I look forward to it and I dare them to vote against it. Thank you, Mr. Acting Speaker.

House Business

An Honourable Member: House business.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Martindale): The Opposition House Leader, on House business?

Mr. Gerald Hawranik (Official Opposition House Leader): Yes, on House business, Mr. Acting Speaker.

In accordance with Rule 31(9), I'd like to announce that the private member's resolution that will be considered for next Thursday is the resolution on Interprovincial Trade Agreements and Decreased Barriers to Trade, sponsored by the honourable Member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Maguire). That's Interprovincial Trade Agreements and Decreased Barriers to Trade, sponsored by the Member for Arthur-Virden.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Martindale): Thank you. In accordance with Rule 31(9), it has been announced that the private member's resolution that will be considered next Thursday is the resolution on Interprovincial Trade Agreements and Decreased Barriers to Trade, sponsored by the honourable Member for Arthur-Virden.

* * *

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): I, too, wanted to put a few words on the record. I must admit I was somewhat working on my laptop when I heard the

minister chirping, and I looked up to see if maybe she was doing the bird dance, but, much to my pleasant surprise, she wasn't doing the bird dance.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

But having said that, she was talking about a very important piece of legislation and I did appreciate the briefing. I can indicate that the legislation, I think, is groundbreaking and I think at the end of the day has the potential to have a very positive impact, the bill that she's referring to.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I want to maybe burst the bubble a little bit in terms of the minister. She makes reference to the consultation and how important it is for us to consult. She makes reference in terms of the Labour Management Review Committee and how unique of an organization—and it truly is a unique organization. At one time, I think the minister had a lot of credibility in terms of talking about that and how she endorses it and so forth, but she needs to be reminded in terms of the statutory holiday and how that was brought in and how there was no consultation done on that particular issue.

Everything that she just talked about in terms of bringing forward legislation is contradicted when you look at the legislation dealing with the statutory holiday.

Now, if we take a look at Bill 214, and then she brings it over to the Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu) and says, well, who have you consulted, who have you talked to? Again, I don't necessarily want to say that I know where the bill came from and who it was that was consulted. I do know that the Member for Portage la Prairie (Mr. Faurchou) and the Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu) are at least in part responding to issues that came out of Portage La Prairie and the hiring and unionization of some employees in that area. I respect what it is that they're attempting to do here. I can tell the government that there are many different issues that face our immigrant communities that we need to be very sensitive with regard to.

Exploitation does occur and it occurs in a very real way, even to the workers. Mr. Speaker, some of the stories that are there today, things that are happening today, are absolutely astounding. Just the other day I had a call from someone saying, well, here's what it is that they are being paid. They thought they were going to be paid this or they were entitled to this, but they've been told to be quiet

about it or they would risk being deported from the country. This is actually an example from the Philippines, and the minister acknowledges it. Those types of issues are very real and they happen today.

In some areas the issue is that of communications in nature. Whether it's other Asian countries, in particular, let's say like Vietnam, China. One could talk about India where, in certain sectors of the population, language is an issue, a very real issue. There are some people that would exploit in order to accomplish whatever it is that they want, Mr. Speaker.

I think that we as legislators need to be aware of that fact. I listen to the Member for Fort Rouge (Ms. Howard) and the minister reinforced what was in the act today. I'm glad to hear, because at the end of the day what we want is good, solid, sound legislation. I was glad to hear the comments that were put on the record. I would go a little bit further by asking the government, in terms of the language issue, to what degree is there a need to provide that going that extra mile in terms of the language? There could be some merit to it.

I would have liked to have seen the Member for Fort Rouge acknowledge the bill that we have before us and say, look, we're going to pass it on to the review committee, to pass it on to some of these agencies that might be able to provide input on whether or not the principle of the bill is worth pursuing. Is there a need for us to make an amendment? Would workers' interests be better served? One could take it, not only for this particular bill, but any other types of legislation that might be there, Mr. Speaker.

I think that it becomes critically important that we recognize that language is an issue in many different ways, especially when you talk about the workers. I can tell you that I've heard firsthand on numerous occasions where language has been an issue, where things have gone through the grievance process and language and how that person expressed themselves was, in fact, being held against them by management. The union is arguing that they didn't understand what it is that the employee was trying to express.

* (10:50)

So it goes both ways, Mr. Speaker. It's not just the issue, and I believe the Member for Morris raises the principle of being able to communicate so that the person genuinely understands in that language,

Mr. Speaker. In this case I think that there could be some potential merit for it. I think when we look at labour legislation, that we need to be a little bit more open-minded.

There are labour issues that I've brought before this Chamber and we've debated for many, many years some issues in which I've tried to get the government of the day to acknowledge and to move forward on. Final offer selection is one of those pieces of legislation that I've raised in the past and suggested that the government should be moving forward with, Mr. Speaker, that there are ways in which it could be more effective than it was during the '80s, but we haven't seen that.

There are issues in regard to private pensions. We hear quite often about the public-sector pensions and the constant lobbying that takes place in that area. I think that there's this huge vacuum that's there today in regard to private pensions. I've walked on some picket lines. I can remember going on the Flyer Industries picket line, walking with individuals that've been working for a company for 30 years; you talk about the pensions and the concerns that they have in regards to pension issues.

I think that there is so much more that we could be doing but, in doing that, we need to work with both management and union in terms of trying to do what is right, both for the employee and the employer. So there are areas for us to improve.

When I look at Bill 214, what I see is a member that is genuine in trying to ensure that there is a better understanding on one aspect of the legislation; I can't fault the member for that. What I would like to have heard from the minister is a response to the degree that this is something that can be brought up with the Labour Management Review Committee and possibly get some sort of an opinion on it because the principle, I think, is positive.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, we don't have a problem in terms of the bill going to a committee stage at the very least. Thank you.

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): It's my pleasure to rise to add my comments to Bill 214, the act to amend The Labour Relations Act, brought forward by the Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu), I believe, the sponsor of this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I listened very closely to the comments that were made by members opposite with respect to this issue. Of course, I listened quite carefully to my own colleagues here as well when

they made their comments with respect to, perhaps, some of the processes that were not followed by members opposite with respect to consultation on this bill.

I do know that our Minister of Labour (Ms. Allan) has worked very hard to build a consensus amongst both business and labour in this province, our partners in the economy of this province, Mr. Speaker, trying to build a province that we all want. I know that our minister and our government are very proud. I think we have some seven pieces of—12 pieces of labour legislation, I stand corrected—12 pieces of labour legislation that have been passed by this Chamber during her time as minister.

We congratulate her for that effort and, of course, we would like to thank members opposite for their support on some of those pieces of legislation as well, because we think our minister has taken the right tack where she has referred many issues to the LMRC, Labour Management Review Committee of our province to try and find a consensus to many of these issues. If it's not 12 pieces of labour legislation, I'm sure it soon will be 12 pieces of labour legislation that we will have had passed by our Minister of Labour.

I listened very carefully to the comments made by the Member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) where he said that our Minister of Labour didn't go out and consult about the February holiday and that we just rammed this into place in this province; perhaps, the Member for Inkster doesn't support the February holiday, but I can tell you the folks of my constituency sure like it. They thanked our government for bringing that forward. It was interesting to note that, even though the Member for Inkster doesn't like the February holiday, his own leader and the Leader of the Official Opposition (Mr. McFadyen) went out when that became an issue in the province.

Our Minister of Labour said that she would need to consult further with our partners in the province, that the two leaders of the opposition party said they supported the concept. So our Minister of Labour talked with our partners in both business and labour, and it was agreed that we would come forward with the holiday, that the Member for Inkster doesn't support in this province, and we now have the additional statutory holiday in February this year.

I'm quite thankful, as I know the families of my community are—[interjection] The families in my

community have. I know the Member for Inkster may not like Louis Riel Day, but that's the day that's been named for that particular day in February. We're quite proud, as a government, to make sure that that's now part of the statutory holidays under regulation, and that the folks in our communities are quite thankful to have that day off in February to be able to spend with their families.

Now, going back to the legislation, Bill 214, that we're talking about at hand here today. I know I've had the chance, in my years as critic during the 1990s, to work with both business and labour in talking about various pieces of labour legislation in this province. I can think back to the time when this province, when the members of the official opposition today, when they were in government, they brought in labour legislation in this province. They called it labour legislation but I deemed it to be anti-labour legislation because of the steps that they were taking. I don't think that you consulted with the folks in the labour community for the legislation that you brought forward. I can remember it being very punitive and very regressive legislation.

We spoke against it at that time, and we voted against that legislation because it did not consult widely and broadly with all affected Manitobans here in the province. I can think back to the WCB legislation in particular and the employment standards changes that you made—of course, it seems like the only time you bring in legislation is when it is to the benefit of the employers of this province and that you don't consult broadly with folks in both sectors, both the labour and the business community.

Now, it's interesting to note the Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu) feigns that she's doing this piece of legislation on behalf of the migrant agricultural workers of the province. Where was she in her party in the 1990s when we were dealing with these issues, and why has she not been in a position where she's brought in other pieces of legislation that will, for example, call for increases in the minimum wage? The minimum wage in the 1990s only went up twice. We've raised it every year when we've been a part of government.

Why have you not been calling on government to help the low- and middle-income families with respect to the minimum wage in this province? Why have you not been supportive of other initiatives where we want to protect agricultural workers in what we call vertically-integrated business in our province? I know the Member for the Interlake (Mr.

Nevakshonoff) has raised this issue many times, trying to protect folks that are working in hog barns, for example, and to make sure that they have the appropriate employment standards, and the WCB standards to support them in those particular industries.

This, I know, is an issue too important to the folks that are working in those industries and the steps that we have taken as a government to put in place the protections for those folks that are working in those particular types of industries.

Now, I had the opportunity as my time as critic for Workplace Safety and Health, Workers Compensation and WCB, and the Labour Relations Act of this province—when I was critic for those portfolios over those years, I had a chance to talk with many folks in the labour community about labour legislation in this province. I do know that I worked quite closely with the United Food and Commercial Workers and consulted with them many times about different pieces of labour legislation. Now, I know members opposite, and the purpose of Bill 214 is going back to the fact that there was a certification of the migrant agriculture workers at the Mayfair Farms in Portage la Prairie. *[interjection]* Well, I'm getting to that. Just give me a moment. I'm getting to that right now, as a matter of fact.

I just wanted to put into context some of the issues here. I do know that United Food and Commercial Workers also represents the workers at the Maple Leaf plant in Brandon. Having talked to the UFCW staff reps, I find that, as they have related to me, it is in their best interests and the best interests of the employees if they are able to communicate with the people that have these language difficulties. The UFCW makes great strides to try and make sure that they have people in place to be able to explain quite concisely and clearly to folks what it is. If you know the Maple Leaf plant in Brandon, there are numbers of folks from different parts of the world and various languages and UFCW has made great strides to be able to explain to the folks what they're trying to do to help the people working in the agricultural sector.

* (11:00)

So, with respect to this Bill 214, Mr. Speaker, this bill is not one that I can support. I think that this bill is ill-conceived and it's the wrong piece of legislation.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

The honourable Member for Transcona, have you concluded your comments? Okay. So when this matter's again before the House, the debate will remain open, and the hour being 11 a.m., we will now move on to resolutions.

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): I would ask for leave of the House for just a moment while the Member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) comes and does her resolution. I thought she was going to be here. Sorry.

Mr. Speaker: Is it the will of the House to recess for a few minutes? *[Agreed]*

Okay, it's been agreed to.

The House recessed at 11:01 a.m.

The House resumed at 11:03 a.m.

RESOLUTION

Res. 8—Pharmacare Deductible Increases

Mr. Speaker: Order.

We will now deal with Resolution No. 8, Pharmacare Deductible Increases.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I move, seconded by the Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu), that:

WHEREAS Pharmacare is a drug benefit program for any Manitoban, regardless of age, whose income is seriously affected by the high prescription drug costs; and

WHEREAS the provincial government has increased Pharmacare deductibles six times in the last seven years, indeed every year since 2002, except during the 2000 election year; and

WHEREAS these increases account for a cumulative 34 percent increase in Pharmacare deductible rates for Manitobans; and

WHEREAS seniors and low-income Manitobans on fixed incomes are the most negatively affected by these increases, often having to choose between purchasing much-needed medications and groceries;

WHEREAS in a nation-wide assessment of drug coverage, the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* found that Manitoba does not, in fact, have the most comprehensive drug coverage in Canada, as the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) frequently asserts; and

WHEREAS the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* found that, in some instances, Manitoba seniors pay far more than their counterparts across Canada for the same prescriptions; and

WHEREAS in a 2006 audit of Manitoba's Pharmacare program, the Auditor General found that the provincial government has not sufficiently explored all avenues available to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Pharmacare and to contain the cost growth of the program and improve the efficiency; and

WHEREAS the provincial government is forcing seniors and low-income-earning Manitobans to pay for its failure to properly manage the Pharmacare program.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to consider reversing its decision to increase Pharmacare deductibles by 5 percent in the 2008 provincial budget; and

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to consider reducing health care bureaucracy, as previously promised, and to consider directing those savings into sustaining Pharmacare and improving patient care.

Mr. Speaker: Is it the will of the House to receive the resolution as printed? *[Agreed]*

WHEREAS Pharmacare is a drug benefit program for any Manitoban, regardless of age, whose income is seriously affected by high prescription drug costs; and

WHEREAS the provincial government has increased Pharmacare deductibles six times in the last seven years, indeed every year since 2002, except during the 2007 election year; and

WHEREAS these increases account for a cumulative 34 percent increase in Pharmacare deductible rates for Manitobans; and

WHEREAS seniors and low-income Manitobans on fixed incomes are the most negatively affected by these increases, often having to choose between purchasing much-needed medications and groceries;

WHEREAS in a nation-wide assessment of drug coverage, the Canadian Medical Association Journal (CMAJ) found that Manitoba does not, in fact, have

the most comprehensive drug coverage in Canada, as the Minister of Health frequently asserts; and

WHEREAS the CMAJ found that, in some instances, Manitoba seniors pay far more than their counterparts across Canada for the same prescriptions; and

WHEREAS in a 2006 audit of Manitoba's Pharmacare program, the Auditor General found that the provincial government has not sufficiently explored all avenues available to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Pharmacare and to contain the cost growth of the program and improve the efficiency; and

WHEREAS the provincial government is forcing seniors and low-income-earning Manitobans to pay for its failure to properly manage the Pharmacare program.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to consider reversing its decision to increase Pharmacare deductibles by 5 percent in the 2008 provincial budget; and

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the provincial government to consider reducing health care bureaucracy, as previously promised, and to consider directing those savings into sustaining Pharmacare and improving patient care.

It's been moved by the honourable Member for River East, seconded by the honourable Member for Morris (Mrs. Taillieu),

WHEREAS Pharmacare—dispense?

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

Mr. Speaker: Dispense.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I just wanted to welcome some seniors that are in the gallery today to hear the discussion and listen to members of this Legislature on this very, very important issue.

Mr. Speaker, this is not the first time the issue of increased Pharmacare deductibles has come to our attention. I do know that, in the past, there has been outrage by many seniors who have really felt the pinch and the crunch when they see an additional 5 percent added to their Pharmacare deductibles. We all know that many, many seniors within our province and within our communities live on a fixed income. They don't see their incomes going up by 5 percent every year, and they've seen, in many instances—and I've had much experience in my own

community where I believe we have the largest concentration of seniors per capita in River East constituency than any other constituency in the province of Manitoba.

We have several seniors that live in apartment blocks, and we do know that rental guidelines only allow a certain increase in rents, but over the years, because there hasn't been much new rental stock built, there have been improvements that have needed to be made to those apartment blocks. As a result, many landlords are applying to exceed the guidelines and raise rents much more than what has been allowed under rental guidelines, and, as a result, we're seeing seniors having to pay more for their accommodation, for their rental.

We've seen seniors that are having to pay more in the increased fees that have been put into place by this government, and many, Mr. Speaker, would call them backdoor taxes. People's pockets are being picked on a regular basis by this government, and when they say they haven't increased taxes, they're really not being open and honest with Manitobans because they, at every turn, are increasing fees, Pharmacare fees being one of those fees.

Mr. Speaker, we do know, and we have seen many Manitobans that have been hit by this government's increase in vehicle registration, in many other user fees. Every time now that they have to have an appliance repaired, they're paying taxes on the services, the service person that comes in to fix those appliances. We've seen, time and time again, how this government has had its hands in the pockets of Manitobans, and many of those Manitobans cannot afford to see these increases.

* (11:10)

We're seeing now that people are having to make very difficult choices, and I wouldn't want to be in the situation. I know members on the government side of the House would not want to be in the situation where they had to choose between purchasing medication that is going to improve their health status and their quality of life or purchasing the basic essentials that they might need to be able to nourish themselves, whether it be bread or milk or any other type of need that they might have.

So, Mr. Speaker, we see, again, a government that isn't taking into consideration those seniors within our community that live on fixed incomes. There's a deviousness to the way this has been handled. We've seen, in seven years, Pharmacare

increases of 5 percent per year with one exception, and that exception was in 2007, in the budget that was presented just before the 2007 election. Now that kind of devious activity is not new to the NDP government, because if you go back to the 1980s, and look what happened in the mid-'80s, when government used to set Autopac rates. They kept Autopac rates low, intentionally, before an election, and then the year after that election they would raise those rates exorbitantly. Well, people were not fooled. They were not fooled by an NDP government that used that kind of tactic.

I want Manitobans to know that, as a result of that, when we came into government in the late '80s, we brought in legislation that took the setting of rates out of the hands of politicians around the Cabinet table and sent them to the Public Utilities Board, so that there would be a fair and independent process. I know that the Member for Transcona (Mr. Reid) is saying that that was a good move. Yes, it was. But, ultimately, we have seen, by past experience, that there's a deviousness to the way the NDP handles the budgetary process and looks at increasing fees to Manitobans before and after an election. So, it's very strange that we would see—oh, maybe, it's not strange, it's probably something that could have been expected. Anyway, a very sneaky way and a very underhanded way of dealing with seniors, especially, and it's not only seniors, there are many, many others, too, that have very significant Pharmacare expenses that are seeing this increase.

Mr. Speaker, with those comments, I have felt it important, not only to ensure that Manitobans have the opportunity to sign petitions, and we can bring this issue to the Legislature on a regular basis, but I felt it important to bring forward this resolution to strongly encourage the government, the Premier (Mr. Doer), to reconsider in this year—we can't do anything about budgets in the past and we know that last year there was no increase, but this year's budget hasn't even passed and we have a government that's looking at going back to April 1 and implementing the increased Pharmacare deductible.

Ms. Bonnie Korzeniowski, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

So, we would urge the Premier and his government, and maybe some members of the government will stand in their place today and support us, and support this resolution and say, take a second look at what this budget does. I'm sure that there are other areas where savings could be

achieved and the Pharmacare deductible would not have to go up this year.

We do know that we have a piece of legislation in front of us today that is going to allow political parties to take tax dollars as a result of the number of votes that they got. Madam Deputy Speaker, I don't support additional resources going into politicians or political parties from hard-earned tax dollars. I would support that money being redirected into the Pharmacare program so that seniors and others would not have to experience the increase that they're seeing, and they wouldn't have to make the very difficult choices that some of them are being asked to make today.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would hope that members of the government would stand up, would support this and would send a strong message to the Premier (Mr. Doer) and to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger) that before the budget is passed, there is still an opportunity for us here to ensure that this increase in Pharmacare deductibles does not go through.

That was one of the reasons that we voted against the budget, a very compelling reason to vote against this budget.

I would encourage members on the government side to reconsider this ill-thought-out increase and ensure that our seniors aren't penalized once again and aren't having their pockets picked once again by this NDP government.

Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Theresa Oswald (Minister of Health): I thank you for the opportunity to enable me to put a few words on the record concerning the—*[interjection]* Sorry. I thought that someone was speaking to me.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to put a few words on the record. I thank the Member for River East for bringing this issue forward. I always appreciate and enjoy listening to her debate and what she has to contribute to the dialogue, and will continue to do so. I want to say that, you know, in saying so, I have to submit that I don't totally agree with a number of points that she's made in her speech, and I'll endeavour to put an alternate voice on the record to try to flesh out this debate just a little bit more.

I want to point out for the member that, of course, I believe that all members of this House, in

ways that are different, want to do whatever we can to be supporting Manitobans in their quest for health and good health care and in their quest for supporting the seniors of our province. In fact, one could reasonably argue that that's why we're working every day to ensure that we can support our Pharmacare program and that we can expand our Pharmacare program, Madam Deputy Speaker.

We know that Manitoba's Pharmacare program is an income-based system that pays a hundred percent of the eligible drug costs once the deductible is reached, and it does not discriminate based on age or on medical conditions like we might see happen in other jurisdictions, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Drug-coverage programs like Manitoba's that limit out-of-pocket expenditures to a given percentage of income provide, we believe, the greatest protection against those catastrophic prescription drug costs. Again, you needn't look much further than other jurisdictions in our great country, Madam Deputy Speaker, to see where this is occurring.

It's also worthwhile to note, and was not presented in the member opposite's speech, that budget 2008 invests an additional \$3.7 million in the Pharmacare program, bringing that to a total of \$280 million, more than triple of what it was in 1999, which was \$62 million. That's, by my calculation, a 352 percent increase, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The substantial funding increases since then, since 1999, have enabled us to add over 2,000 new drugs to Pharmacare. I think that this is a very important point, Madam Deputy Speaker, because at the same time that members opposite are—you know, quite rightly, we live in a democracy, and they're speaking against something that they don't support, and that is an increase of 5 percent to the Pharmacare deductible. That's an increase somewhere between \$2 to \$6 per month for individuals for Pharmacare families. At the same time that they are raising that part of the argument, of course they are sending letters. Virtually each and every one—perhaps not every one—asking government to expand coverage for new and developing drugs, sometimes for experimental treatments, and the fact is that that's their job. It's their job to advocate on behalf of their constituents to ask for an expanded program.

* (11:20)

Frankly, I have listened to them very seriously, and I want to work with them on those issues. We know that the single largest cost in health care around the globe, Madam Deputy Speaker, is an increase in pharmaceutical costs, and we have a very big job in working to balance our costs and expanding the programs in ways that all members of this House ask us to do. For seniors, most certainly, and the drugs that they want to access that may not currently exist on the formulary. For children, for families. We want to work with these members in order to make that expansion that they ask for on behalf of their constituents, while at the same time, balancing health care costs. So I take these letters very seriously.

Certainly any deductible increases that occur over time are factored into the need for all members of this House and citizens outside of this House, Madam Deputy Speaker, that want that program expanded as much as possible. I can also say that, since 1999, the number of families in Manitoba that are benefiting from Pharmacare has increased by over 24,000. I think that that's a very important point that needs to come to bear in this dialogue as well. I also think it's really important for us to be very clear about what is true and what is not true about the availability of pharmaceutical drugs. We need to make note that welfare recipients don't pay Pharmacare deductibles. We need to bring that into the debate as well.

We need to know that historically, let's go back to 1996 to 2007-08, the average Pharmacare benefit more than doubled from \$976 to \$2,465. That's an average benefit increase of nearly \$1,500, \$1,489. Deductibles have covered only a fraction of those benefit improvements, increasing by about \$424 over the same period.

I also want to note that we know that the cost of pharmaceuticals can be significant for families that are living with particular illnesses. We introduced the deductible instalment payment program for Pharmacare, allowing patients with those high drug costs, that's 25 percent of monthly income, to pay their deductible in monthly instalments so that that isn't as overwhelming a cost to bear.

We also need to bear in mind that we know that we are not the only government over history to increase deductibles or the co-payment. We know that when the previous government, a number of members who still exist on the other side and will be making some arguments today, we know that they

increased the deductible every year between 1988 and 1996.

We know that, over the term of the opposition members, seniors deductibles almost tripled, from \$285 to \$750. I think it needs to come into the conversation when members opposite suggest that our government or any government is specifically targeting one group with Pharmacare deductible increases. We need to be factually accurate on what has happened in a mutual effort to give some balance and some foundation to this program that Manitobans hold so dear.

We know that the Auditor General made recommendations regarding Pharmacare. Manitoba Health has worked with pharmacists and with drug manufacturers to develop new policies and programs like a new generic drug policy to introduce stronger controls on generic drugs. This is going to, of course, improve our ability to manage the growing cost of pharmaceuticals and the impact on the Pharmacare budget.

We know that, in March of 2008, the new generic drug submission policy enabled us to put 120 new generic drugs on the Pharmacare formulary. The Province will save a projected \$4 million per year with the addition of these new generic drugs. The savings will be reinvested to expand and further strengthen Pharmacare. We think that's important and I believe members opposite think that's important, too.

The new generic drug policy accounts for \$1 million of these savings and as the number of new generic drugs go on formulary, the extra savings obtained by our new policy will also grow. Members opposite have been critical that we took too much time in implementing that new policy but I can say, taking the time has saved us approximately \$1 million. With the savings from that new policy, it's going to be paid back before March '09. If we had done what members opposite wanted us to do and add those generics immediately, at the snap of a finger, we would have had about \$1 million in savings for one year only, and we would have passed up a million dollars in savings for every year going forward. We thought it was a good idea to take time and good management to take time to get that right, and we believe that it will be a very positive thing for Manitobans and for Pharmacare going forward.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

We know that, according to the recent external review on regional health authorities, the review that all RHAs are taking actions to reduce administrative costs and that admin costs in Manitoba are reasonable and comparable to other provinces. The review committee stated—I believe it was on page 42 of that report, Mr. Speaker—that it's confident that there is a constant focus on cost savings and evidence of reduced costs.

We know that we're also asking RHAs to ensure that they'll be providing more-detailed public reporting on those admin costs, to separate out-patient care functions, like infection control and patient safety and corporate office expenses. We know that we want more transparency in the issue.

With those few words, Mr. Speaker, I look forward to hearing—

Mr. Kelvin Goertzen (Steinbach): Mr. Speaker, it's a pleasure to rise to say a few words on this particular topic, one that affects a great many people in our province and our seniors, those who built this great province through their hard work over the course of their lifetimes.

I listen to the minister comments and I know she's finding something amusing with her colleague there. I did listen to the minister's comments and didn't take much heart from the minister. I don't expect that the seniors that are here with us today and certainly those who might read the comments in the days ahead won't take much heart from them either. We all know that, in today's environment with the increased cost of food, and the increased cost of fuel, it's difficult for many people in our society to make ends meet. Whether you are a family, a young family, or a single parent who's struggling on an income that isn't fixed, but a limited income, to try to make ends meet with the increased cost of food and the increased cost of fuel, it continues to be a struggle.

We don't expect that under the current environment, the world environment for fuel prices and for food prices, it's going to get better any time soon. Certainly this government would have known that, when they made the decision to increase the deductible this year again on seniors, it is already a tough economic environment for all people, let alone those who are living on a fixed income. Yet, they decided to go ahead anyway.

I did hear the minister talk about the fact that this is, in her figures that have been provided by her

from her department, \$2 to a \$6 cost for a senior a month. She seemed to indicate that this might be, or at least in her words, indicate that this is a small amount, an insignificant amount. Really, I think for each of us in the legislature here and perhaps for others around Manitoba who are in different occupations that aren't on fixed incomes, that might seem like a small amount. For us to come and try to ascribe that dollar amount as being small or insignificant, I think is very unfair to those who are living on a fixed income because, whatever that dollar figure is under the current environment where people are already paying 50 percent to 60 percent more for their fuel prices, where they are already paying 30 percent to 40 percent more for their food prices and could continue to pay more, it is a very important amount. Any dollar figure is an important amount.

This government certainly had other options. We know from the federal equalization and transfer payments that there's never been a government in the history of Manitoba that's ever had more money. This government has been able to raise the budget from approximately \$5 billion in 1999 when it took office to now \$9 billion, just under \$10 billion, almost double the budget since they took office, and largely as a result of, not because of economic growth necessarily in Manitoba, because of transfer payments and equalization payments that have come from the federal Conservative government in Ottawa.

There were certainly many options, Mr. Speaker, that this government could have looked at. To try to put a tax grab—and that's really what it is, and the former Minister of Health described it as a tax grab—to put that on the backs of seniors at this particular time, really at any time, but at this particular time when all these mandatory costs, whether fuel or food, are going up is not only poor politics, I would say, but it's simply cruel government.

* (11:30)

Mr. Speaker, we need to look at why it is that it happened again at this time. My colleague from River East who has been a very strong advocate on this particular issue, and I want to give her—I know she doesn't like to take credit and certainly wouldn't give it on her own—but I do want to say that, within the context of our caucus and throughout Manitoba, she's always been a very strong advocate for seniors and the work that seniors do in ensuring that seniors continue to have a good quality of life as they go into advancing years. I want to commend her for the

work that she does on behalf of her constituents and really, constituents and residents across Manitoba.

But when we look at the timing of this particular increase and other increases, there's been six in the last seven years, we find the one exception has already been noted, it's during an election year. The cynics might say that, perhaps, the government avoided increasing it during election year because they wanted to knock on those doors at the seniors' homes and other places for those on fixed incomes and say, we're not increasing your deductibles this year, to try to get their votes. I think that all of us here in the Legislature would be ashamed to think that any elected member or a government would try to use seniors as a political pawn at any time, and particularly at election time.

It is important to remember that these individuals, those who are living on fixed incomes, have spent their entire life building our province to what it is today. While there are many challenges in the province of Manitoba, and we point them out here in the Legislature every day, I think all of us would recognize that this province has the potential to be a great, great province. It has achieved many things over the time that it's been in our confederation here in Canada. Much of that work is done because of the seniors, those who are today in their advanced years or are living on a fixed income, they have really built this province. They're the ones who, through raising families, and through ensuring that we had strong farm communities, rural communities and building businesses and industries here in the city of Winnipeg and other cities, they're the ones. I know the minister finds this a laughing matter, but they are the ones, Mr. Speaker, who really made Manitoba the province that it is today.

Now, they turn to us as legislators, all of us collectively, and say to us, what do we get in return? We obviously try to do what we can to ensure that those who are seniors are getting the services that they deserve. But for the government to come in and say, now, we're going to increase this deductible, put on this tax on your back at a time when you've never had it more difficult trying to make ends meet, I would say, Mr. Speaker, is a cruel act by a government. It's disingenuous to do it again after an election year when they don't have to go back to those same seniors, those same seniors who they knocked on the doors on just a year ago and said, please elect us, we didn't increase your deductibles this year. We're the ones who are going to ensure that you get the security at this age that you deserve

because of all that you've done in Manitoba. Now, a year later, they forget. They forget that those are their words that they brought to the door, they brought in trying to win an election campaign.

I think it's a shame. It's a shame on the members opposite. I think it doesn't reflect well on government completely across the province and I think it's disappointing. Those seniors who are here today and who will read the transcripts and see, in the days ahead, their deductibles going up as they pay their bills, they will know it for what it is. It's a government who's decided on an election year not to raise the deductible purely for political purposes. It's disrespectful to all Manitobans, but particular for those seniors who've built this great province to what it is.

It's not as though when I mentioned that the record amount of money that the government has here in the province of Manitoba, and setting priorities and they decided not to set a priority of keeping deductibles at the same rate they were last year, but it's also mismanagement in the system. We've seen Auditor General's reports that have come forward and said there's a great deal that could be done to improve the efficiency and the effectiveness of the Pharmacare system that could have prevented any need, and I don't believe that there was a need, for this increase. We see that throughout government.

We've debated in this Legislature a great deal about the Hydro line that this government has decided to build on the west side of Lake Winnipeg as opposed to the much shorter, cheaper and safer route on the east side of Lake Winnipeg. By most estimations, almost any objective estimation, this decision to build the Hydro line on the west side of Lake Winnipeg will cost an additional between \$800 million and \$2 billion to the Province of Manitoba. There are many different ways that we could take the savings by putting the line on the east side, take the savings of the 800 to \$2 billion and apply it to good things within government. Certainly, one of those things, and the minister says it's a small amount that's increasing on the deductibles, certainly, a fraction of that money, a small fraction, Mr. Speaker, could have gone to ensure that the rates, not only didn't increase on the deductibles for Pharmacare, but in fact, could have decreased.

So, the minister says in her comments that she's under a great deal of pressure, that she's under a great deal of strain because there's different competing

interests. I would say to her, through effectiveness and efficiency, through the fact that they have more money than they've ever had before and through looking at decisions like the east side or the decision about the hydro line on the west side at a cost of \$800 million to \$2 billion more, she could have found many, many ways to spare these good seniors who've built our province this tax increase.

There's still time. There's still time for the minister to change her mind. She certainly has the means. There certainly is the way. If she has the will to go to her Cabinet, we can ensure that these great Manitobans who built our province don't have to have this tax increase now or in the future. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): Mr. Speaker, it's with pleasure I'm able to put a few words on the record regarding the resolution from the Member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) about Pharmacare deductible increases. Yes, it's lamentable, the price of drugs, and, yes, there is a challenge for us. There's no doubt about that. The member is correct on a number of points. However, I think the record has to be kept straight as well.

In the second WHEREAS from the honourable member's resolution: "WHEREAS the provincial government has increased Pharmacare deductibles six times in the last seven years, ..."—that's absolutely correct. But in all honesty if we take a look at the former government's record and we start looking at 1988 and go all the way to '96, what do we notice, Mr. Speaker? We notice that in '88-89 there was an increase in Pharmacare deductibles, and in '89 and '90 there was an increase in Pharmacare deductibles. In '90 and '91, was there an increase? Yes, indeed, there was; '91-92, yes, there was; '92-93, again a Pharmacare deductible increase; '93-94, the same thing, as well as '94-95; '95-96.

So this is nothing unusual, Mr. Speaker. I think we're reflecting the reality that's out there. Drug prices do increase and sometimes they do increase dramatically. The ability of provinces to wrestle with that is somewhat limited. So it's a bit of a case of the pot calling the kettle black, I would submit, Mr. Speaker.

I would also point out that under the Tory tenure, the deductible, the Pharmacare deductible for senior citizens tripled. It tripled and went from \$285 to \$750. That's a huge increase, Mr. Speaker. In fact, when the Tories went to an income-based deductible

system in 1996, they cut \$20 million out of the program.

Now, the member says in her third WHEREAS: "WHEREAS these increases account for a cumulative 34 percent increase in Pharmacare deductible rates for Manitobans;"—and I'm accepting her figure. She's probably correct, and if we base that on the roughly nine years that we've been in office, that comes out, according to my somewhat limited mathematical ability, to roughly 3.8 percent. Now, that's not a huge increase, although 3.8 percent is still significant, but when you consider the cost spiral of drug prices, I think we've done a relatively good job keeping the lid on. So I see this, rather, in a positive light than in a negative light.

On the other WHEREAS: "WHEREAS seniors and low income Manitobans . . ."—and that's the fourth one—"WHEREAS seniors and low income Manitobans on fixed incomes are the most negatively affected . . ."—I think the honourable Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) has pointed out that people on social assistance, first of all, do not pay the Pharmacare deductible.

Then how do we deal with what we consider to be a challenge nonetheless? Well, I think we have to have partners and one of those partners has to be the federal government, and I think that's where we see a great lack, that there's no national pharmaceutical strategy. And not only is it a serious lack, Mr. Speaker—and I would like to be even a little more critical here—I find that under the Liberal governments, federal governments, some of the former Cabinet ministers actually became outstanding well-known lobbyists for huge pharmaceutical companies.

I'm not saying that is morally wrong. I don't think it's morally wrong. It wasn't a conflict of interest. They were probably out of Cabinet for quite awhile, but, nonetheless, when you see people—and I believe it was Judy Erola, but I stand to be corrected—lobbying strongly for patent protection, therefore putting stresses on the ability to create generic drugs and keep the cost price down, that's really anti-productive. That's going in a negative direction, in a backwards direction. So I fault the Liberal government extremely, the federal Liberal government, for not taking this much more seriously, and I'm hoping that the present government, the federal government under Stephen Harper, will be a little bit more positive and we have more hope for that government.

* (11:40)

The other thing that the member does, and perhaps it is the THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED section, connecting the Pharmacare deductibles to reducing the health-care bureaucracy. I think it's a bit of a spurious argument, although, you know, from sort of a grassroots level, I'm very sympathetic to it. I hear this all the time, that there're too many people at the front and not enough people carrying the bedpan, so to speak, and I resonate sympathetically on that level. However, when you look at the facts I don't think it's quite the case.

I think we had chances to change that. I think there's a review in place, and we find that most of the regional health authorities are indeed trying very hard to curb their expenses as much as they humanly can. I know it's a difficult task, and I know when we set up the RHAs, and the Tories actually produced this legislation, there were mixed feelings about it. Some people were for it, some were against it, and I remember asking the then-Minister of Health Jim McCrae because I wanted to see the regional health authorities much more accountable in the sense of elected members on the board, and he more or less agreed that every board should have two elected members.

Now that never came to pass, and I somewhat lament that because I would like to see, personally, more elected members on the boards. That hasn't happened.

An Honourable Member: Change it.

Mr. Jennissen: The honourable member says we should change it, and I'm sure we're going to be looking at that.

An Honourable Member: Oh, yeah, right.

Mr. Jennissen: I realize, Mr. Speaker, that I'm greeted with great belief over there.

When we look at the present program, I think it's a fine program. I'm not saying it doesn't have a few warts, but it's a fine program. We know it's income-based, that it pays a hundred percent of eligible drug costs once the deductible is reached and does not discriminate based on age or medical condition.

As well, I would point out that the 2008 budget invests an additional \$3.7 million in the Pharmacare program, bringing it to \$280 million, which is more than triple what it was in 1999. So we have to look at that fact, that 352 percent increase and 1999 Tories, \$62 million. Today \$280 million. Surely that's a huge increase when the member makes it sound like we're

niggling and we're being nasty to senior citizens. Being a little on the older side myself, I'm certainly willing to take that argument seriously, but I don't think it's quite true.

The substantial funding increases since 1999 have enabled us to add 2,000 new drugs to Pharmacare and that's the other wrinkle in this, that more and more and better and better drugs come on stream and they tend to be very costly. That's why it would be so nice to have the federal government onside, keeping the patent protection a little shorter rather than lengthening it as some of the Liberals did and making sure that more generic drugs come on stream to keep the cost down that way. I think that would be a very positive direction to be going.

We know that the number of families benefiting from the program has increased by 24,000 families since 1999. That's certainly nothing to sneeze at, Mr. Speaker. That's a huge amount. As the honourable minister has pointed out, Pharmacare deductibles will increase between \$2 and \$6 per month for most Pharmacare families with this year's deductible increase. That's not the direction we like to go, but this is the inevitable reality in a system where drug costs keep going up and spiralling, sometimes almost out of control. On average, for every dollar increase in Pharmacare benefit, beneficiaries have paid only an additional 28 cents.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to conclude by saying that, although I'm sympathetic to the argument that Pharmacare deductibles are high and they are a challenge and particularly to seniors and we can't minimize that—we don't want to laugh about that or say that's not true—I think it would be equally at fault to say that we're not trying hard to combat that. Now, we're open to other suggestions. We're open to the opposition giving us reasonable ways of doing this or curbing this, but I think—

An Honourable Member: Open government.

Mr. Jennissen: The honourable member says, open government. Up to this point I think we've done a relatively good job. Of course it's easy to be on this side and praise the government of which you are part, but in all honesty, I think an unbiased observer sees more money in the system, will see that we've done a lot over our last nine years in office.

I know that there are ways of tweaking this and making this better, but I cannot support the honourable member, although her intention is definitely in the right direction. She has the welfare

of seniors at heart and so do I. I just beg to differ a little bit about the reality of the situation. I think we're doing well, and I think we're going to try to do even a little bit better in the future. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the Member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) for bringing forward a resolution that I think needs to be taken very seriously by this government. Pharmaceutical deductibles have increased by 34 percent since 2002 and that's a fact, and I think that the government should be listening to the community at large who are very concerned about this.

It is definitely affecting not only seniors, but people on fixed incomes. When your income rises over \$15,000, your Pharmacare deductibles double, Mr. Speaker, and that is not good policy. That is not in the best interests of Manitobans who are on fixed incomes who are looking for support and guidance from this government to ensure that their quality of life continues.

So, on that note, I welcome the members in the gallery today, Manitobans and seniors, for coming forward and sharing their concerns with us and looking for our support and looking for this government's support in what we believe is a direct attack on seniors as well as people on fixed incomes.

Manitobans rely on Pharmacare for the prescription drugs, and as this NDP government increases Pharmacare deductibles, many are put in precarious situations and forced to choose between food and medicine because of the escalating costs. Mr. Speaker, that is outright criminal and that needs to be addressed.

Pharmacare deductibles in 2002 went up 5 percent; 2003, 5 percent; 2004, 5 percent; 2005, 5 percent; 2006, 5 percent; nothing in 2007, an election year; 2008, 5 percent increase. In fact, this year the government was a little bit sneaky about its increase. They implemented this year's Pharmacare deductible before it was even announced to Manitobans, Mr. Speaker. On April 1, 2008, before the budget was even introduced, the deductibles were increased by 5 percent. So even before the general public had an opportunity to even hear this publicly, that increase took effect, and really, the budget wasn't passed until we finish Estimates. So really, it's almost a month, or it is more than a month before Manitobans will actually have the opportunity to be hearing the true fix of this Pharmacare increase.

You know, it's interesting to hear the Member for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen) speak about apples and oranges, and blaming the federal government. Well, Mr. Speaker, they get 40 percent of their income from the federal government. When the Conservatives were in power, we had a billion-dollar clawback. So to be putting his words and his thoughts on the record as he has, he's taking things totally out of context and out of proportion. He seems to be blaming everybody else on what has been the failure of this government.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Flin Flon has indicated that Pharmacare deductibles are too high. He's on record as saying that. He's also indicated that the Member for River East's (Mrs. Mitchelson) comments regarding putting the resources into front-line workers and into Pharmacare programs, like this program, and reducing the bureaucracy is what he hears. So he's put that on the record as well. So he's hearing this, but he rises in the House and says he can't support the resolution, and I find that rather interesting.

The former Minister of Health, himself, in 1996, indicated that Pharmacare deductible increases—and these are his words—are a tax grab on Manitobans and a tax on all Manitobans and a tax most importantly on the sick. So that is in *Hansard* in 1996, Mr. Speaker. So the former Minister of Health, the Member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) has put on the record that he also agrees that these Pharmacare deductible increases are an attack on the sick and the elderly and people on low income.

So the provincial government has received unprecedented transfers for Health, transfer payments for Health, from Ottawa and yet they continue to spend every single cent and continue to offload their irresponsible spending habits on the backs of Manitoba's most vulnerable, the seniors and the low-income earners.

* (11:50)

An example of how they spend it all without consideration is the HPV vaccination. They received dollars to implement that program over a year ago. Ten million dollars and they sat on that money, or spent it elsewhere, but they did not implement the program until one year after they received the funding. So that money was sitting there for almost a whole year without this government taking action on it. So if this happened in this program, what else is happening within the Department of Health? Where is the management and the accountability to the

dollars that they have that should be going and being spent on the welfare and the best interests of Manitobans?

Mr. Speaker, members opposite might be interested to know that the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* found that Manitoba's plan, the pharmaceutical plan, doesn't measure up to the plans across the province. Looking at the graphs that were presented in their report, Manitoba's line just skyrockets to the top in two of the graphs that are there. It raises alarms, not only for myself as a legislator, but for the people that I represent within the community, in my constituency, as well as Manitobans across the board. That sends a red flag that this issue is not being addressed. This is becoming an issue that is not being managed properly and we have seniors that are telling us, specifically, that they're very concerned that they are having to pay substantially more money every year for their drugs, and it is taking a toll on their well-being and it's taking on toll on their health.

In the Canadian Medical Association study, they indicated that a 65-year-old woman, on an annual income, who has an annual drug cost of \$454, excluding professional—sorry, a Manitoba senior, who pays for the same type of drugs as somebody in Ontario, the Ontario senior is paying \$8 for those drugs and the senior for Manitoba is paying \$503. So if that's not something that should be a red flag to this government, I don't know what is.

Mr. Speaker, the journal also indicates that New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island stand out as offering the most comprehensive public prescription plan for seniors. So there are models that are working that are superior to what Manitoba has. I would encourage the minister and this government to look at other jurisdictions to see where things are being handled and managed more effectively.

A red flag that was provided by the Manitoba's Auditor General. In 2006, the Manitoba Auditor General, John Singleton, indicated that the provincial government has not sufficiently explored all avenues available to improve the efficiency and the effectiveness of Pharmacare and to contain the cost growth of the program. This government has actually ignored those recommendations.

The Auditor General also found that there was inadequate processing for assessing the drugs on the Manitoba's drug formula for cost effectiveness and therapeutic benefits. So when the minister talks about new drugs coming on the market, and that type

of thing, and this huge challenge, it obviously is showing that there are ways that they can improve it, and the Auditor General has shared that support at looking at that.

So, Mr. Speaker, in closing, I just would like to say that I want to thank the seniors and the Manitobans who have come to the gallery today to listen to this debate. I want to thank the Member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) for bringing this resolution forward, and I look to this government to address this situation and to pay attention to the needs of seniors and low-income Manitobans, because this is an issue that is spiralling out of control and this government needs to address what is significant to these people. Thank you.

Ms. Jennifer Howard (Fort Rouge): Mr. Speaker, I want to just take an opportunity to speak about what is a very, very important issue, the Pharmacare plan in this province and the rising cost of pharmaceuticals.

I just want to start by saying that I don't think anybody takes the decision to increase pharmaceutical deductibles lightly. It's a very difficult decision. I know that the member who has brought forward this resolution will know how difficult that decision is, because she was at the Cabinet table in 1996 when that government made a decision to radically change the Pharmacare plan. Previous to that time, there was a flat deductible for Pharmacare. It was a universal program. Everybody had a deductible of \$285, and they radically changed that plan. In their time in office, the deductible went from \$285 to \$750. Tripled. So, I know that those decisions are difficult.

I also know that, in 1996, which happened to be the year after an election year, \$20 million was cut from the Pharmacare program. I think, at that time, when there were questions about that, certainly, one of the answers from the government of the day was to blame the federal government, and I wouldn't say wrongly. There were huge cutbacks by the Liberal federal government at that time to the provinces.

It's interesting to me, every time that we talk about the fact that there is a role for the federal government in this country, there is a role for them to play, the accusation is that somehow that's blaming the federal government. Well, I know that all of us in the past few months have filled out our tax forms, as I did, and I would say that most of the tax money that I'm paying is going to the federal government. I don't

think it's wrong of me or any Manitoban to expect to see benefits from that tax money.

I do think it's vitally important, pharmaceutical costs have risen by double-digits year after year after year. There is no doubt that that's putting tremendous pressure on provinces like Manitoba who have very comprehensive Pharmacare plans. That's why this province, along with other provinces, has been a champion of a national pharmaceutical strategy.

It makes no sense in this country that, if you're living in one province, you will have access to different drugs than if you're living in another province. I would really advise the Member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat) to do some research on other provincial plans before she suggests that we go to the model that is present in the Maritimes. Perhaps that is their plan if they should ever be government again, because, I'll tell you, Mr. Speaker, the plans in the Maritimes are not that generous, and they discount hundreds and thousands of citizens from those plans.

There are many plans in this country that only offer benefits to seniors, only offer benefits if you have a certain kind of disease. I am proud that our plan, although it has many, many shortcomings, at least does not force us to make the choice that if you're a certain age you get coverage and if you're another age you don't. If you have one kind of disease you're sicker than if you have another kind of disease. I'm proud that our plan at least has that element, still, of universality.

I think the pressures that we have experienced on the Pharmacare plan also, you know, mean that we have been innovative, and we have tried to enrich coverage to new groups of drugs that were never before considered. One of those is palliative care drugs. I am proud in our province that we made a decision to cover palliative care drugs for people who choose to die at home. I think there is no more sensitive time for a family than when they're dealing with the end of somebody they love's life.

I'm very proud that we have made it easier, through our coverage of drugs, palliative care drugs, through our provision of palliative care resources to families and to patients, for people to make the choice, if they choose to die at home, to spend their last days at home, surrounded by the people that they love. But when you expand coverage to different forms of drugs it does create pressure on the Pharmacare system. There's no doubt about that.

We were talking earlier about the pressures on seniors, and I'm very familiar with the pressures on seniors, because I've many in my constituency who talk to them. I would encourage the members opposite who have come out strongly on this position to continue to advocate on behalf of seniors. I think they should advocate in their own caucus, to their leader, to ask him if he would reverse his position on increasing hydro rates for everyone. It's going to be very difficult for people on fixed incomes to meet increasing hydro rates. I think that that would be a good form of advocacy for members opposite to take on.

I also think that we are trying to make changes in the management of the Pharmacare program—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Minnedosa, on a point of order.

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was wondering if we can get leave in the House to have a recorded vote on this matter and ask for leave to vote on this resolution and have it passed unanimously within this House.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable member is asking leave to have the vote on this resolution, because normally what we allow is all members who wish to speak, we normally let them speak, but by leave the House—

Order. The honourable member is asking for leave, and leave can be requested by any member, but also remember that there's agreement to be no quorum calls or votes this morning. So, the honourable member has asked for leave. Is there leave?

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Some Honourable Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: No, it's been denied.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member to continue.

Ms. Howard: I also just wanted to talk a bit about some of the management practices that have been introduced into Pharmacare to try to ensure that there is money available to continue to add drugs to the formulary, drugs that have been requested, certainly—

* (12:00)

Mr. Speaker: Order. When this matter's again before the House, the honourable member will have three minutes remaining.

The hour being 12 noon, we will recess and reconvene at 1:30 p.m.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

FAMILY SERVICES AND HOUSING

* (10:00)

Madam Chairperson (Marilyn Brick): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply in Room 254 will now resume consideration of the Estimates for the Department of Family Services and Housing.

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

The floor is now open for questions.

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Minister of Family Services and Housing): I understand that there is some expectation of dealing with Housing starting this afternoon, if we're back in Supply today.

I just want to table for the committee, and I've got multiple copies, answers to questions from the fall. There were some other questions from the critic for Housing that followed on Estimates in the fall. So the compilation is here. I thought it would be useful to distribute that now. I don't think that it's necessary then to go through it orally. That's available for the members. So I'll table three copies.

In addition, there were a number of questions late yesterday that the department has been working hard to compile. I understand most of the questions there aren't available compilations or data bases for them so some of it took some crunching, but some others are available now.

I think what is yet to come is the location of new-funded spaces for last year that was requested by facility for centres and region for home centres. Staff is working on that now I'm assured.

The other, the number of spaces closed in the last five years was another question. That is another number that we're going to have to crunch. In terms of other questions, I have some information provided by the department.

First of all, with regard to River East Transcona School Division and that issue, the materials I have appear to indicate that, indeed, the school division

made a decision not to request an exemption for school-age programs. In other words, they did not want to continue any responsibility for that, and so there were discussions apparently that ensued which led to, I think, some flexibility in terms of recognizing qualifications and being able to ensure that those spaces continued.

*(10:10)

Now, whether those are listed as newly funded spaces I think was the question. We'll determine that when we look to see where the newly funded spaces were for the last fiscal year. So I hope that we can get that very quickly. I just want to look at if there's any correspondence that may be helpful in that as well. I could share that with the member.

Some other questions just on that in terms of 500 spaces that were funded last year, 183 were newly created in '07-08, of the 500. That was one of the questions.

In terms of the new Family Choices plan, the department has crunched these numbers overnight and has confirmed that the total number of unfunded spaces at centres is 1,707. There was an estimate yesterday I think around 1,500. So there's a little bit more than that number.

There's some math here I can put on the record for the member. I have the total spaces as of March '08 of 27,189. Unfunded spaces, the total was 2,725. Subtract from that the family child-care nursery and 40 occasional for a total of 1,707 at centres.

So there's going to be some priority to try and fund those spaces over the five-year plan. So I think that my other remarks from yesterday stand with regard to the allocation of funding for 6,500 spaces, but that means then that there'll be close to 5,000 new spaces over the next five-year plan.

The budget allocation for Family Choices, there were questions from the member there, a breakdown, and we had the number of spaces; just to put on the record the funding of 1,500 spaces beginning October '08 is \$3,050,000. I think that was a number given yesterday. The enhanced funding for 100 nursery, focussing on September to start that, \$194,500. The wages and wage adjustment, that is to begin 3 percent overall July 1 and a December 1 target for low-wage adjustment of \$3.95 million.

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): Madam Chair, if it's okay, if I could just ask on that, is that for full-year funding, or is that in this year's budget?

Mr. Mackintosh: That's in year; that's this year's investment. In addition to that, then, there is \$2.5 million capital from Education. There is over \$100,000 from Advanced Education. In order to fund that, there is some re-allocation of dollars that was unallocated from the subsidy line. There was a fund, a pool there, and now, actually, interesting, there's about \$2 million, then, being re-allocated from the fund pool for subsidy.

The member's probably aware that there has been some historical overestimating, or shall we say the take-up historically has not been what budgets have tended to estimate, but last year there was a very significant adjustment to the subsidy level of 13 percent so that people with—well, we hadn't changed that since about 1993 or something, '91. So there's a 13 percent adjustment to the subsidy level, and as well we changed the non-subsidized daily fee from \$2.40 to \$2, and so the anticipated take-up did not come through. In fact, there was just a recent *Free Press* story on that when the actual—not only was there less of a take-up, we had about 700 additional families take it up, but the estimate was far in excess of that. As well, the number of families applying for subsidy is declining, and Catherine Mitchell reported on that in the *Free Press*, I don't know, a couple weeks ago.

There are a number of reasons for that. You know, there are income levels that are going up, the poverty rate's declining, but I think, as well, and my concern is that when you look at need in child care, Noralou Roos has done some work on this one, again reflected in that *Free Press* analysis, but we definitely need more child care not only in growing communities, generally suburban communities—I think of Thompson—but we need more accessible, available child care in lower-income neighbourhoods.

All of that has worked together to allow for some reallocation there. Of course, that wasn't a controlled expense, so we were able to tap that reserve fund or to encumber some of that.

The qualifications of workers was another issue. Oh, I should also add, though, that there are three staff resources that will be added from the Community Service division, a different division within the department, for the child-care charter. The curriculum development and planning capacity, we're going to get started on that. Competition will commence very shortly for hiring in the next few months.

In terms of qualifications of workers, apparently, if you have credentials in areas other than early childhood education—that would be like education, for example—you can have your credentials assessed through two mechanisms that are used in the sector, the child-care sector. They're competency-based assessments. One's a competency-based assessment; the other is the prior-learning assessment. Both provide individuals with information about the degree to which their previous education can be applied to the qualifications for early childhood.

In this way, many people who have credentials in other areas can easily identify the gaps they have in order to meet the standards that we have for early learning. That's one way that we can support an increase to the future of the workforce in early-childhood education. My understanding that this is a long-standing practice and recognition.

I'm certainly prepared, as the member suggested yesterday, to look further to see if there are gaps based on her experience. In River East I want to know if there's something more that can be done. I'm very keen to see that. I'm very keen to see about the future of before and after programs being able to tap into the EA work force, as another example, but I'll have to defer, of course, to the professional assessment of qualifications. I think we owe it to the future of spaces in schools to look further at that, so I thank the member for that contribution.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I wonder if the minister might undertake, by the end of the day, to have the information that's outstanding available. Is there any difficulty with that? I would sense that if government is funding with tax dollars facilities, that information certainly should be available because it would have had to be part of the analysis to get funding for this year's budget.

*(10:20)

Mr. Mackintosh: I just want to nail down exactly what the request is and what's necessary now because that would perhaps focus, but I know the member had asked for the location of newly funded spaces last year and the record will exist. I'm confident of that. I think that that should be all right. Perhaps, the member could just indicate what other priority there would be.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I'd like an undertaking for sort of the information for the last five years, but not—I don't need all of that today. I mean, I know that that's a little more difficult.

But I would like to go back to last year, if I could, and look at where the new spaces were created and then the newly funded spaces because some of those spaces existed previously, but were just funded in this last year's budget. So, if I could have that information.

If I could have a listing of all the child-care facilities and the number of spaces that they might have in them, the centre ones. I understand that, you know, homes are a little more difficult to compile, but if I could get some of that information on a regional basis where some of the homes are and, again, that isn't critical for today or anything, but if, you know, if I could get that, just to get a sense of what regions of the province or the city are served by child-care homes, that would be beneficial.

So I would just like to go back for this year. I have just one quick question and I hope it'll be—I have other things that I need to do this morning, so if I could just get a quick answer. I know that there'll be three new staff years for the child-care charter. Will child-care facilities or homes incur any additional expense in implementing the charter?

Mr. Mackintosh: Yes, just to be clear, the three positions that will be added this year—the call's going out soon—one of them is for the child-care charter, one of them for planning capacity, and one of them for curriculum development. Then we'll gauge, you know, what, within the—with the FTs that we have, who has to help whom, and what adjustments have to be made because we want to be very responsive on all three of those issues. The charter, though, we would like to see the plans all back, safety plans, and the codes of conduct within 18 months. We had set that out right at the outset when we introduced the bill. So we are trying to work around any demands there. I think there is capacity, I'm assured, within the existing complement as well then, to enhance help as needed.

In terms of any costs, any exceptional costs will be recognized and funded on a priority basis by the department. If there are any other kinds of capital costs, then that can be factored into, you know, any other grants that we can make.

So, the objective is to provide all the assistance we can. Part of that, because we've learned, I think, from the Safe Schools Charter implementation, is to develop very early on some model safety plans and model codes of conduct that, I think, will simplify things quite a lot. But there'll also be a requirement for protocols to be developed, for example, checking

indoor and outdoor spaces for safety, you know, checklists. Anaphylaxis is an increasing concern and we have to develop the regulations around that. So some of this is regulatory work at all that won't put a great onus on the centres themselves.

Mrs. Mitchelson: One quick question. What consultation was done with the child-care community prior to implementation of the—or bringing forward the legislation?

Mr. Mackintosh: I'm advised that there was work initially done with education, just picking their brain in terms of advice on how the charter should be worded, the legislated charter, and as well the process that should follow, based on their experience; we got good advice there.

There were discussions as well with the Regulatory Review Committee which is comprised of a cross section of stakeholders. As well, I know the MCCA—in fact, I had very early discussions, even myself with them on the intentions here—but the MCCA had done some work on this one a few years ago. I think we're certainly cognizant of this area of interest. I understand there were, as well, some consultations with—I think that comprised the bulk of the discussions.

As well, we—and I was there myself—and the ADM and the director of Child Care were at a meeting with the anaphylaxis group that is trying to advance legislated scheme, a requirement for anaphylaxis protocols. I think we're well-positioned on that, I should say. We'll see the real guts, though, of—well, first of all, they did want a legislated requirement and that is what is in the charter. Then that will be backed up by regulatory steam that will reflect best practices. I think Manitoba is well positioned on that one, a very interesting area of public policy and child safety.

So you can see, the safety charter goes—we're going to talk about the safety charter more, but I just want to assure the member I think the main focus of child-care safety in the past has been on fire safety. There's been sort of the traditional notion that there has to be fire regulations and inspections and so on. So this really is going far beyond that. First of all, we should recognize child-care centres are safe but we have to continue to be vigilant and enhance our approach to this.

The charter really turns the collective mind then to safety in the broadest sense, whether it's food safety and whether it's other kinds of public-safety

issues that also include bullying and Internet use, recognizing that the ages in child-care centres are everything from zero to 12.

Mr. Stuart Briese (Ste. Rose): Last fall, Elsie Flett wrote to the Southeast Child and Family Services instructing them to disentangle themselves from their involvement with the Southeast Resource Development Council. I'd like to know what's happening there, what stage that is at, and I have several other questions.

* (10:30)

Mr. Mackintosh: Under the current, relatively new accountability structure, Southeast Child and Family is now accountable, of course, to the southern authority. The southern authority launched an operational review of southeast in the last fiscal year—later in the last fiscal year—as part of what I see as a strong new round of accountability measures that I see the authority is very keen to exercise, and I'm very thankful to see this vigilance.

But, as they launched this review, they had a concern of the relationship, I understand, between the child welfare agency and the tribal council's organization, and so before the review is completed, which I understand is expected in the next month or two—something like that—they decided that they would take some interim action, and one of the courses of action, as the member described, there was a directive, I understand, that was issued to separate—like, financial banking arrangements, as one measure.

Mr. Briese: I'd like to know what administrative fees this agency is actually paying to the council and how much they were paying, and I'd like to also know if they've been paid back since this was ordered.

Mr. Mackintosh: Yeah, I also look forward to that information from the review. It's my understanding that this arrangement goes back for many, many years, and of course, goes back over years when the only funding that flowed to southeast was federal funding. Before devolution, southeast only had jurisdiction on-reserve. So in the last couple of years the Province now is part of the funding arrangement. So, I'm pleased to see that there is this kind of review when, you know, there's provincial dollars now, but it has been obviously an area where there has been some traditions or practices that have been long-standing, that the southern authority questioned. So, I'm very keen to see the outcome of this.

Mr. Briese: Has the agency tendered its 2007-08 audit without any problems then?

Mr. Mackintosh: We don't have the '07-08 yet, but I suspect that, actually, the review will be more detailed and perhaps more useful.

I might add, though, that the authority also appointed an administrator to assume direction of the agency, an experienced administrator, and so they took all precautions while the investigations are ongoing. But part of that analysis will, I understand, is a financial analysis and a key part of their review. So I share with the member an interest in seeing an early conclusion to this to determine if there is any other action necessary on a go-forward basis.

Mr. Briese: I believe the audit of the agency is ongoing. It's probably not completed yet. When do you expect completion and will that be made public when it is completed?

Mr. Mackintosh: I've been advised by the branch that the intention of the authority is to try and get this completed—the section 4 review it's called in the operational review for I guess a more descriptive term. They're focussing on trying to get this done by June, or in June.

It's also my understanding from the branch that the intention of the authority is to make available to the public whatever it can. Obviously, any case-specific information could not be made public, but any other information, I understand, there's an intention to make that public. So I look forward to that.

Mr. Briese: Once again, I request—thank you, Madam Chair—a request I made last year and I'll make it again. Will we be able to see the financial statements and audits of the authorities and the agencies at some point? I presume a lot of them aren't done yet, but for the past fiscal year.

Mr. Mackintosh: I know we sent over to the member the last ones, but we'll look to see if there are others because those are public documents, to my understanding, and it's important the member have those.

I remember there was some flurry of activity compiling I think for all the agencies, but, anyway, we'll certainly undertake then to, again, on a timely basis, provide the member with the reports that have been approved by the respective organizations. I think the member was asking for the authorities and the agencies. Perhaps he could just clarify.

[interjection] Yes, he just clarified that, so we'll undertake to determine what's available now and when the others are expected.

I'm just advised that the expected receipt of those is following their annual meetings, so we'll make best efforts to get that information to the member.

Mr. Briese: Thank you, Minister. I'll look forward to receiving those.

The Sagkeeng CFS agency is the agency that was responsible both for Fonessa Bruyere and Gage Guimond. It's, I know, under review as a result of the review into Gage Guimond's death. What is the status of that review?

*(10:40)

Mr. Mackintosh: The authority made the decision to conduct a full operational review, a section 4 review, into the circumstances surrounding the death of Gage, and that would include an investigation into allegations about everything from hiring practices to governance, the personnel issues.

This kind of a review was recommended by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner in the section 10 review, so this is an extension and a drilling down, even further, to determine if there are any systemic or specific shortcomings that must be addressed. The review, although conducted by the authority, the Child Protection branch is also involved in that review in a consultative role.

But, as well, the southern authority has contracted with an independent external reviewer. In fact, he was the reviewer that was a big part of one of the external reviews, Mr. Andy Coster, and that independent reviewer is looking at the case-specific components of the investigation. My understanding is that they're also looking at the agency's resource department. They're also doing a file review of cases, but governance, I understand, is another focus there.

The latest information I have, which is dated April 16, has: the authority is advised that the review is expected to be completed by June 2008. I take it from the information I have that, along with the conclusion of the review, will be an action plan that will accompany it to address recommendations.

In terms of the public nature of the review, it would be my understanding, and I assume the intention of the authority, to make public any recommendations that, again, would not be case-specific, or any recommendations that would bear on

specific family circumstances. But, given the nature of the review, that means there may be, indeed, some wide-ranging information available to the public, given that the authority is going way beyond case-specific examinations and looking at whether there are systemic shortcomings.

Mr. Briese: With the new duties assigned to the Child Advocate, is the Child Advocate reviewing this, too?

Mr. Mackintosh: No, the Child Advocate is not, because the Children's Advocate office hadn't been contacted. At one point, with regard to this case, and to guard against, then, any perception of bias—maybe that's as good a phrase I could use—the authority then contracted with Mr. Coster in order to have those independent eyes with the investigation. Mr. Coster is, I understand, doing the case-specific examinations, which is what would be the role contemplated for the Children's Advocate. So that was the way to substitute for that outside aspect to the section 4 review.

Mr. Briese: I've asked, on a couple of occasions, in the House in question period, for an inquest into Gage Guimond's death. Is there a possibility that the minister is going to order an inquest into that death at some point in the future?

Mr. Mackintosh: As well as I have said in the House, in Manitoba the practice has been to maintain the decision as to whether or not to call an inquest as a professional judgment exercise by the Chief Medical Examiner. I've been in the House long enough to have heard calls over and over again, sometimes from differing parties, well-intentioned calls to seek assurances that answers will be provided to important public questions.

But it has always been maintained, I understand, that the Chief Medical Examiner's exercise of professional judgment, looking at whether there are outstanding questions, is important to be maintained, particularly in light of the development in Manitoba of a very strong review process that involved the creation, quite some time ago, of the Child Inquest Review Committee, which is comprised of many professionals who deal with the tragedy of child deaths and provide advice to the Chief Medical Examiner.

We have seen, by the way, I think, a strong pattern of inquests being called into child deaths in Manitoba that have been very useful, most recently, of course, into the tragic death of Tracia Owen. I can

go back in time, and I understand that there are more under consideration obviously.

That has been the approach, but the legislation does set out that the minister could exercise some powers there. That is not this minister, that power rests with the Attorney General (Mr. Chomiak) as the minister responsible for The Fatality Inquiries Act. There's good reason for that and that is because of the need to protect criminal proceedings. The Chief Medical Examiner, as a practice, first of all, defers the calling of inquests until after the conclusion of criminal proceedings. I would think that would be the protection as well. Even if there was a political or ministerial direction, that would be a decision only made after criminal proceedings.

There are two good reasons for that. The most important, of course, is to maintain the integrity of the criminal proceedings and not to be eliciting evidence that would compromise the criminal proceedings, not to give any argument to defence counsel for mistrial or even to move the trial, not to in any way taint what may be the ability of a jury to fairly consider an issue if it's a jury trial. So for all those reasons that decision has relentlessly been exercised after criminal proceedings.

The second reason is that information in criminal proceedings can often answer a lot of questions. Indeed, trials can bring out extensive information for the public and provide answers. What I as minister am keen to see is that the important questions that the public has are answered and we'll make best efforts to ensure that.

The short part of the answer is that whether an inquest will be called or not by the CME is an outstanding question and one that I know will be considered carefully. In the meantime, we have these ongoing outside independent reviews taking place. Beginning as early as, I guess, next month we should be hearing more and get some answers publicly by way of the section 4 review. Then we'll see what comes in terms of criminal proceedings.

I appreciate the question, but there has been this practice in Manitoba. But an open question, one that I certainly will be vigilant on.

* (10:50)

Mr. Briese: I think that I picked up that it's still in section 4 and you're expecting results fairly shortly then, in June.

Have there been any policy changes as yet because of the review under section 4? On kind of an ongoing basis, I guess what I'm asking is and it may not be because of section 4, but have there been some changes made to, because of what's happened, even though this is in review right now, that would strengthen the system and prevent this from happening again in the interim?

Mr. Mackintosh: Our loss of Gage Guimond came at a time when the child welfare system in Manitoba was in the earlier stages of an overhaul and, of course, that was in the context of the outside review, some 280 recommendations to strengthen child welfare in Manitoba because of historical long-standing shortcomings that have been clearly identified in need of attention.

So, when we look at the changes that are now under way, we see everything from, of course, the workload relief that we spoke about yesterday. We see the enhancements to the foster bed capacity in the province, now 900 more foster bed placements available, I understand, from the great work of the authorities; as well, everything from enhancing the supports for foster children through the rate system.

We're seeing the strengthening of the Children's Advocate and all of those—well, whether it's the information management system, whether it's the overall budget increases to support child welfare. So those changes are happening. As well, though, in terms of accountability the authorities are now in a better position than ever to pursue the necessary accountability measures that can help ensure stronger agencies. Quality assurance reviews are starting and joint reviews with agencies, the development of stronger standards—I understand that the stronger new foundational standards are just about to be launched here, which has been a major task that began in 2004 and just really comprises intensive work over the last nine months especially.

When you look at the legislation before the House as well, the development of a strong every-child-seen-every-time rule, the work to send a clear message publicly in light of debates, whether it's in the Legislature or in the media, as to whether safety is still job one, that is all part of our strengthening of the child welfare system. I think all of those may well bear on—at any time, you know, there are child deaths where there may be shortcomings identified either specific to professional judgment or systemic shortcomings.

So I think those are some examples of the changes that are under way. I mean never in a time in history in this province has there been so much positive change under way in child welfare, first starting with devolution itself, which all of the outside reviews that we have seen so far that have commented on devolution have said that it's an important part of the solution to the long-standing challenges, and then followed by Changes for Children.

So I think that would be how I would answer that question.

Mr. Doug Martindale, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Briese: Have there been some staffing changes precipitated by the death of Gage Guimond?

Mr. Mackintosh: The agency board with the support and with the work of the authority have relieved two staff on a leave of absence of their duties, the executive director and the resource co-ordinator, pending the outcome of the review. So based on the results of the review, further action may be required. So that is the interim action that has been taken.

Mr. Briese: In March, it was reported that the department was developing a child welfare secretariat. Could you expand a little bit on the intent of that initiative, first of all.

Mr. Mackintosh: This structure was recommended by the external reviews to ensure that the child welfare system in Manitoba was interconnected and that the important policy and developmental work was done collegially, co-operatively, and with some symmetry across the province. I know I was party to some of the discussions about how that would look. The organization is called the standing committee office. I think it's called a secretariat in their reviews, just so the member knows what they have decided to call it.

* (11:00)

At one point under Changes for Children \$1.5 million was allocated for this office. Now I understand there's about 12 staff that are currently assigned there, and I think some of them have been temporarily assigned while permanent appointments are being made. I think each authority has two appointments, and the branch is also a part of this office. It's not only the four authorities. So it's

comprised of representatives from five different stakeholders.

The work will be policy analysis and some of the examples of the functions will be foundational standards, the information management system. The joint training unit has a strong connection and training initiatives will as well be developed through this office.

I have some breakdown here in terms of the staffing there if the member wants that. I can provide that now or later if he wishes. It's located at 150 Henry, and it is housed under the authority of the Métis authority for administrative purposes, similar to ANCR being hosted by the southern authority.

These are all issues that had to be worked out collegially and I'm pleased to see that it was established several months ago.

As part of the development of the office, the Ombudsman was actively involved in consultation to ensure that what was being concluded reflected the Ombudsman's and the external review's vision, if you will, that was set out in the recommendations that are relevant to this.

Mr. Briese: You mentioned \$1.5 million. Is that new funding? Is that ongoing over how many years? What's the aspect of funding here?

Mr. Mackintosh: The 1.5 is new money under Changes for Children, and that is the annualized amount, but it will increase because of staffing, some adjustments, annual adjustments. So we can expect to see that grow somewhat in the years ahead, but that is a permanent allocation.

Mr. Briese: You mentioned a training component, Mr. Minister, through this office. What precise training are you talking about?

Mr. Mackintosh: There has been a substantive focus on developing training for front-line staff in particular. Under Changes for Children, we've seen over 1,700 take place. It's called the JTU, the joint training unit, co-ordinated training. That will sometimes include foster parents and group care workers. There's been training specific to critical incident and stress management, suicide programming through an initiative called ASIST. That's what the acronym is.

Ms. Sharon Blady, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Child abuse investigation and interviewing, the system whereby families choose the authority that

will manage their case, non-violent crisis intervention. Then there is the general orientation to the CFS system for newcomers, the child abuse committees, policy and procedure writing on FASD, autism care, strategic planning.

Some 869 participated, and some maybe more than once, but those are the total participants in competency based training. There's a number of series that are offered. Sexual exploitation, by the way, is another topic there. So those are some of the participation rates. But I'm pleased to see that development of strong training initiatives in a number of issues that are critical. This, again, reflects the focus of the outside reviews into what's necessary for enhanced training. I'm advised that the investment in enhanced training is \$1.5 million on an annualized basis.

Mr. Briese: Madam Acting Chair, I'm little bit confused on that. I heard the figure \$1.5 million for the whole announcement, and now he said 1.5 for the training component?

Mr. Mackintosh: It's just coincidental that the numbers are the same. The amount for the standing committee office is \$1.5 million which will largely go to salaries. There may be some other operating costs there. The training is specific to training, the cost of providing training.

Mr. Briese: How was that co-ordinated before, then? This appears to be somewhat of a new initiative, but the training must have been going on before.

Mr. Mackintosh: Historically, or at least before Changes for Children, I'm advised that there was just one branch person assigned to training and it was really focussed on what's called competency-based training, you know, core curriculum. So, not surprisingly, the external reviews found that to be insufficient, both in terms of the staff assigned to it and the scope of topics that had to be addressed. So now I understand each authority and the branch have now a combined total of five, as co-ordinators, to oversee the development of the training which, by the way, can be delivered, though, by specific agencies. But it's all being co-ordinated through the joint training unit now to ensure that the Province is covered. So, quite a new era in training, I'm advised.

Madam Chairperson in the Chair

Well, I just, I think it's important as well to recognize that there's a whole new era for the role of the Foster Family Network in Manitoba which is, of course, you know, an independent non-profit

organization that is there to support foster parents. When I came into the position and got to know them, it struck me immediately that they really were being underutilized. They have the ability to have great peer support. I mean, these are people that are foster parents. They know. So, as a result, we've been working with them and they have, I think, made some tremendous advances in working with the authorities and agencies to, as well, deliver training. A lot of that, of course, is focussed on foster parents, but not always.

They've also been recruited to participate in the development of the training manuals and they've been out there as well, doing training, I understand, on the suicide program, called ASIST. So, I think this is really an important part of the answer. I didn't want to just suggest that it is only within the branch authorities and agencies where the new training regime is taking place.

* (11:10)

Mr. Briese: To the minister, I have had the opportunity to meet with that group, too, and I was quite impressed. Another aspect I think they've indicated they were involved in was some work on fetal alcohol syndrome, too, I believe.

But back to the child welfare secretariat, I presume part of the mandate here then is to have a consistency of policy. I think you referred to that earlier in the discussion, and I presume that is a consistency of policy through the authorities and through the agencies that are out there.

Mr. Mackintosh: I recall reading the recommendations from the Ombudsman and the Children's Advocate on the child welfare secretariat, which is what they called it, and the rationale for it. I can just quote back the basis of it but clearly, when you have devolution of child welfare not only with a goal of having more culturally appropriate services off reserve—I think it's important to remind us of this, that sometimes people think devolution was the start of Aboriginal people delivering child welfare. That, in fact, goes back decades here and elsewhere across North America and beyond.

Child welfare has been delivered on-reserve by Aboriginal agencies for many, many years. In fact, most of the agencies in Manitoba, I think, go back to the '80s. What devolution meant was two things; it meant the ability for families to sign on with Aboriginal child welfare agencies, often those same agencies, but for off-reserve services where, I think,

the majority of Aboriginal people in Manitoba actually live off reserve now. So that was the one change; the other change was to have four authorities being the body to which certain of those agencies are accountable. That provides as well, though, I think, a stronger regionalization. For example, whereas the branch was responsible for about 21 agencies just a few years ago, you look at the southern authority, which is now responsible for about 10, that's the largest; the Métis has just the one; general has about four, five; and six for the north. So I think that provides some opportunity for greater vigilance and oversight.

Having said that, along with that devolution, I think a risk rose then that there could develop differing standards across the province because of the different accountability reporting mechanisms. So that's why I think a lot of emphasis was put in the external reviews on the need for what they call this child welfare secretariat.

Now we have the standing committee office, and it is in place to make sure, then, that the basic foundational standards are symmetrical across the province. You look at intake, for example. It's really important that, when there are calls made, there are standard processes in place to triage, to respond to calls, concerns, or complaints, that a child may be in need of protection. Consensus is always the objective in trying to move ahead with new structures and change in this system.

What the Ombudsman said was the creation of the standing committee is necessary to consider the needs of child welfare in the province as a whole, so I think that reflects what I was saying. They said, though, that the research design, training and development of programs, policies and standards have to be in accordance with the direction of the standing committee, which is the organization comprised of the four authorities and the branch.

I'll just let the member know the discussion starts around page 27 of the *Strengthen the Commitment* report, so I don't have to put that into the record. It's there for the member, but it does go on to provide a list of some of the issues that have to be done through the standing committee office, a case-management model, a quality assurance framework, differential response. I mean, to tie in to the discussion the other day, the development of differential response is being done through this organizational effort, training, consistent protocols,

communications, CFSIS-intake module, ANCR issues.

They're doing consultations. For example, I mean, one of the earliest jobs that they had to do was the early development of strengthening the child in child welfare information management system, the CFSIS model, developing that RFP, and, you know, they're working on all the new standards.

So I think that's an overview. Maybe if the member has some specific questions, we can drill down further.

Mr. Briese: So there's not a specific—and I don't know what the right word would be—standards manual in place yet. They're working on a standards manual, or is there—oh, there is a specific standards manual by the looks of it. Is that available to us? Would the minister share that with us?

*(11:20)

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, there've been standards for many years—many, many years—but what is happening now, though, is the development—well, first of all, standards do get updated on a regular basis. The standards that are in place today are available on-line and we can just let the member know where he can find that. I understand that those aren't confidential in any way.

I think it went on-line around 2004, but what's happening now is the development of updates and stronger standards in many new areas. Actually, there are four volumes on-line. In one volume, alone, there are some eight chapters. What's under way now is a lot of new sections that are finding a consensus. I understand that the standing committee is on the cusp of approving the final versions any day now. I could make those available to the member.

Mr. Briese: Thank you for that response, Mr. Minister. I think that's one of the things that I've gleaned in my short time as the critic in this department. I know these things are ongoing, but there has to be a standardization of what's expected of all the workers in this field, especially the case workers that are out there; actually, the front-line troops. I believe there has to be an absolute, and I think you're referring to it here, a consistency between the authorities and between the agencies on the standards of service that are provided out there.

I hope, from what I'm hearing from you, that that is the mandate of this secretariat: to give us that level of consistency in all areas of the province.

Mr. Mackintosh: That's the thrust of this, but I should note that the standing committee office does the leg work on this one, but the branch still has responsibility for final approval on the foundational standards.

I was just advised during the course of the questioning that what has developed more recently, though, is getting input and advice from the front line. Historically, I think, it was a top-down approach, I understand. So that can only strengthen the standards.

I just think of the Ontario model that they brought in for risk assessment, and they brought this model in from New York, and it all sounded great. Then they went and they talked to the front-line workers and some folks from the university, and the front-line workers were saying, we can't make heads nor tails of the assessment tool. It's all very nice to make this checklist, but it's actually just a lot of paperwork and we don't think it makes children safer whatsoever.

I think that was a good example, sort of a stunning revelation for the Ontario government, that what they thought was state-of-the-art actually didn't even work on the front line. So I'm pleased that there is this kind of dialogue happening within the system now. As well, the training on the standards—you can't have standards without the training, so the two go hand in hand. That was reflected in the reviews; it is now being reflected in the Changes for Children agenda.

Mr. Briese: I do agree with the minister, on that point. I think it's critical that you listen to the front-line workers, and I don't think, over the years, maybe, we've done enough of that. They are actually out there dealing with every situation, and if we're not listening to them, we're probably not developing very good policy.

I think that pretty well completes my questions on the secretariat. If I may, at this time, I'll turn it over to my colleague.

Mr. David Faurschou (Portage la Prairie): I do appreciate my honourable colleague for Ste. Rose affording me the chance to ask a few questions regarding Family Services as they pertain to Portage la Prairie constituency. The minister, I know, is

waiting with bated breath upon my questions to be posed.

Could I perhaps ask the minister about the progress regarding the former minister's announcement of a significant reinvestment in the Manitoba Development Centre in Portage la Prairie, and the progress that has been made over the past year, and anticipated redevelopment work for the forthcoming year as pertaining to the current budget?

Mr. Mackintosh: First of all, I thank the member for his advice in our ongoing discussions on MDC and its future.

My understanding from the department is the construction and upgrades are ongoing. There is a real focus, of course, I think that was enunciated at the time of the announcement, of life safety and fire deficiencies. So we completed studies in the summer of '05, but anyway, the member may well be aware of these components, but the Cedar Cottage redevelopment was done in December of '06 and then the life-safety upgrades were made to South Grove and East Grove cottages. That was done last fall. Then the geotechnical survey was done. That was completed in March of '07. There's some functional space and other redevelopment options were looked at. It was done last spring, and then some topographical work done. Most recently, though, the Elm Cottage has been redeveloped and I think they're hoping for that to be completed very quickly, very soon.

The West Grove building now will be a focus, focussing on life and safety issues, smoke containment and, you know, evacuation issues. There's still, I guess, some engineering work to look at mitigation, work to complete renovations, and so that's the current status of the physical work being done there.

Meanwhile, I'm anticipating some other recommendations in terms of what will be necessary and what the investment should be in the coming years as well, because of what I've just discussed are the more immediate work efforts.

You know, we'll have to take into consideration, as the member and I have discussed, what will be the long-term uses for this, recognizing the great quality work force we have there. So what I'm very interested in receiving from the department, and I know they're working with the Infrastructure people, is making investments that are going to be useful in

the longer term and not just to address immediate safety issues.

So I think they're working on some options for consideration that I would like to talk to the member about when it gets closer to being conceptualized, because the age of the residents, as the member knows, is increasing. The admissions are down to at most a trickle. There are those that are on a list to move out and we're doing our level best to accommodate those who want to move out.

* (11:30)

I've got some numbers here somewhere on terms of discharges, if the member would like to hear that. But we have here, I am advised by the department, as of March 31, '08, a total of 25 residents have moved into the community from MDC as a result of the accelerated discharge policy, and that was two in '05-06, 11 in '06-07, 12 in '07-08. There was a transition team the member may be aware of to help to do this. We've discovered this to be a very challenging process in terms of getting the appropriate services in place in the community. It's been discovered that we have a focus on trying to get more than that. We have a target that we're trying to reach over the last year but the complex needs of the individuals have really caused a challenge for our staff, especially in light of significantly increased construction costs and agency capacity.

So I think the member is saying, well, I told you so; he's looking at me—I think I can tell by the look on his face. We are dedicated to transitioning those who do want to move into the community as best as those needs can be determined. We're not going to let up on those efforts but, having said that, let's get back to—I know what the member's next question is and that is, what can we do to ensure a helping facility in the longer term?

The member has provided some options to me that I have passed onto the department. We're going to drill down and see what we can do in terms of even looking—I've been here 15 years now, so I can say 10 years is not a long time. I don't know where the time has gone; the member knows what that feels like. I think we've got to look longer-term. We've got to look 10, 20 years out for every reason and to see if this could be a centre of excellence for different populations, for example, what can be done. That's where the thinking is right now so, if the member has any advice further to that, I look forward to that discussion either now or one on one.

Mr. Faurschou: I couldn't agree more with the minister in regard to looking long term and the recognition of the quality of care that is provided at the MDC; the expertise and professionalism of the staff is unmatched anywhere in the province. To have the nucleus of professional expert care for persons suffering from brain dysfunction amassed in one location, I think, is definitely an asset for the province and I do appreciate the minister's receptiveness to discussion as well as making his staff available to me to discuss the long-term affairs of MDC.

One concern, though, that I think has yet to be addressed is that, when persons are discharged from the MDC for community living, the door seemingly continues just to bolt shut behind them. I believe, in the example that I used about a wheelchair repair where the individual, once discharged and residing in the community, had to make four trips to and from Winnipeg for the proper repair to be made to the specialized wheelchair, that could have taken place, had that individual had the opportunity to just travel a few blocks north from where they're residing, back to MDC to make use of the expertise and facilities that are available to residents, however not available to those persons in community living.

I hope that the minister can at least keep the door open a slight amount so that former residents could potentially still benefit from—and this is a very cost-effective, efficient way of helping out those that are living in community.

Mr. Mackintosh: It's been interesting to see, by the way, the lobbying efforts by some individuals in the Association for Community Living, in particular, of Manitoba, although I know their views have been different from the ACL in Portage, but very heartfelt strong representations being made to myself and others in the caucus about the need to just shut down MDC and transition everyone to the community.

We have maintained that we have to have a balanced approach. We've seen in other provinces where parents have taken on the government for dismantling any institutional options. We've seen some real concerns about the ability to support some individuals with very complex needs in the community.

What I have learned very quickly in this portfolio is that we have the community living, you know, the Supported Living budget line having increased over 200 percent. I suspect it is the biggest line increase perhaps anywhere in the whole

government. I could be wrong there; in some new areas obviously or maybe there's some area in Health or something, but the enhanced pressures are coming from a number of sources even with a 200 percent increase since '99 alone. I haven't looked back further but I suspect that there were increases that were significant before we came into office.

There are significant wage demands in the sector because the sector is just now being recognized for its professionalism. There are some unionization efforts that are, I think, starting. I'm getting regular lobbying on the wages.

Second, of course, is the interest in trying to get some significant or meaningful discharges for those who want from MDC, plus very significant and just heartbreaking cries from parents, usually parents who are getting older, to have their mentally disabled, intellectually disabled children move into community living and out of the family home, so they know that there's security for them in the future.

We've significantly enhanced the funding. I've got some numbers here. Maybe I should put them on the record when I have the opportunity but I don't want to take away from the member's time.

These pressures are all converging at once and yet those pressures aren't adequately being answered with over 200 percent increase. You look at the number of people served, it's gone up by about 1,500. There's a lot of numbers there. Anyway, the point I'm making is that there has been like a sea change in terms of supports for community living. Of course, you'd never know that from some of the public advocacy.

It led to this decision then. Mr. Wes Henderson is at the back of the room, but we made a decision that we really have to do some longer term strategic planning around what we're doing with community living. How can we support this financially? You know, if there's a recession that hits, that's going to have a real immediate impact on the hopes and aspirations of a lot of the parents and others who want to see continued opportunities to live in the community.

We're going to have a hard look at it. In fact, Mr. Henderson has been looking at the models in some other jurisdictions. I've had some discussions with my counterparts in other provinces. It's not unique to Manitoba although I think we certainly have a strong regime here. I've met as well with the parents of a lot of the children both individually and in group

sessions. I hear their pleas and I think, we have to do better in some way. They do want better road maps; they want to know how to access services better, so we're going to look at that.

* (11:40)

As well, what is the role for providing some incentives for savings, for example? I know the federal government has started looking at disability savings accounts. I'm interested to see, well, what can the Province do there? That might not be as much of help to very low-income families but it may provide opportunities otherwise. Maybe there could be some tax help. That's just an idea, a concept that we're going to develop.

As well, there may be other ways of funding community living, like, we've sort of got into the group home model here. Maybe we should be looking at flowing funding to individuals to purchase services. Some provinces are starting to move there. Maybe we should even do a pilot project to see what that is like. Those are some of the issues that are under considerations, but we supported, what? Over 1,300 more Manitobans in the community since '99. We've got almost about 5,000 now—206 percent budget increase. That's what's part of this.

Then, getting back to where the member was going in terms of the role of MDC, I think, as part of this whole rethink, I will make sure Mr. Henderson's here, that we will look further to see how MDC can provide a regional service then.

You know, it's not good enough, I think, and I take the member's argument. It's just—I think just a reasonable suggestion is that when you have an institution, you shouldn't just be looking inward, you should also be looking outward and if we're going to support people in the community, by golly, we've got a very huge public investment at MDC that surely can be part of this continuum.

I think historically we've thought of institutions and the community as being two separate operations, and it shouldn't be that way. We should get some flexibility going here, and it may be that, yes, someone just can't be supported in the community, but maybe there's some stabilization that can happen. Maybe it's for weeks, maybe it's for a few years, and then back and forth. I'll take the member's advice on that one and we will work that into the analysis, and so I thank him for that.

Mr. Faurschou: Well, I do appreciate the minister's comments. That's exactly where I was going: looking

at the MDC and being able to have community outreach and be able to be interactive with those that are in community living and to provide for the assets and investments that we as Manitobans have made in MDC, and make those cost-effectively available to those persons, say, now enjoying community living.

I look forward to speaking longer on this topic with the minister at another time.

Just want to leave my questioning at this moment, because, well, the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Briese) is wanting to continue his line of questioning, but I want to take the opportunity to thank the staff of Child and Family Services that each and every day dedicate themselves to the betterment of Manitobans in need, and I also would like at this time to compliment the minister's department for partnering with the Young Parents Resource Centre in Portage la Prairie as well as Big Brothers Big Sisters to come together under one roof and provide a one-stop outlet for persons that are in need and to garner one window, if you will use that terminology, the services that can address individuals' needs prior to a crisis event.

I believe that this model could be one that the Province could repeat in other communities and I think when it opens officially, I look forward to the minister's attendance because he will be royally impressed with the initiative taken by these three organizations of which he is a participant and to truly appreciate what can be accomplished in working cooperatively with a like mind.

Mr. Mackintosh: I just should add a caveat. MDC does do wheelchair adjustments and repairs. I wanted just to put that on the record, because I don't want to slight that great work and that connection with the community, but it just shows you that that's one example of—now, if we can just expand that approach to other services. And you're right. You know, when I went to MDC, you could come out of there in tears because you see this tremendous devotion to people who are so profoundly disabled and just that love and then the professionalism and just rubbing someone's back as a physiotherapy treatment. The day I was there they had a country western jamboree and it was just tremendous to see the excitement there and the collegiality. It is a community.

I guess sometimes we think that community only exists somewhere outside of an institution. I went to a boy's school for a year. I can tell you there's a heck of a community that goes on within places, too, but there is a community there as well with a lot of

supports. When you saw the staff working with individuals—there was one resident who just was living under a blanket, just completely covered up—you think, wow. Really, it puts questions in your mind that you never had before. I certainly take the member's point. I think there's a service there that has great potential outside the walls.

Mr. Briese: Just a small follow-up to my colleague from Portage la Prairie's comments. I recently had met on a couple of occasions with a community living group. One of the things that they were bringing to our attention was the role of the Public Trustee in moving people out of MDC and into community living areas. They were fairly adamant that the Public Trustee should be taking a more active role and that that is some of the slowdown and the hold-up in getting these placements to happen.

Mr. Mackintosh: I know there have been some recommendations made about the Public Trustee's office with regard to the Vulnerable Persons Commissioner. There's some study done of that, and action will be following on that by the Public Trustee, I understand.

In terms of the specific question about MDC discharges. The Association of Community Living, these are tremendous people, just so devoted and doing a great job in both advocacy and insights. They have taken on, though, in the Manitoba branch, advocacy to close down MDC as an objective. We haven't subscribed to that view. As I said earlier, we see that there is a continued role for a place just like MDC, for some families and residents. We think it's important to—we listen.

I think of the Lindens from Portage la Prairie who are also tireless advocates for MDC. They have an adult child living there. We maintain this balanced view. I do understand that the Association for Community Living may have been saying that since the Public Trustee is the decision maker for some of the residents at MDC, the Public Trustee should get on board with the view that there should be a de-institutionalization.

I also understand, and I might be going out on a limb, but my interpretation of the Public Trustee's approach has been that, well, that may be appropriate in certain circumstances. The Public Trustee's office has come to the view, or accepted, that MDC does provide a high quality of service that is appropriate for some of their clients. I think it's just different views that are out there which makes for healthy

democracy and a good debate on the future of institutions.

* (11:50)

The Housing ministers met recently. I've known the Minister of Housing for British Columbia for some time. He was a former solicitor general. We spent some time talking about the challenges in British Columbia, in Vancouver, and the lower east side in particular. What we're seeing in some jurisdictions now is actually some return to recognizing the role for institutions for those that may, just from time to time, even on a temporary basis, have very complex needs that cannot be ameliorated or supported in the community.

I think what we're seeing across North America is some vindication that you have to have a continuum of services. The policy of the Province of Manitoba, the government, is one of community living, but not for everyone and not against the wishes of everyone. On balance, yes, we favour community living, but sometimes that just can't be supported and perhaps most unfortunately. I understand why the Public Trustee may also come to that view, but she could speak for herself.

Mr. Briese: Just one thing that we had neglected to ask, how many residents are there in MDC at the present time?

Mr. Mackintosh: It looks like there have been reductions since '99 of about 25 percent. My numbers here indicate about 400 and—it looks like during the course of the '99-2000 fiscal year, the number I had was 467. Then I'm advised that, as of March 31, '08, there are 333. So we're down about 134.

You can certainly see the trend there of decreases. On the community living side, it's not a proportionate increase there, so you can see that the numbers on the community living side are coming from families, not just from institutions. So, that explains—there's a good portrayal of the convergence of the pressures.

There's a caveat here. Those may not be just discharges; those will include deaths.

Mr. Briese: Madam Chairperson, I'm going to go in a little different direction now. We had some indication in 2005, and you'll recall I asked this question last fall to a review of The Adoption Act. I want to know if anything's been done there, if that review has started, if there's a movement at all.

Mr. Mackintosh: There's been a lot of legislative activity and, shall we say, experimentation in Canada on adoption laws. Some very recent, and I think in particular of Ontario, where they made some recent amendments to their adoption act, and as a result there were some challenges by stakeholders that thought it interfered with their privacy, their right to make decisions about access information with respect to adoption.

So what the department has done is it's begun a research initiative which I'm assured is now under way to summarize the adoption approaches in the different jurisdictions in Canada. As well, I understand that there's been some research in terms of approaches by American states that had received a number of—like, I guess, a '60s scoop during the '60s, in terms of what kind of reciprocal arrangements may be possible there, other options with other jurisdictions outside of Canada let alone inside Canada.

This is all with a view to having some review process that would involve the public in some way, and what they're trying to do is construct a document with options for consideration then so that the act could be looked at in a comprehensive way to determine if we should make change.

But I think it's important that it not just be opened up, but that there be some plain language options that the public can consider. I think it's an issue. I've identified that it has some strong views on different approaches and, you know, how do we achieve a good balance? There has been some dissatisfaction with some aspects of our act, and I think I've had representations that have urged us to look at Alberta models, some Ontario model. I think the Ontario model now has just got a problem because it just wasn't Charter-proof.

So that was a lesson learned. At least now it's been judicially considered, and that may take at least one option off the table in terms of their open records approach.

So I can assure the member that it's hoped that within the next six months, I'm told, we could be in a position to have some process to look at adoptions. I don't think there is any interest in just bringing in legislation without some public discussion first. It may be that, after public discussion, there's a determination that we should leave the act as it is. I'm not saying that it's going to be amended, but if the member has some views on this, I certainly

would be glad to consider that. But that's an answer which is a process answer.

Mr. Briese: Thank you for that answer, Mr. Minister. I'll look forward to your review or what comes out of this process because I think it is an old act that does need some updating and some bringing into the modern age. A lot of things have changed since it was written.

I know we're getting short of time, and there was another thing here that I wanted to touch on, last fall when I asked on foster care beds, and we may run out of time. If we do, I would like to get these numbers anyhow at some point from you. Last year you gave me numbers for licensed foster homes and also numbers for licensed special facilities, and something I would really like to see is a breakdown, regionally, on those foster beds.

Madam Chairperson: The time being 12 noon, I am interrupting the proceedings.

The Committee of Supply will resume sitting this afternoon following the conclusion of routine proceedings. Thank you.

MANITOBA SENIORS AND HEALTHY AGING SECRETARIAT

*(10:10)

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

This section of the Committee of Supply will now consider the Estimates for the Manitoba Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat.

Does the honourable minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Kerri Irvin-Ross (Minister responsible for Seniors): Yes, I do.

Mr. Chairperson: Please proceed.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: As Minister responsible for Seniors, I'm pleased to present the 2008-2009 budget Estimates for the Manitoba Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat.

The health, independence and well-being of Manitoba seniors are important to our government. We recognize the value of planning for our aging population. We are always looking for ways to better respond to the needs and interests of older Manitobans.

A vital part of our work is continuing the progress of the provincial seniors strategy, *Advancing Age: Promoting Older Manitobans*. This strategy was introduced by our government in 2003 to address the current and emerging needs of seniors and to guide development of policy, legislation and programs.

Now in its fifth year, budget 2008 provides another \$120,000 to further the *Advancing Age* strategy. Part of the strategy includes funding to community-based seniors organizations to help strengthen their services and bring their perspectives to issues facing seniors in communities across the province.

This past year, funding and service agreements have been developed with Age and Opportunity, Creative Retirement Manitoba, Manitoba Society of Seniors, Manitoba Association of Multi-Purpose Senior Centres and the Aboriginal Seniors Resource Centre.

Our government is pleased to support these organizations. We appreciate and are encouraged with their work. With 93 percent of older Manitobans living in the community and a projected 45 percent increase in seniors population over the next 20 years, there's a growing demand on community-based services.

Budget 2008 invests \$120,000 in a Healthy Aging Strategy for seniors, including new resources to expand community-based services and help seniors maintain their health and independence. The Healthy Aging Strategy enhances a person's ability to actively participate in family and community life through improved mental and physical functioning, social engagement, healthy relationships, and a lower risk of disease and disease-related disability.

Mr. Chairperson, 2008 funding will allow Manitoba to continue the successful momentum it has created through the Healthy Aging Strategy and in partnership with the Active Living Coalition for Older Adults in Manitoba to promote healthy aging and the concept of seniors as role models for healthy living. Through the 2008 Healthy Aging Strategy, ALCOA Manitoba, we all support peer-led physical activity programs, such as the Victoria Order of Nurses' SMART, Seniors Maintaining Active Roles Together program, and Steppin' Up and Steppin' Out With Confidence programs. These programs train older adults to lead physical activity programs for other older adults of varying mobility levels,

including frail seniors and those who are at risk of a fall.

The strategy also increases health promotion and physical activity programs for older adults in rural Manitoba, as well as increases awareness of the importance of active living, healthy eating, smoking cessation, falls prevention, social connectedness, and healthy aging, and, finally, focus on the positive contributions of older adults, building communities, capacities, and fosters positive collaboration.

The safety and security of a senior is another priority for our government. In particular, we are aware that between 6,000 and 15,000 seniors in Manitoba are victims of abuse every year. That is why the Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat is providing strong leadership on this issue through the Elder Abuse Strategy. The strategy includes the senior abuse line, education materials, and community development. Our efforts to increase public awareness about elder abuse continue.

After such great participation in the 2007 World Elder Abuse Awareness Day event on June 15, the secretariat is already planning activities for the third World Elder Abuse Awareness Day in 2008. The 2008-2009 budget provides \$80,000 in funding to enhance Manitoba's strategy to address elder abuse. This funding will continue to support our partnership with seniors organizations to deliver an elder abuse safe suite program, toll-free elder abuse counselling line, a provincial elder abuse network, and take actions as an outcome of our research that focussed on legislative frameworks to address elder abuse.

In Manitoba, the number of people aged 65 years and older is expected to increase by 43 percent over the next 20 years. Clearly, it's important to support our aging population, and one way to do that is developing age-friendly communities. The Manitoba Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat is working with the World Health Organization and the Public Health Agency of Canada on a variety of age-friendly community initiatives, and in February, 2008, the Age-Friendly Manitoba Initiative was launched.

Together with the Centre on Aging, the Association of Manitoba Municipalities, the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce, seniors organizations, and other community partners, the Age-Friendly Manitoba Initiative supports community efforts that enhance the health, independence, and well-being of all Manitoba seniors.

Age-friendly communities benefit all citizens. For example, secure neighbourhoods will be safe for children, youth, women, and older adults. Barrier-free buildings and streets will enhance the mobility and independence of both younger and older persons with disabilities. Our age-friendly funding has supported 10 communities to create age-friendly environments with financial support in the amount of \$3,000 each. Throughout 2008-2009, more communities will be selected to join the initiative until all communities across Manitoba have joined.

Transportation is a key factor within our age-friendly work. We know older adults want to continue to live independently in the community. Accessible and affordable transportation allows seniors access to programs and resources that can improve their quality of life. Transportation is a challenging issue. We recognize this and the importance of building on the recent momentum generated from the *Mobility Options for the Aging Population of Manitoba: An Action Plan for Regional Solutions* report and workshop held in March 2008.

New funding of \$40,000 in 2008-2009, will allow for the launch of innovative pilot projects which provide direct transportation for seniors in rural Manitoba. This pilot project will be based on the recent research and workshops about transportation in Manitoba.

It's easy to view Manitoba as a relatively safe place to live, because it is. Certainly, our quality of life ranks among the top in the world. However, there's a growing threat and increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events and the possibility of pandemic outbreaks and other human-caused disasters. The time is right for seniors in this province to take a more active role in emergency planning. That's why the secretariat is working to ensure that the often unique needs of seniors as well as their contributions in a time of disaster become a recognized and routine part of developing emergency plans in this province.

Last February, the secretariat co-hosted the international workshop on emergency preparedness and seniors, together with the Public Health Agency of Canada and the World Health Organization.

The secretariat will continue to make this issue a priority and intends to help establish itself as a leader in integrating the needs of seniors into its emergency preparedness planning. Enhanced access to information about programs and services in

Manitoba has been a key outcome of the senior access program. Now, with the distribution network established and hundreds of copies of the manuals in the hands of professionals working in the community, this initiative will continue to be the priority of the secretariat and the Manitoba Society of Seniors in ensuring that older adults receive the benefits from programs to which they are entitled.

In the coming year, the Manitoba Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat will also continue their work, acting on issues that affect seniors and their well-being and ensuring the views of seniors are taken into account when developing programs, policies and legislation. Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the minister for those opening remarks.

Does the official opposition critic have opening comments to make?

Mrs. Leanne Rowat (Minnedosa): Briefly, we have 45 minutes of Estimates here so I would like to just put a few things on the record, but I want to thank the minister for her opening comments. We look forward to those initiatives coming into play. We'll be watching carefully to ensure that there are the outcomes that she has been speaking to.

We also believe, on our side of the House, the Conservative caucus, that the health and well-being of Manitoba seniors and elders is important for a healthy Manitoba. In 1980 I was part of the government, as an assistant to the creation of the seniors' directorate, and was able to work in that directorate and see the great things that were coming forward through the leadership of the former government.

The minister spoke briefly on the elder abuse awareness campaign that this government is putting forward, and I can say that, in 1989, we did similar work. We put out a white paper. We travelled the province and spoke to Manitoba seniors and elders on the challenges that they're facing. Many of the issues that the minister has just identified were issues that continue to be of importance and of a challenge to the senior population in our province. We will be following closely and encouraging the minister to put initiatives forward that will ensure that the personal safety of our seniors is a priority, that transportation and mobility are a priority of this government, and seniors housing challenges, not only in acquiring safe and quality housing, but also personal safety within those facilities is a priority.

Today, the Member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson) will be bringing forward a resolution on Pharmacare deductibles. There will be a debate in the House later on today on this issue. I believe that this is something that the government should be taking a closer look at. In the current budget, we see another 5 percent increase in Pharmacare deductibles. This has created additional hardships for individuals on fixed incomes, seniors, as well as low-income Manitobans.

So we will continue to work with the seniors of Manitoba and individuals on fixed income across the province. I look forward to a short discussion, but a very important discussion with the minister on some of these issues. Thank you.

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

At this time, we'll invite the minister's staff to join us at the table and for the minister to introduce us when they arrive.

*(10:20)

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I'm joined by Arlene Wilgosh, Deputy Minister of Health and Healthy Living, as well as Patti Chiappetta, acting executive director of the Secretariat.

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

Mrs. Rowat: In a global discussion, please.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I agree.

Mr. Chairperson: Excellent, thank you very much. It's, therefore, agreed that questioning for this department will follow in a global manner with all resolutions to be passed once the questioning has been completed.

The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Rowat: I would like to welcome Arlene and Patti to the table. I want to thank you for all the work that you do on behalf of Manitoba seniors and elders within the province. Thank you very much.

My first question for the minister is page 8 of the Estimates book. Can the minister just give a little background on the Manitoba Council on Aging? I'm just wanting to know who the members are on the Council on Aging and, also, how often the council currently meets. Those are just two quick questions.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: All right, the Manitoba Council on Aging 2008 membership: Norma Drosdowech is the chair, Jean-Yves Rochon is the vice-chair, Sharon Arnold, Percy Bird, Lorraine Bonnefoy, Bernard Brown, Laraine Coll, Julie Collings, France Lemay, Martha Owen, Harry Paine, Dennis Rebello, Bob Riddle, Glenora Slimmon. They are meeting five times a year. They meet four times in Winnipeg and then once in a rural area.

Mrs. Rowat: To the issue of Pharmacare deductibles, a case study published in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* showed that a 65-year-old single woman on a government pension who needs four prescription drugs would pay \$8 for the medication in Ontario, but \$503 in Manitoba. Another example of a 75-year-old married man taking five drugs would pay \$60 for his prescriptions in Nova Scotia and \$1,332 in Manitoba.

Given the role of the Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat, and their role to act in an advisory capacity to the government departments and to promote the interests of older Manitobans, what advice has the Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat given to the Department of Health with regard to Pharmacare deductibles?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Just to put on the record, Norma Drosdowech, the chair of the Manitoba Council on Aging, sits on the Pharmacare committee and provides ongoing advice around issues related to seniors.

As well, I just want to put on the record, too, about some of the aspects of our Pharmacare program and some of the positive things that it has been doing.

We've also got positive remarks from the Canadian Institute of Health Information, CIHI, that says Manitoba provides the highest provincial coverage in Canada, paying 54 percent of prescription drug expenditures for Manitoba.

Also, the 2008 budget invests an additional \$3.7 million into the Pharmacare program, bringing it to \$280 million, more than triple than it was in 1999. That's a 352 percent increase.

Also, I think it's important for the member to know that the number of families benefiting from the program has increased by over 24,000 families.

Also, in 2007, we introduced the deductible instalment payment program for Pharmacare. That's really important for people living on fixed incomes,

as they're able to pay their deductible in monthly instalments.

So those are some of the changes that we've made to continue to support seniors in Manitoba around the Pharmacare program.

Mrs. Rowat: Just in reference to her comments, the minister's comments she's just made, the provincial government has received unprecedented transfer payments for Health from Ottawa. Yet this government continues to spend every cent of it they receive, and continue to offload their responsibility onto the backs of the most vulnerable Manitobans, the seniors and low-income earners.

Over the last seven years, we've seen, year one, a \$60 increase; year two, \$60 increase; year three, \$60 increase; year four, \$60 increase; year five, \$72 increase; nothing year six—election year; year seven, a \$72 increase. These are substantial increases that individuals on fixed incomes would obviously be very concerned about, and put undue hardship on their decisions on what they can or cannot spend their money on.

I'm wanting to ask the minister: Can she indicate what initiatives her department is undertaking to help seniors shoulder these increased costs that, based on the numbers I've just given, are pretty significant?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Really, I need to clarify for the Member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat), the operations of Pharmacare fall under the purview of the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald).

What I can tell you about is how we provide the seniors perspective at the table, and how I have seen that different allowances that have been made support Manitoba's seniors. I think, you know, the CIHI supports us, saying that 54 percent of prescription drug expenditures for Manitobans are being paid for, as well as the continued investments that we've made, again, the additional \$3.7 million made this year in this budget. Then, as I stated earlier as well, the deductible instalment payment program for Pharmacare, which really allows people to pay their deductible in monthly instalments, that continues to help them. As well, we implemented the palliative care drug program. These are some pieces that we are doing.

But, just so the member understands, we are at the table. Seniors are being represented and continue to share their perspective. We feel that Health is listening and making those adjustments.

Mrs. Rowat: Thank you for that.

The minister's comments, I guess, aren't really addressing the issue. The issue is that Pharmacare deductibles have increased by 34 percent since 2002. The secretariat under her direction is to be a voice for the seniors. Obviously, increases are continuing to occur. When you get 34 percent as increases over the past seven years in a spending area that taxes the sick and the elderly, it is a very serious concern and issue.

I'd like to just make a comment that, while the government were in opposition, the MLA for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) had indicated that Pharmacare deductibles, any increases in that area, referred to them as a tax grab on Manitobans and a tax on all Manitobans, and a tax, most importantly, on the sick.

There is issue, you know, that I have with a government that, when they're in opposition, obviously saw this as an important issue and a significant challenge to the sick and the elderly, and, when they take power, take government, we see a 34 percent increase since 2002. So I believe that this government's inability to control its spending has resulted in a direct assault on the sick and the elderly within our province.

I'd like to ask the minister, again, what has her department done in addressing this issue and helping seniors shoulder these increased costs?

* (10:30)

Ms. Irvin-Ross: As we're talking about increases that the honourable member has referred to, I think there's a piece that she, I don't know, maybe has forgotten, that, while the Tories were in government, they increased the deductible, or co-payment, every year from 1988 to 1996. The Tories' term of office, the seniors' deductible almost tripled, from \$285 to \$750.

You know, we continue to, at the secretariat, be represented. At the Pharmacare committee, our voice is being heard. There are a lot of things that are happening within the program to support seniors. I think a good example is the deductible instalment program, more drugs that are being covered.

I think, really, what the member ought to know is that our efforts, as we continue to advocate for all Manitobans, we're also looking at a healthy aging perspective, promoting wellness and prevention initiatives to avoid people acquiring chronic diseases and having to end up on medication.

Mrs. Rowat: I just want to reference another case where—this is very significant, and it has to be said. The specific cases, or the incidence for individuals is staggering: A woman who is 72 years old who has osteoarthritis, she received, I guess, what she would say is the shock of her life, when I was talking to her regarding her Pharmacare assessment that she received in the mail. She went from paying \$300 to \$625 per year. That's significant when your income is just over \$15,000; your Pharmacare costs, obviously, have doubled. So I don't think that's fair to say that that's a comprehensive system that is working.

Back to the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, they had indicated that New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island stand out as offering the most comprehensive public prescription drug plans for seniors. So, when the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) stands in the House and says that Manitoba's program is the most comprehensible, I beg to differ. I guess I would argue that the minister would then be in conflict of the Canadian Medical Association. So, I think I'll take the word of the Canadian Medical Association over the Minister of Health.

Again, I don't get where this minister is saying that they're working on this issue and are doing anything to help shoulder those costs.

I'll go to my next question, which would be under departmental spending. I've seen a significant increase, 29 percent, I believe, since 2004-05—or, I'm sorry, 29 percent this year. That has more than doubled since the '04-05 budgetary numbers, and the majority of the increases seem to be in grants to external agencies.

Can the minister indicate what these additional fundings will be used for? I'm hoping that it'll be in an area where we'll see some accountability measurements or mechanisms that will address some of the issues that we're raising today.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I need to go back to the minister before I respond to her last question to her—I need to correct the record is what I need to do, about the details that she put on the record. I'm not familiar with this case. If she'd like to present it to me, to the Minister of Health, we'll certainly review it.

The information that I know to be true is that the Pharmacare deductibles will only increase between \$2 and \$6 per month for most Pharmacare families. So that is the fact. The fact remains that we have one

of the best Pharmacare programs in this country that has been endorsed by numerous third parties.

One other piece that I need to put on the record, as well, is that I had the privilege to join the Minister of Family Services and Housing (Mr. Mackintosh) as we talked about expanding the support services program, but, also, we increased the 55-Plus income supplement, which will provide \$1.8 million annually in new support for low-income seniors.

So those are some pieces that are happening. We're here to work with the seniors. Their voice is being heard at the table. We'll continue to make yearly investments and changes to the Pharmacare as we see fit and continue to provide what is recognized as one of the best in the country.

It was very interesting and we were very pleased when Treasury Board came back and increased the budget for the Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat by 29 percent. That's money that's going to be well spent, I assure the member. There are different initiatives, so I'll put on the record some of the specifics.

The one piece is called Age Friendly. Age-Friendly Manitoba is an initiative where, last year, we did some work with the World Health Organization where we researched what makes an age-friendly community. Research happened at Portage la Prairie as well as in Gimli. The outcome of that was that each of those communities established seniors committees to sit alongside mayor and council. So their voices are going to be heard. As they look at their communities and they decide what they need to do to promote and encourage a quality of life that's deserved by seniors in Manitoba, they'll be making some changes, but I need to say that by making a community age-friendly, it impacts all of us. It impacts children, people with disabilities. It's going to be a win-win situation.

So the Age-Friendly dollars were used to have a forum that we hosted in Portage la Prairie, where we brought communities together and brought them on board to Age Friendly. There were 10 communities that have agreed and have received some grants to participate in the Age-Friendly initiative. I'd like to put them on the record: Roblin, Cartwright, Morris, Pinawa, MacDonald, Gladstone, Arborg, Gilbert Plains, The Pas and Elkhorn. So those are communities that see the value of ensuring that they're providing quality services for their older Manitobans.

As well, we fund, through service purchase agreements, many seniors organizations and partnerships that happen, and they provide grass roots community service supports to seniors across the province.

Around elder abuse, there are expenditures for the 1-800 toll free counselling line, for our safe suite, as well as for research and looking at best practices around programs and policy, as well as legislation and education and awareness.

As well, we have funding that will be going to ALCOA that will be providing peer-to-peer support for individuals who are looking at healthy lifestyles.

Then, we have, oh—that's it.

Mrs. Rowat: It was interesting to hear the different community projects. I'm wondering if the minister would be able to provide a listing of the organizations that are receiving funding across the province, which communities will be receiving them and the funding that each organization will receive. If she would mind taking that as notice and then providing that list for me.

* (10:40)

I'm also wanting to ask the minister what her position is on community resource co-ordinators. Services to senior groups in Manitoba play an integral role in providing supports for the elderly or the sick within the communities. I notice within the communities that I represent they are front and centre on a lot of these initiatives that the minister has just been speaking to. I also know that their role has been expanding over time in many of the communities, and the expectation and their responsibility have also increased within the communities.

What we're finding is that the groups are having a difficult time retaining co-ordinators because of low wages and lack of benefits, et cetera, and high turnover. In rural communities, our population, obviously, is aging. Statistics show that. But there is also a need for supports to be available to them to continue to be active and mobile in these communities, also to ensure that nourishment and activities are available for them.

Has the department given any consideration to increased funding for these positions?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Mr. Chairperson, the Province of Manitoba, we're committed to providing quality programs and supports for older Manitobans. One way that that happens is through the seniors' resource

co-ordinators. Seniors' resource co-ordinators across this province are providing everything from social programs to recreation to meal programs. I've met with many of them, and no two of them operate the same way as far as the programs that they deliver because they are community based. They're looking at what are the needs in the community. They are adapting those needs and providing those supports for them. I've met with them; I've received the letters from them with their requests. What I have told them is that the funding for the seniors' resource co-ordinators comes through the regional health authorities.

I am prepared to meet with the regional health authorities and encourage them to look at how they can better support these positions within their communities. We'll continue to work together. We value what they do in these communities. I know that the relationships that they develop, the bonds that are developed, really improve the quality of life of seniors in those communities.

Mrs. Rowat: The minister's comments saying, if you want, I will meet with, that concerns me a bit because this issue has been front and centre for quite some time now. The work of the community resource co-ordinators is significant. I agree with her on that point. It does improve the quality of life for seniors in our communities. I'm asking the minister, obviously she has not raised this, based on her comment. I encourage her to do that and ask her to speak to the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald) and to give consideration to increasing the funding for these positions. Many of these communities may not have community resource co-ordinators in the future because of this red flag for support. We have to be diligent and ensure that services to seniors programs throughout the province are not only retained but also sustained. I am asking the minister to put this on her radar screen and to ensure that these groups are given consideration in the future.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I want to assure the Member for Minnedosa (Mrs. Rowat) that it is a priority. It is on my radar screen. I see the value of what they provide in the community. I have the privilege of meeting with the CEOs and board chairs of the RHAs frequently. We have discussed this. We'll continue to have these conversations about how do we better support Manitobans in all communities.

I need to put on the record some of the funding that we have provided to regional health authorities, specifically to community resource councils, tenant

resource councils, congregate meal programs and seniors centres. These are all initiatives that impact Manitoba seniors across the province directly.

In 2005-2006 it was \$6 million; \$6,081,242 was received. In 2006-2007 it was increased again to \$6.2 million, almost, and, in 2007-2008 it was \$6,293,620 in response to identified community needs. We understand the value. We celebrate their successes in the community. We've been providing them with financial support. We see them as key partners as we deliver programs across Manitoba and ensure that Manitoba becomes the most age-friendly province in Canada.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister indicate to me how many community resource co-ordinators there are currently in Manitoba? Are there currently communities in Manitoba without a resource co-ordinator who have identified a need for this kind of service? Is she aware of these requests or these needs?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: There are 105 community resource councils and 21 multipurpose seniors' centres. I am told that the province is covered. There are some communities—I know the community I represent, the geographical area is broader and we share resources. It's been very, very successful.

Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat is available to provide support for communities as well and provide information. Through these 105 individuals, they're working closely with other service providers. They're working with the seniors themselves and coming up with beneficial programs that improve and enhance the quality of life for Manitoba seniors.

Mrs. Rowat: How many community resource co-ordinators are there in Manitoba?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: 105.

Mrs. Rowat: Thank you. I just wanted clarification that the 105 number that she used was the number for the co-ordinator.

Can she also indicate to me: Are there any communities currently without a community resource co-ordinator where there is an identified need for this kind of service?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Throughout the province, the province is being served by the 105 seniors' resource councils through the regional health authority. If there is a particular community that the member is referring to, we'll certainly take it under advisement.

The regional health authorities are the bodies that decide where these seniors' resource councils are going to be and provides the ongoing funding to them but, if there's a particular community that you're referring to, you can please let us know and we can follow up.

Mrs. Rowat: What I'm asking the minister is if she's aware of any that have been identified to her for this kind of service. So I'm asking her specifically if she has been made aware of a need within the communities throughout Manitoba for this kind of service.

* (10:50)

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Again, if the member has a specific community, rather than playing this game, we can certainly put it on the table. We'll co-operate. We'll get the information. To my knowledge, I know that I have not been approached about any specific community through the RHA at all. So, again, if the member would like to let us know what community she is referring to, we can work together with that community and the RHA and the Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat to inquire what services they are being provided.

Mrs. Rowat: I didn't mean any disrespect to the minister and making her paranoid about it. I was just asking her specifically if she had heard of any communities that were identifying a need for services. So it's a general question. I just wanted to need—you know, wanting to know if there was a need within the communities. If there is a specific community, I will most certainly be sharing the information with the government, or working with the community specific, to make sure that they're requests are being put forward.

The next question I have for the minister is in regard to the Alzheimer strategy. If the minister can give to me a background on the status of the strategy, and I believe the strategy is *A Strategy for Alzheimer's Disease and Related Dementias in Manitoba*. Can the minister indicate to me how it's being implemented and who will be in charge of this initiative, and actually, how it is also going to be funded?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Around the Alzheimer strategy, just so the member knows that there's a multi-stakeholder committee that's being co-chaired by Health and the regional health authorities, and there is funding through the RHAs.

During the election we committed investing \$300,000 to enhance dementia education and training, which was part of that strategic planning, and that was announced recently.

We continue, Manitoba Health continues, to work with the secretariat and community partners including the Alzheimer Society, Manitoba Society of Seniors to better co-ordinate services for Alzheimer's and other dementia education policies and services.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister indicate to me how much money the RHAs individually, so specific to each region, how much money they're being asked to contribute toward this initiative?

Ms. Irvin-Ross: That question would have to be referred to the Minister of Health (Ms. Oswald).

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister indicate to me how the \$300,000 announcement—how that is going to be laid out? How is it going to—there a sort of a time line or a—I'm just looking for some accountability mechanisms that the minister can fall back on.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Again, that allocation of the \$300,000 is through the Department of Health, but what I can tell you is that money is being flowed through the regional health authorities to provide the training services to their staff.

Mrs. Rowat: Can the minister indicate to me who is on the committee that is being co-chaired? If she can just indicate to me who the members are and where they're from.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I'll have to take that under advisement, so we can provide you with that information.

Mrs. Rowat: I'll obviously be doing some FIPPA on this, I guess.

Can the minister indicate to me what—*[interjection]* Yes, right. Has the Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat done any work recently with regard to the need for a wider variety of affordable housing options, and especially with personal safety being a key issue, and also with the quality of some of the housing out there? Can the minister indicate to me what the secretariat is doing in that regard? The secretariat specific, please.

Ms. Irvin-Ross: Specific to Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat, they are active around looking at affordable housing in partnership with multiple other departments. They're an advisory role with that

committee. When we're talking about quality of life for Manitoba's seniors, living in secure, safe environments, we have a very successful program which, just to put it on the record for the member, is the Safety Aid crime prevention program. This is a program in partnership with Age & Opportunity, where individuals will come out to older Manitobans' home and assess it for safety. It might be safety around fall prevention as well and looking at what are some indicators that might create a fall and unnecessary visit to the health-care system and how do we support them so that they can continue to live a quality of life. This program has been very successful, very well received across Manitoba.

I just want to put on the record that we've recently just expanded it to Beausejour, Sagkeeng, Fort Alexander First Nation, Lac du Bonnet, Little Black River First Nation, Pinawa, Steinbach and Ste. Anne's. This program, like I said, is being co-delivered with Age & Opportunity. They go around in a van and provide these services, and we see the value of doing it.

Some specific things that they'll do is they'll look at putting safety devices in homes, such as peepholes and deadbolts and, again, as I said before, the fall prevention supplies as well. Fall prevention is one of their other objectives that they do.

Mrs. Rowat: I appreciate the comments regarding this initiative that the minister is speaking to, and we will be following it closely because we are hearing and seeing an increased incidences of crime against seniors and the elderly, so I believe that, you know, this initiative does show promise. But we, again, have people in communities that are very concerned about their safety and their well-being, including communities like Minto, Manitoba, where a woman was calling and had to ask for intervention because of an abuse of—verbal abuse that she was receiving from a person that was living in her housing complex.

I agree with the minister that this service and this type of support have to be widespread or available throughout Manitoba. There's an example where it can not only be targeted for urban centres, but individuals in rural Manitoba are also looking for these types of initiatives and support.

With a few minutes left, I just want to thank the staff from Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat for being here today and providing that support. I want to thank the deputy, Arlene Wilgosh, who has done a

great job in providing supports in different areas that I've been asking help on.

In closing, I want to thank the minister for her responses to my questions and also thank the staff for taking the time today to be here.

* (11:00)

Ms. Irvin-Ross: I just wanted to clarify for the member that we provide services throughout the province of Manitoba to rural and northern areas. I had put on the record the number of places where we had just recently expanded Safety Aid, and that was all in rural Manitoba. Yet, again, the Age-Friendly initiative all in rural Manitoba, so those services are being provided.

When we were talking about the safety of older Manitobans, one of the pieces that is really important that I need to get on the record is our elder abuse strategy. This is where there's the 1-800 line that is available to everybody in the province where they can access services and get the information that they need. There's also counselling available, as well as crisis housing is available for older Manitobans. If they need to be removed from their situation immediately, we have a safe house where they are very secure and then are helped to transition back into the community where they want to be living. So thank you very much.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, very good. Seeing no further questions, we'll now move to resolutions.

Resolution 24.1: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$1,756,800 for Manitoba Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat, Manitoba Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009.

Resolution agreed to.

Resolution 24.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$8,000 for Manitoba Seniors and Healthy Aging Secretariat, Costs Related to Capital Assets, for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009.

Resolution agreed to.

This completes the Estimates for the Department of Healthy Aging and Seniors Secretariat.

The next set of Estimates to be considered by this section of the Committee of Supply is for the Department of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines.

We will have a brief recess while new staff, ministers and critics arrive.

**SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY,
ENERGY AND MINES**

Mr. Chairperson (Rob Altemeyer): This section of the Committee of Supply will now reconvene to consider the Estimates for the Department of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines.

Does the minister have an opening statement?

Hon. Jim Rondeau (Minister of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines): Yes, I do, Mr. Chair.

First, I'd like to say thank you to the staff. It's been a really busy year in Science, Technology, Energy and Mines. On page 2 and 3 is the list of the goals, objectives and some of the projects that we've worked on this year. I was very, very impressed at some of the projects and some of the initiatives. Now, I'm going to highlight a couple of them to move forward and let you know, Mr. Chair, and the committee, what's going on.

As far as science, we have a very good science sector in Manitoba. I'm pleased, because although we have about 3.7 percent or 4 percent of the population, we have about 8 percent of the national biotech activity which is good. These are jobs that are good jobs. They have good annual revenues and they're increasing and that's very, very positive.

As far as the energy sector, I'll highlight a few of the points that I'm very pleased with. One of the initiatives that has been very successful is the Centennial neighbourhood project. What that was was taking one of the poorest areas in the province, older housing stock, very inefficient housing stock. We work with the Winnipeg Foundation and a number of partners to bring energy efficiency there, to make conservation important, because often the poorest people in the province were paying some of the highest energy bills, and it was wrong. These are people who don't own the house, that are often renters, or they don't have money to do the retrofits.

So this was a really neat initiative where we worked with a number of groups, including Hydro, foundations, et cetera, and we really did a good job. There were large savings in each household. They're talking between \$400 and \$600 per household in savings in just utility costs from that initiative, and we've done about 150 houses. It was a wonderful program.

Also, the other part of that program was training a number of residents in the community to do carpentry and renovation and insulation skills. That was really good.

I'm particularly pleased that we've moved from ninth, as far as energy efficiency standards in Canada, to first, and we've retained that standing with the Energy Efficiency Alliance. Part of it is through Power Smart and part of it is through increasing the geothermal and other things that save energy.

Although we have about 3.7 percent of the population, we have about 30 percent of the geothermal installations. We actually have standards for the installers. We have a good association. We're moving forward very quickly on that. We actually have two manufacturers of geothermal heat pumps right here in Manitoba. One of the things I like to tell people is it's really nice to see that we're exporting manufactured goods to China. Most people can't say that. We actually are. We're also exporting that expertise around the world to the Middle East, et cetera.

Some of the other things I'd like to highlight is that 2007 was a record-breaking year for metal prices. It's been very good for the mining sector, the mineral sector. We've hit record numbers as far as oil production on oil activity. The mineral production is expected to exceed \$3 billion and that's very, very impressive.

The other thing I'm very pleased with is that throughout most of Manitoba's history, exploration has been below \$20 million a year. I'm pleased to say that companies spending intentions for exploration are about \$116 million to \$117 million this year. So it's a six-fold increase from basic historical, and that's really good.

I'd like to also just quickly mention R&D. We've been focussing a lot on research and development. We've gone from about \$16.6 million in '99 to about \$28.1 million this year. We've also increased the R&D tax credit, and so that's moving.

To conclude, one of my favourite comments is that we're moving forward in new-media gaming. I think the numbers in the last three years were up 1,850 percent in new-media gaming companies. I think it's great because, first, it's exciting, and, second, it has huge value-added. I just go through the story of three young men in B.C. that invented an Internet big-gaming company. They invented it in

their backyard, in their basement, basically. They developed it, set it up and sold it this year for \$310 million. All of these people were under 30 years old. So this is the type of industry you can compete anywhere on. It has huge value-added. It has great potential to export to the world. When you take it, the comparison between film, which is about a \$20-billion-a-year industry, they're estimating new media will be between \$40 billion to \$60 billion a year in the near future. So it has huge up-side potential.

So, with the Red River training course, with the Fortune Cat as an incubator and with a lot of efforts, we've moved forward. I have to tell you, I am very, very pleased with 1,850 percent growth. We hope to continue some more growth, but I don't think quite at that rate.

So, with that, Mr. Chair, I'm pleased to see that the staff has joined me. Once again, I'd like to thank them for their hard efforts on behalf of all the people in Manitoba. They do a great job. I just look at all the initiatives that we've got. We've got two pages of initiatives. It's a very, very dynamic group of people, people that are committed to serving Manitoba, growing the industry, and it's truly a pleasure to continue working with them. Thank you very much.

* (11:10)

Mr. Chairperson: I thank the minister for those opening remarks.

Does the official opposition critic have an opening statement?

Mr. Cliff Cullen (Turtle Mountain): I certainly thank the minister for his brief opening statement.

The theme for this year's provincial budget was "Opportunity and Stability." Quite frankly, I do believe there is tremendous opportunity here in Manitoba. Sometimes that opportunity and achieving that opportunity, we as a government have to take some chances along the way.

I think we have a tremendous private sector here in Manitoba. We still have some entrepreneurs left in the province. I know a lot of them have left under this particular regime, but there still are some individuals and companies here that are willing to try some things for the benefit of not just themselves but all of Manitoba.

I think some of the onus is on the Province to help facilitate development with those private companies and those private entrepreneurs and those

private investors. I really think that's the role of government is to facilitate and try to get things done and not put onerous regulations in their way so that they get frustrated with the process. That's one of the points I certainly want to make.

In terms of opportunity, we have tremendous potential on the energy side of things with the way the global market is playing out. We have seen some development in the ethanol business. I think there's more potential there, maybe not in the grain side right now but maybe in some other avenues and in the biodiesel side of things as well, and in also looking at other forms of energy there and how we may produce it. I think there's tremendous opportunity.

There are a lot of changes in technology as I'm sure the minister is aware of. I think we as Manitobans can be in the forefront of how that technology unfolds and again, how we can use that technology to benefit all Manitobans.

I know we do have a relatively strong industry here in terms of the health science side of things. They've had their challenges the last couple of years in terms of raising funds in terms of some of the financial difficulties we've had with the Crocus Fund and whatnot. I think it's important that we as a government make sure that we're there to facilitate the development in that particular and very important industry.

We do have a tremendous resource here in terms of Manitoba Hydro. I think it's an opportunity for us again as government to facilitate that development and not interfere on a hands-on basis to make sure that particular corporation moves ahead and gets things done in terms of development and in terms of sales.

The only other comment is again just on the technology and the education side and the important role that that whole sector plays. Again, it's important for us as a government to make sure we have the proper investments in the education side, and that we're investing our money wisely for the right outcomes, making sure that our children are directed and have the opportunity to participate in the right areas in terms of technology and business skill development.

With that, I thank the minister again for his comments and look forward to having a lengthy discussion with him and his staff.

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

Under Manitoba practice, debate on the Minister's Salary is the last item considered for a department in the Committee of Supply.

Accordingly, we shall now defer consideration of this line item and proceed with consideration of the remaining items.

At this time we would also like to invite the minister's staff to come join us at the table if there's room. The minister can introduce them when they arrive.

Mr. Rondeau: I'd like to introduce John Clarkson, who's the deputy minister of Science, Technology, Energy and Mines, Craig Halwachs, who's the chief financial officer of this department, and a couple of others, and we also have Leigh Anne Lumbard, who is the senior financial officer and comptroller in STEM.

Mr. Chairperson: Very good. Now, does the committee wish to proceed in a chronological manner or have a global discussion?

Mr. Cullen: I would prefer to have a global discussion.

Mr. Rondeau: Sure, I'll agree just to be co-operative.

Mr. Chairperson: Excellent spirit. It's therefore agreed the questioning for this department will follow in a global manner and all resolutions will be passed once the questioning has been completed. The floor is now open for questions.

Mr. Cullen: Just, kind of, some housekeeping items to take care of, first of all, in terms of the Estimates book. Has your department changed in any regard in terms of structure or is the department structure basically the same, and in lieu of that, has there been any change in numbers of staff?

Mr. Rondeau: The basic structure is the same and the same approximate number of staff, although, of course, in any case, there's some turnover of individuals. The basic structure remains the same.

Mr. Cullen: Would the minister be able to supply me a list of all political staff including their names, positions, and whether they are full time?

Mr. Rondeau: Sure. Would that be okay if I get it to you tomorrow or very shortly?

Mr. Cullen: Yes, that would be fair. There's no rush on this, and there are a couple of other issues I'd like to have, maybe, just added to that particular list. If we could get a list of all the staff in the minister's and deputy minister's office and the total number of staff currently employed within your department and the names of any staff that have been hired, I guess it would be the 2007-2008 year, up till the end of March.

Mr. Rondeau: Yes, we could provide that. What we'll do is we'll set up a package and get it to you in very due course.

Mr. Cullen: Thanks. Now if the minister can include whether those positions were hired through competition or appointment and any description of any position that's been reclassified within your department as well.

Mr. Rondeau: Sure.

Mr. Cullen: Thanks. I'm just going to continue down my list here. Again, it was a list of all the current vacant positions in there. *[interjection]*

Thank you. And if all the staff years are currently filled and, of course, with the vacant positions that might be there and any positions that have been relocated over the past year as well in terms of if there's been any movement around the province.

The other issue would be an update on any new departmental initiatives announced or undertaken, you know, in terms of news releases, that sort of thing. I know you talked about one of them in your opening comments there. If you could provide me a list of those new initiatives over the past year. Just a list or the press releases, whatever might be available for you. So, if the minister could undertake that, I'd certainly appreciate it.

Mr. Rondeau: We'll undertake that and put it together as a package and get it to you in a few days.

Mr. Cullen: Thank you very much. I do appreciate that.

Mr. Rondeau: That's if all the material's there. If there isn't one part of the material, we'll get as much as we can to you soon and then we'll follow it up with anything that's missing.

Mr. Cullen: Thank you very much for that. I do appreciate that.

* (11:20)

Just in terms of page 7 here of the Estimates book, just some general comments and questions pertaining to that. I guess what I notice here within the department year over year, we've had an increase in the department of 1.5 percent. I know the funding for this particular department hasn't increased significantly; it's been a fairly straight line for a number of years. My understanding is the provincial budget increased somewhere in the neighbourhood of 6 percent, and I'm just wondering why this particular department the funding has only increased 1.5 percent.

Mr. Rondeau: I think what we've been able to do is through efficiencies, through a lot of very good management by the deputy minister and department level and a lot of good work by the different people in the department, we've been able to achieve our objectives very effectively within the budget. What we have been able to do is manage very appropriately.

What we also have done is often been very creative in our department to bring together partnerships where we're not just the delivery mechanism. We work with private sector. We work with many partners in order to facilitate. So I had to agree with the opposition critic when he sort of says your job is to work within the bigger community in order to achieve your objectives. We agree with that.

So we're a partner. We work with other organizations, groups, different components of society to get our objectives done. If you look at pages 2 and 3 we've had a whole host of wonderful initiatives and good objectives that we've accomplished within good budget constraints.

So I lead it to good management at the deputy minister-departmental level and also good work at the staff level.

Mr. Cullen: Well, that's certainly a good political answer and my compliments to your staff in the department. But at the same time my view is this is a fairly important department within the entire government and my expectation was there would be more funding going into a department because we have—I think we're on the cusp of some great things happening here in the whole area of science and innovation, technology. Obviously, energy is just a huge undertaking here and across the world, and the mining thing is we know with some of the minerals, the value of these minerals have just skyrocketed. In my view it's a real opportunity for us as a province to move forward and try and capture some of those

things. I think we, as a government, should be prepared to allocate some very serious funds to making sure that we don't miss any opportunities.

Mr. Rondeau: When the honourable member mentions about where we're going, I actually think that it's been very positive in the mining industry. We've gone from somewhere around \$1 billion to \$3 billion with constant expenditures and I have to compliment the staff for that.

We also have some very interesting things that have been around for a long time. One of them is the Mining Community Reserve Fund. What this is is that over successive governments they've put about 3 percent of the mining reserves into a fund and then use it for economic development, for communities that are experiencing difficulty, et cetera.

By very judicious expenditures, by working with companies for exploration, what we've actually done is taken 3 percent of the mining revenues, part of that, to do the mineral exploration program, creating incentives for companies to do exploration. Lo and behold, when they explore they find things, when they find things, they dig mines and create jobs and create economic activity, which is exactly what we're doing. It's done on a very small budget, but very important because what it is its providing mining companies with up-front expenditures and money that they can spend on any operations, et cetera. So, with a very, very small percentage of incentive, we have worked with the federal flow-through shares to create a wonderful opportunity for mining companies to explore.

What I find interesting about it is, with the Fraser Institute, which isn't known for its left-leaning tendencies, actually rated us as the best jurisdiction to do mining a couple years ago, and we are still within the top five in the world. I think that's good. On a very small budget.

Then, if you look at the other things that we've done, and one of the things that I have to compliment the federal government on, is they actually set up an eco trust fund. Of that, there is \$54 million in a fund to do climate change activities, do environmental activities that are very progressive, and that's also been accessed to do some of these programs. That's a good use of a partnership. So it's not just the Province doing it. Some of it could be in co-operation with ecoTrust. When you are looking at this expenditure, there's other things that we can do and use to help facilitate economic development without just putting 100 percent of our cash up front.

Mr. Cullen: I thank the minister for his comments here. In reference to your comments about the mining side of it, that particular fund you talked about and that three percent that you're collecting. Where does that money go? Where does that go? Does it ever show up in your Estimates in this document?

Mr. Rondeau: The mining community reserve is part of the consolidated fund. What happens is three percent of the mining revenues, I understand, are put into a trust fund. The trust fund is then utilized to create programs that help mining communities, and mining in general. Some of it's used for the mineral exploration program and some is for prospectors assistance program.

What happens is the department will put a recommendation to government on a certain expenditure level and how it's spent. That comes out of the consolidated fund and is dispersed from there.

Mr. Cullen: So, then the provincial budget would have a line in there somewhere when we—keeping track of that particular fund. It would be an income and an expense on any given year. There must be a line in the provincial budget there somewhere.

Mr. Rondeau: I understand it shows up as part of the consolidated financial reports but not part of this Estimates.

Mr. Cullen: Just a note. In your Estimates book there's been a decrease in terms of the money allocated to the mineral resource sector and the information communication technologies area. It appears that there's been an increase in the money allocated to the climate change. That climate change, is that directly related to the introduction of Bill 15?

Mr. Rondeau: I understand from my deputy that the increase for the climate branch was the coal reduction program. What it's doing is providing incentives for people to come off coal before the coal tax takes place in a few years. What it is doing is providing incentives for people to proactively not use coal.

* (11:30)

There's also additional money for a waste recycling roundup. Last year, I believe, we had about 305,000 kilograms, about 30 semi-loads of electronic waste that was collected. We are planning to do that again this year. It was hugely successful. We'll do that again.

The MHRC, Manitoba Health Research Council, had an increase. It was quite a considerable increase, and what I'm happy about is that it's done. They sent us a report which we then acted upon and increased their research spending a great deal. I think it was one of the biggest increases in this department.

Mr. Cullen: One of your largest, I'll call it a department if you will, in terms of the Manitoba Information and Communication and Technologies, that's where a lot of the funding is allocated. Could you just give me a quick overview on that department and your expenditures within that area?

Mr. Rondeau: Part of the branch of the government is the ITs department for government. It's been centralized in this department. So the IT budget, which is about \$79 million, comprises all the people, the core services, the data management, the telephones, the desktops, the communications. All the services that would be normal communications or IT are consolidated. So, although we have about a \$79-million budget, in that about \$50 million is recoverable from other departments that, again, utilize the services. So we recover about \$50 million from other departments.

Mr. Cullen: Well, actually, that's where I was headed with my next question in terms of that \$50 million that's recoverable from other departments.

So that's in addition to some of the ones that are noted on page 7 here. I want to get into that in a minute.

Your department works with school divisions as well. Is that correct? Is part of the recovery there or is primarily that \$50 million coming from other departments then within government? I guess if the minister would have some indication of is there funding coming to the government from private sources as well, or is it strictly kind of an internal transfer within government departments?

Mr. Rondeau: It's internal within government from other departments. There is also a special operating agency, I believe, called MERLIN, which creates the supports to school divisions and that's been around for a while. What MERLIN does is sort of do the communications and supports and some of the filtering functions for school divisions. We are separate from that. It's a sort of a stand-alone operating agency. Whereas this part of the \$50 million is recoverable from departments for its services that we provide them.

Mr. Cullen: Okay. Thank you. On page 7, in terms of the reconciliation statement—[interjection] It all stems from this page 7, though, the discussion. Excuse the pun.

The transfer functions here; the Family Services and Housing and Department of Health, specifically allocate some money into the department. Can you explain that to me?

Mr. Rondeau: I understand that they're IT functions that were transferred from those specific departments.

Mr. Cullen: That's a pretty vague statement. Why would we have two departments here to the tune of \$700,000 and then, on the other page, we've got \$50 million transferred from various departments? That seems strange to me.

Mr. Rondeau: What happened was, most of the IT was transferred in the previous year from all departments into this department. I understand that these were two specific applications that were embedded in Family Services and Housing or Health that were transferred in this last current year. They were transferred over during the year; sometimes some of these programs that are caught creating direct support for direct departments, in these two cases took a little bit of awhile to get transferred centrally to the STEM Department.

Mr. Cullen: Sorry, are we talking hardware, software, or we talking bodies coming in?

Mr. Rondeau: They're application, maintenance costs, Mr. Chairperson, as well as any of the costs to run the system.

Mr. Cullen: Would the minister and his department be able to provide me a breakdown of the \$50 million that's being transferred into his department? Could you give me the breakdown from the other departments into this department?

Mr. Rondeau: Yes, we could do that. It would take a little time, but we can get that to you by department.

Mr. Cullen: I would appreciate that undertaking.

The other one you mentioned was the ecoTrust where we had a federal transfer in to the Province. I know there's a line on the provincial budget where that money has been allocated and then each year there's an allocation back to the respective departments.

What money has been transferred from that ecoTrust into this particular department?

Mr. Rondeau: Under the climate change program, we've been allocated \$13 million out of the ecoTrust money. This department will co-ordinate all of that money and all of the efforts on climate change, although the programs may be delivered in other departments.

What'll happen is, we help coordinate, help deliver, monitor and evaluate those types of programs so the \$13 million, although it might be spent in Ag or Transportation or other sectors, what we do is, we as a central body coordinate and work with the different departments and delivery agencies to make sure that \$13 million is spent wisely.

*(11:40)

Mr. Cullen: So that's \$13 million in this particular budget year that we're in. So, your department, I'm expecting you and your senior management then will actually be directing where that money goes. Is that how this is going to unfold?

Mr. Rondeau: The allocation is done on a program basis. What will happen, of the \$13 million, the departments, as well as the climate change group, would make a submission to Treasury Board. Then Treasury Board would approve it, move that forward. Then the department would work—my department, the Climate Change branch—would work with the individual program departments in rolling out specific programs to achieve the objectives as outlined by their first submission to Treasury Board and what they've said that they're going to do.

Mr. Cullen: Would the minister then, be able to provide me—I'm assuming there was some money taken out of that eco trust last year, in that provincial budget last year, and obviously, the recommendation probably came from his department. Could you provide me a breakdown for last fiscal year where that money was allocated, how much it was, and to which department and what area and for what programs that money was allocated?

Mr. Rondeau: We can provide you with a list of the programs and the money that was spent last year on the ecoTrust program. The one thing that I'd caution is that, although it was spent, \$54 million was set up approximately in the original eco trust, there's lots of programs out there. It sounded like a lot of money at the beginning, but when you're starting to talk about hybrid rebates, you're talking about east-west grid, you're talking energy efficiency, you're talking

working with agriculture, transportation, all sorts of things, it's a huge area. It's one that we as a province really believe is important. So we want to move forward. So that is a very, very important program.

I have to commend the staff for moving very expeditiously on some of the programs. One of the programs that the Climate Change branch has moved forward on is things like the hybrid rebate. I have to admit that from a very small number a couple of years ago, I'm pleased to see that there's almost our entire taxi fleet has gone hybrid. Lots of delivery cars have gone hybrid. So it's been a very, very good program. That's another one which is layered on to the federal program right now while the program still exists federally. So things are happening.

Mr. Cullen: While we're talking about the ecoTrust program, there was an announcement here; it was a joint announcement, federal-provincial back in March 2007, where they talk about Manitoba's share of being \$53.8 million. Manitoba talked about a few initiatives they were going to undertake. It was the low-income energy efficiency program which you alluded to earlier there, the creation of biodiesel plants in rural Manitoba which hopefully, we'll get into later today and the development of solar power and bio-gas and then dedicating part of the fund to Manitoba's portion of an east-west power grid. I hope to get into the solar power and the bio-gas and all that at a later time, but the whole concept of the east-west power grid, I'm assuming your department then make a recommendation to Cabinet how much money will be allocated to that particular fund as well. So, is there money set aside for the east-west power grid out of that eco trust fund?

Mr. Rondeau: What happens with a lot of these programs is that the ideas come forward. They're vetted with Treasury Board to see which projects will move forward and when and then they proceed. One of the ones that I'm pleased that has proceeded, that you mentioned, was the low-income energy efficiency. It was a very great project out of the Centennial neighbourhood. I'd be happy to share you some information on that, but each program you have to work with partners. You're not going to deliver it by yourself. You want to make sure that the programs make sense. Sometimes they take a little bit longer than others to work out.

In the case of a grid, it's something that Manitoba's been championing for a long time but there are issues. You have to make sure if you have a grid you have to have a place to sell the electricity to.

You have to have agreed sales. You have to have meetings to make sure that you can share loads or emergency loads, so there are a lot of discussions that have to happen. So, before you build a grid, there are lots of communications. There are communications with other provinces, other energy providers, and in the case of Ontario there are lots of companies that buy, distribute, manufacture and sell power so it's not a simple thing.

So, to get an agreement with a number of different provinces, to get an agreement with the federal government, to get agreement on route selection transmission is a tough, tough thing. Everyone knows you need it. Everyone doesn't want it. It's NIMBY, not in my back yard, and so it becomes a very, very tough thing, but we are champions of the east-west grid and will continue to push it.

Are we building it yet? No. Are we championing it? Do we talk to other jurisdictions? I'd like to say, yes, we are, and we'll continue to do so.

Mr. Cullen: Just in terms of the process moving forward with the \$13 million that's going to be put into programs this year, will your department look at it then on a program by program and then bring that forward to Cabinet? You don't have kind of a global plan as to how that \$13 million is going to be spent, and I'm kind of wondering, like you outline some initiatives back in this release here a year ago, and I guess my gut feeling would be there would be—you know, we're going to allocate so many dollars to each of these programs. Do you have a general estimate of where that money's going to be allocated at this point in time?

Mr. Rondeau: I would be pleased to provide you with the 2007-2008 list of the programs. They're very consistent with previous press releases. Again, there is going to be another set of programs that are very consistent to previous years being produced, but the biggest thing is when you're looking at the overall program, I don't know whether the member has a copy of the climate change plan, basically in it there's about approximately 60 things that we're moving out and moving forward on to do the climate change plan.

So there are no surprises here. We're looking forward on a very consistent long-range plan. We're looking forward on energy efficiency, new energy sources, savings in transportation, savings in agriculture. It's all in there, and I'm pleased to see that not only did we write the documents and put it

on the Web so anybody can make access to it, the interesting part about it is actually it's got a new section which most climate change plans don't have, and it's "What You Can Do." I thought the staff was very, very creative in saying what an individual can do. It takes the big plan, breaks it down by sector and then it has what actual individuals can do.

* (11:50)

All of that will be very consistent with what we've done in 2007-2008 and then 2008-2009. If you do a low-income energy efficiency, you start it off with a small enough group of houses. You grow it, you build the partnerships, you bring some businesses in, you grow it, work through the kinks, then you grow the program.

Same thing with the coal reduction strategy. You start it by bringing through the concept, starting the process, funding a few pilots, growing it and then you have the program. It's very, very consistent and you can basically draw a simple line from commitments to reductions in the greenhouse gases or energy efficiency or whatever, in the plan.

The other good thing about the plan, I also have to compliment the staff because they also put them on discs, so you have them on the Web, on discs or on paper. I specifically made mention that we didn't want tons of paper, but that might get me a point of privilege.

Mr. Cullen: I thank the minister for that. Certainly there are some members of the Legislature that do like to have their hard copies to work with. That's a fair comment, I'll leave it at that.

There's a transfer in here to the tune of \$126 million as well. Pardon me, that's an expense. Culture, Heritage and Tourism, that's an outgoing expense. Can you explain that line to me?

Mr. Rondeau: We transferred a function from our department over to Culture, Heritage and Tourism. I understand it was a position.

Mr. Cullen: I'm sorry, can you just clarify, you understand that was a position you transferred over?

Mr. Rondeau: It was the position and operating costs associated with a function.

Mr. Cullen: Would the minister be able to provide me that particular function?

Mr. Rondeau: Yes, we will put that with the whole package of other stuff that you've requested.

Mr. Cullen: Thank you. I appreciate that. The other thing I wanted to just have a look at, you have some special operating agencies here. I guess they're referenced in the book here under part 5. My question is a little more global in nature in that I understand those are basically stand-alone agencies, that it doesn't appear that the staff that is employed by those particular agencies aren't directly employed or appear under your department. If you can just clarify for me that that's in fact the case.

Mr. Rondeau: I understand it follows regular practice of having special operating agencies. They don't count as part of the government, total government. However, if you're counting the amount of people employed within the government, like the total amount of employees in government, they fall in there, but they don't fall within the specific count of the department. The staffing years.

Mr. Cullen: I thank the minister for that. In terms of the special operating agencies, they will have a separate board that they will be responsible to. Just to clarify the government's role here, I would assume then you would be responsible for having potentially somebody on that board and second of all, what about the funding side of it? What responsibility does the Province have in funding?

Mr. Rondeau: All of these special operating agencies have a board but we don't necessarily have a rep. In some cases, we don't have a rep; in other cases, we do have a government rep on the board.

The agencies, we have operating agreements from government which will specify not only the funding that government would provide but also performance from the agency, what we expect from them as far as their operations; the accountability is through the operating agreements.

Mr. Cullen: Is there one of those three that you have specifically have board representation on? Let me

just follow up there. Do you appoint members to those particular boards, or are there actually boards involved in any—maybe if you took the time just to go through the three operating agencies, just for clarification.

Mr. Rondeau: With your permission, Mr. Chairperson, I'll go through each one: MERLIN, which is the educational support; ITC Educational Support. I appoint the board members, but there's no one from government appointed on it. There'll be superintendents or technology people from the school divisions, et cetera.

Although we don't have a departmental person on the board, I appoint board members. In most cases they were recommended by their associations: the Teachers' Society, the technology group from the schools, Manitoba Association of School Superintendents. They'd all make recommendations and I appoint them.

As far as the board of Green Manitoba, we're just putting that board together. I understand recommendations are coming to me. Our plan is to have the ADM of climate and green initiatives chair it. Everyone else would be outside board appointments, representing different community groups and interests and concerns.

As far as ITC, same sort of system for the deputy minister in this case, Mr. Clarkson chairs it. All the others are outside people who are on the board; they are generally the business community. They are people who would use the services of the ITC Centre. That's how the boards work. In general, I get recommendations that would be for the boards that would make sense, like the ITC, people who'd use the services and that's who we appoint.

Mr. Chairperson: The time being 12 noon, I'm interrupting the proceedings. Committee of Supply will resume sitting this afternoon following the conclusion of routine proceedings.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 8, 2008

CONTENTS

ORDERS OF THE DAY		Resolution	
PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS		Res. 8–Pharmacare Deductible Increases	
		Mitchelson	1881
		Oswald	1883
Second Readings–Public Bills		Goertzen	1885
Bill 214–The Labour Relations		Jennissen	1887
Amendment Act (Information in		Rowat	1889
Employee's Language)		Howard	1891
Taillieu	1871	Committee of Supply	
Howard	1872	(Concurrent Sections)	
Faurschou	1874	Family Services and Housing	1892
Allan	1875	Manitoba Seniors and Healthy Aging	
Lamoureux	1877	Secretariat	1906
Reid	1879	Science, Technology, Energy and Mines	1915

The Legislative Assembly of Manitoba Debates and Proceedings
are also available on the Internet at the following address:

<http://www.gov.mb.ca/legislature/hansard/index.html>