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**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Sixth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, June 24, 1999

The House met at 10 a.m.

PRAYERS

House Business

Hon. Darren Praznik (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, a number of announcements with respect to House business, and I look to my colleague, the opposition House leader, for concurrence. We have been speaking this morning with respect to today.

Madam Speaker, first of all, I am going to ask if you could call for introduction for second reading, Bill 203, The Graffiti Control and Consequential Amendments Act, firstly, and then I will have more announcements after that.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

SECOND READINGS—PUBLIC BILLS

Bill 203—The Graffiti Control and Consequential Amendments Act

Mr. Gord Mackintosh (St. Johns): Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Selkirk (Mr. Dewar), that Bill 203, The Graffiti Control and Consequential Amendments Act; Loi sur la lutte contre les graffitis et modifications corrélatives, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion agreed to.

Mr. Mackintosh: Well, I thank the House for accommodating the second reading of this bill today. I would just push that one step further and ask that the House now adopt this legislation. It did not receive support from the government last year when we introduced this legislation. We think it is very important that it receive the support of all members of this House.

I will not have extensive comments on this bill at this time, given that very, very similar legislation was introduced last year, and on June 17, I made the speech on second reading in this Legislature.

Madam Speaker, even since last year, the problem and challenge of graffiti, particularly in the city of Winnipeg but not confined at all to the city of Winnipeg, I think has worsened. That is despite some efforts at the municipal level and some limited funding, I understand, from the province to assist in removal campaigns.

The problem has increased, I assume, Madam Speaker, not only because gang activity has been increasing but also because of the rise or the increased popularity among a very, very small number of youth in relation to tagging. It is now estimated that about 80 percent of the graffiti in the city of Winnipeg is characterized as tagging.

Now, there are several different types of graffiti. We have, and you will note from our comments last year, expressed grave concerns about the proliferation and the threat of gang-related graffiti. This kind of graffiti is not simply a threat to one's esthetic values, it is a threat to our ownership of our neighbourhoods, indeed our city. I know from speaking to victims of graffiti how they are put in fear when graffiti, particularly graffiti which indicates a particular gang shows up on their property. They are scared to remove it for fear of retaliation. They are then worried that crime is right at their doorstep. The fear of crime, it has often been said, is just as bad as crime itself, and when graffiti proliferates, Winnipeggers and other Manitobans have an increased fear of crime and certainly a loss of sense of control over their neighbourhood.

Well, it is time to take back control of our neighbourhoods. It is no longer good enough that we continue to treat graffiti as a mere mischief or as a very minor misdemeanour. I

think over the years this kind of wrongdoing has virtually been decriminalized.

Aside from the gang-related graffiti, there is then what is called tagging. The word "tag" stands for "tough artist group" and these individuals, for some reason, think that they are genuine artists and will go to great extent to mar the landscape and affect our sense of community well-being by using whatever kind of chemical or other application to put their tags around on private and public property.

Constable Shawn Matthews who is the resident expert, if you will, of the City of Winnipeg Police Service to deal with graffiti said the other evening at a meeting in Elmwood that at one time most of the graffiti was on public property, was on City of Winnipeg property, whether it be underpasses or perhaps signs, perhaps park buildings. But now that has extended to private property. It has even been found on many homes in certain neighbourhoods—I know of that myself—right on the sides, Madam Speaker, of people's homes. The latest now is a proliferation of tagging on vehicles.

Constable Matthews showed a video that was confiscated from a stolen automobile that was used by some taggers who were caught. Apparently, some of these taggers will videotape their own tagging and destruction and go home and play it to themselves. For some reason, they get some kind of a thrill out of that. Well, Constable Matthews showed this video at this meeting, and I think my reaction was the same as others watching. I could just feel my blood pressure rising. It was very maddening to see these young individuals spray painting private vehicles and buildings.

There are two other types of recognized graffiti, and one is, of course, the old "Kilroy was here" type of graffiti, and we all have to recognize, of course, that that was yesterday, although it is still out there. But we are dealing with a much more serious generation of graffiti now. So the sort of antisocial or political graffiti is still there, and we also are aware, sadly, Madam Speaker, of the heinous graffiti that expresses hate.

One of the first disappointments I had after my election was to discover that anti-Semitic hate graffiti done to a synagogue in the Interlake was treated by this government as mere mischief and not a hate crime. I did what I could to have the government change its view on that one, but they continued to deal with that as mere mischief, and I do not think that was the proper way to characterize that kind of graffiti.

No matter what kind of graffiti it is, Madam Speaker, it is unacceptable. What is commonly now known as a broken-windows theory, which is generally accepted around North America, holds that it is sometimes those crimes that we used to think were minor misdemeanours that have significant impact on our quality of life, our sense of well-being and indeed affect crime levels of a violent nature. If a business has a broken window which is not repaired, it is thought, soon other windows will be broken, soon there will be graffiti, soon there will be other criminal acts taking place in and around that building because the message has been given to individuals and to the community as a whole that that building is not within the control of anyone and no one cares. Well, it is important that our community take control of itself because we do care. Neighbourhoods do care. It is a matter of learning from experiences elsewhere.

* (1010)

Now, there are jurisdictions in North America where graffiti has been a challenge for quite a number of years, although I warn that the types of graffiti found in the city of Winnipeg now are to no lesser degree than that found in other major North American cities, including cities like Chicago and San Francisco, Madam Speaker. In Chicago, Mayor Daley introduced what has now become one of the most popular public programs of that city, and that was the Graffiti Blasters Program. In Chicago they look at graffiti removal no differently than they look at other public services, whether it be garbage pickup or lawn-cutting. They think it is important in Chicago that those victimized by graffiti not be required, as some jurisdictions have required, to remove that graffiti. Often it does not happen, often there is fear, and there is

always potential of retaliation or a sense of retaliation.

So Chicago has 23 or 24 crews that work each and every day in that city. They go out and they get approval and consent from property owners in most cases, and there are some exceptions, and they remove the graffiti as instantly as they can, knowing, of course, and this has been proven, that the quicker graffiti is removed, the greater the likelihood that graffiti will not show up again, and that is because, Madam Speaker, control has been exerted, because the person who put the graffiti there knows that their job will not remain, that it is futile.

In San Francisco there is a public service, an integral part of city government, where vans and trucks patrol the city with computerized colour matching equipment. They take this seriously. They take their city seriously. So one of the solutions is removal and quick removal. I know of locations in this city where the graffiti has remained, extensive hideous graffiti since 1996. I know that there are groups that have been working hard, whether it is Take Pride Winnipeg, and I know the City of Winnipeg Police Service, with their TAG program, which stands for Together Against Graffiti—take back that word—offers some promise. I know that BIZes and other residents' associations have done what they can to remove or cover up graffiti, but we still do not have a comprehensive public program to deal with this threat, and that is regrettable.

This is not about the Pan Am Games, because I have heard that from other associations: let us deal with graffiti because there are people coming to town; we want to look good. This is not about just looking good. This is about doing what is right. This is about acting for citizens, for neighbourhoods, for each and every individual resident of this province.

So, Madam Speaker, we want this province and this government to get serious about funding municipal programs. Second of all, it is important though to stop this in the first place, and that is why we have introduced today this deterrent legislation. This is Canada's first known provincial law that has been introduced

to require the immediate removal or cover-up of graffiti by the wrongdoer, a minimum fine of \$500, mandatory restitution, a minimum 50 hours of community service and suspension of driver licences. This should be the deterrent so that would-be graffiti artists will think twice whether that one moment of gratification, or whatever they get out of this, is really worth it when this kind of legislation is on the books.

Municipal governments have passed legislation like this one; it is high time a provincial government did. The Criminal Code says nothing about graffiti. I asked the members opposite to support this legislation. They have had plenty of time to look at it, and if there are certain problems, if they think it is too harsh in some areas, if they do not think in some wording that it is good enough, let us hear their amendments. But let us work together; let us resolve this problem. I ask for the government's help this time to get this legislation through. Unfortunately, they did not help last year; will they help this year? Thank you.

Mr. Edward Helwer (Gimli): I move, seconded by the member for Gladstone (Mr. Rocan), that debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

House Business

Hon. Darren Praznik (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, in discussions with the opposition House leader, I would ask if you could then proceed, rather than deal with Private Members' Business at this immediate moment, to go through the Order Paper and call government bills that are in the debate on second reading stage in order, please. Some of the bills, there may be a willingness to pass through; others, the opposition may not want to speak to. So I will look to their guidance.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Bill 3—The Fatality Inquiries Amendment Act

Madam Speaker: To proceed now with adjourned debate on second readings, on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Justice (Mr. Toews), Bill 3, The Fatality

Inquiries Amendment Act (Loi modifiant la Loi sur les enquêtes médico-légales), standing in the name of the honourable member for Osborne (Ms. McGifford).

Is there leave to permit the bill to remain standing? [interjection] I know, but do you want it to remain standing? I need to clarify that first.

An Honourable Member: No.

Madam Speaker: No. Leave has been denied.

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Madam Speaker, I am going to be extremely brief on this bill and just say that it gives the Chief Medical Examiner authority to summarize reports on the deaths of children in care in the examiner's annual report. For those of you who may have read these reports, they consist almost entirely of statistics and give very little explanation as to why individuals have died.

Of course, the category that I am most interested in as the Family Services critic are children who die in the care of a Child and Family Services agency. We know that, regrettably, there are still children who are dying in the care of an agency or who have been in the care of an agency within the previous two years, which I believe is the definition that is used. I think the only way that we can demand that improvements be made in the way that service is provided to children in care is if we know the causes of why they died in care. Sometimes we find out because sometimes a judge conducts an inquest. So, for example, when a two-and-a-half-year-old died in a foster home several years ago there was a judicial inquest, and the results of the judge's report were made public in March of this year. So his recommendations were made public, but this is not always the case. So we think that this is an important amendment because it means that more information will be available.

* (1020)

Our only concern about this bill, which I think has been taken care of, is that it is important to guarantee the confidentiality of children and families who are involved. As far as I know, no names will be released, and I

presume that enough of the circumstances will be left out that no one could identify the individuals who are involved.

So with those few remarks, we are prepared to pass this to committee.

Madam Speaker: Is the House ready for the question? The question before the House is second reading Bill 3, The Fatality Inquiries Amendment Act. Is it the will of the House to adopt the motion?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Madam Speaker: Agreed? Agreed and so ordered.

Bill 7—The Public Schools Amendment Act

Madam Speaker: To resume adjourned debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Education and Training (Mr. McCrae), Bill 7, The Public Schools Amendment Act (Loi modifiant la Loi sur les écoles publiques), standing in the name of the honourable member for Osborne (Ms. McGifford).

Is there leave to permit the bill to remain standing?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Madam Speaker: No? Leave has been denied.

Ms. Jean Friesen (Wolseley): Madam Speaker, this bill has two purposes. The first is to require school divisions to ask permission of the minister before renting or renovating buildings for the purposes of education. I have discussed this with representatives of school divisions, and I understand that there are some questions about this that will be raised at committee.

I believe that some school divisions in particular are concerned about the need for flexibility for short courses for some schools, for temporary accommodations that might be required in some divisions at some time. I believe that they have spoken to the minister, and I believe that they are anticipating that there will be regulations drafted or amendments to the

bill that will be made by the minister to accommodate this need for flexibility.

So we look forward at committee, Madam Speaker, to discussing that with the minister and to ensuring that the flexibility that the school divisions require as well as the responsibility that the government has for the financing of public buildings, that those two requirements can be accommodated in this legislation.

Secondly, Madam Speaker, this bill removes the requirement from school divisions to require a certificate at Grade 1 from each child to testify to whether or not they have been vaccinated. We have some concerns about this that we would like to discuss further at committee, and I want to put them on the record now. I am sure that the minister is listening to this, and they are quite specific. I have made a number of inquiries in schools, with the Department of Health, as well as the minister's own department, and partly I think because the appropriate people were not available within the department, I have not been able to get satisfactory answers. So I want to be very specific with the minister on this and to ensure that we can have the answers on the record and the discussion on the record at the committee.

Madam Speaker, the government believes in this bill that the Department of Health has a sufficient record known as MIMS of the vaccination records of children across the province. They believe that the existence of that record enables them to remove this requirement from presenting certificates at Grade 1. We do not have any concerns about the thoroughness of MIMS. That is not the issue.

The issue that we do face, I think, is the need for some assurance that the school principal or the school division or the accountable authority, and as I read the existing Public School Act, it is the school division which is responsible for this. We need to know how well they know who is vaccinated and who is not. We are concerned about the possible outbreak, as there has been recently, well, not this year but certainly in the recent past, of measles. As the legislation stands now, a school principal would know who in his school was vaccinated and who was not. If you remove this requirement and

you place all the responsibility on MIMS, I think we need assurance that there is a speedy mechanism, and one that is not a charge upon the school division, that the principal will know who is vaccinated and who is not, or the school division will know. It seems to me, and I would need some further information from the Department of Health on this, that a principal would want to know who is not vaccinated in the event of an outbreak, because you would need not only to protect the child but you would in the interests of public health need to ensure that the disease does not spread. When you have people who are not vaccinated, that is a host for the disease and it does spread.

So there are two reasons for that. So how does the principal know who is vaccinated and who is not? How do they protect the children in their care? If the principal has to apply to MIMS, has to take a class list, a school list to MIMS, how long is that going to take to get the information back? Is there a cost for that information, and who is the responsible authority for requesting that information? Now we know that there is obviously a continuing co-operation between public health officials and the Department of Education and between public health officials and the schools within their division. I could not ascertain from either the Department of Health or the Department of Education the specific protocols that exist on this or that will be put in place to deal with the removal of these certificates.

So I think we need some discussion of that, we need to have that on the record, and we need to have the appropriate people there. I would suggest to the Minister of Education (Mr. McCrae) that it would be helpful if these answers are not available within the Department of Education to have somebody from the Department of Health at the committee meeting who can give us that kind of assurance so that we can get the record straight on this. So with those concerns, Madam Speaker, we are prepared to pass this to committee.

Madam Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Madam Speaker: The question before the House is second reading Bill 7, The Public Schools Amendment Act. Is it the will of the House to adopt the motion?

An Honourable Member: Agreed.

Madam Speaker: Agreed? Agreed and so ordered.

Bill 8—The Ozone Depleting Substances Amendment Act

Madam Speaker: To resume adjourned debate on second reading on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Environment (Mrs. McIntosh), Bill 8, The Ozone Depleting Substances Amendment Act (Loi modifiant la Loi sur les substances appauvrissant la couche d'ozone), standing in the name of the honourable member for Selkirk.

Mr. Gregory Dewar (Selkirk): I will be the only member on this side of the House to speak to this bill. [interjection] Not necessarily, my colleague from The Maples says. That is great, but I will be urging support of this legislation. Bill 8 represents this province's fulfilment on its obligation associated with an agreement to a strategy for phasing out ozone depleting substances brokered by the Canadian Council of Ministers of Environment. In fact, Madam Speaker, and I will give the government credit, Manitoba is one of the few provinces to proceed with the on-time implementation of the council's action plan. We would however encourage the government to go beyond the minimum goals suggested in the action plan, and I will offer some suggestions to the government.

In order to supplement the existing legislation, the government should also consider implementing a timetable for the disposal of existing CFCs. While a sunset schedule has been agreed to for the disposal of halons no such schedule has been agreed to for CFCs. We would encourage the government to consult with stakeholders and consider the establishment of a firm date to achieve this worthwhile goal.

Now that opportunities to sell halons in the United States have not materialized, the province should begin planning for the permanent dis-

posal of halons. It is particularly important that taxpayers not be faced with the burden of paying exclusively for this disposal.

Finally, Manitoba Hydro, they have established a plan to phase out halons largely through changes to its computer systems. Hydro and the federal Department of Defence are two government departments to act in this regard, and we applaud this initiative. We would, however, appreciate the government of Manitoba showing some leadership by directing other government departments and Crown corporations towards a similar policy.

So, Madam Speaker, with those few words we look forward to moving this bill into committee stage and listening to Manitobans. Thank you.

Mr. Gary Kowalski (The Maples): Madam Speaker, we are happy to see this bill come forward, and we are pleased to see it going to committee where we are hoping that there will be public support for this bill. We welcome it to go forward to committee hearings.

* (1030)

Madam Speaker: Is the House ready for the question? The question before the House is second reading Bill 8, The Ozone Depleting Substances Amendment Act. Is it the will of the House to adopt the motion?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Madam Speaker: Agreed and so ordered.

Bill 9—The Securities Amendment and Commodity Futures and Consequential Amendments Amendment Act

Madam Speaker: To resume second reading debate, on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mrs. Render), Bill 9, The Securities Amendment and Commodity Futures and Consequential Amendments Amendment Act (Loi modifiant la Loi sur les valeurs mobilières et la Loi sur les contrats à terme de marchandises et apportant des modifications corrélatives),

standing in the name of the honourable member for Flin Flon (Mr. Jennissen).

Is there leave to permit the bill to remain standing? No? Leave has been denied.

Mr. Tim Sale (Crescentwood): Madam Speaker, the purpose of this bill is very simple. It is to change the refund procedures to make them more equitable. The intention is to create the Securities Commission as a special operating agency. This seems to us to be appropriate and given that those who are seeking approvals from the Securities Commission ought to be paying the costs of what it is they are seeking in terms of their corporate status either as an initial offering, IPO, or some other form of activity of the Securities Commission.

So this legislation should be passed to committee, and we have indicated that we will be supporting it.

Mr. Gary Kowalski (The Maples): I would echo the words of the member for Crescentwood. We are pleased to see it going to committee, and look forward to any public input into this bill.

Madam Speaker: Is the House ready for the question? The question before the House is second reading Bill 9, The Securities Amendment and Commodity Futures and Consequential Amendments Amendment Act. Is it the will of the House to adopt the motion?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Madam Speaker: Agreed. Agreed and so ordered.

Bill 14—The Amusements Amendment Act

Madam Speaker: To resume adjourned debate on the second reading of the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship (Mrs. Vodrey), Bill 14, The Amusements Amendment Act (Loi modifiant la Loi sur les divertissements), standing in the name of the honourable member for Transcona (Mr. Reid).

Is there leave to permit the bill to remain standing?

Some Honourable Members: Leave.

Madam Speaker: Leave. Leave has been granted.

Bill 15—The Cemeteries Amendment Act

Madam Speaker: To resume adjourned debate on second reading, on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mrs. Render), Bill 15, The Cemeteries Amendment Act (Loi modifiant la Loi sur les cimetières), standing in the name of the honourable member for Wellington (Ms. Barrett).

Is there leave to permit the bill to remain standing?

Some Honourable Members: No.

Madam Speaker: No. Leave has been denied.

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Madam Speaker, I would like to speak on this bill because I received phone calls, as did many other members of the Legislature, about the problems at Elmwood Cemetery. I am probably one of the few people here who can say I spend a lot of time in cemeteries. Above ground, I would like to point out. In fact, I could probably regale members with stories, but it would probably be better that I not do that on the record.

However, in a more serious vein, I have actually visited Elmwood Cemetery a number of times, both as a clergy person conducting funerals or internments and also to look for the marker or the tombstone for one of my late, great uncles, whose name was Dr. Angus Fraser. He was the first doctor at the Workers Compensation Board of Manitoba, I believe from about 1919 to 1929, and he actually wrote a book called Trauma, Disease, Compensation, which I requested from the Legislative Library, and they found me one at the medical library at the University of Alberta. So I have a personal connection, and I am still looking, actually, for his grave marker and hope some day to find it.

But, of course, the people who were phoning us as members of the Legislature were very

concerned about the lack of a perpetual care fund for the cemetery, the fact that the owner was no longer paying taxes and no longer maintaining the cemetery, and people were very upset about that, as I guess the former minister is well aware. I am sure he got lots of phone calls, too. There were also very serious concerns about gravesites that were in danger because they were between one of the driveways and the Red River, and, in fact, I believe, at the time of the flood of the century some of those were moved and interred at other sites, and that may still be an ongoing concern because of erosion of the riverbank.

I have talked to Mr. Norrie who I guess volunteered a lot of his time to organize the Friends of Elmwood Cemetery, and I believe it is their hope that they can set up a perpetual care fund that is substantial enough that the interest would be used to maintain this cemetery in perpetuity. I am sure that the former Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs has much more understanding of this issue than I do. I know he is trying to give me some hints here, but I cannot talk and listen to him at the same time. We certainly hope that Mr. Norrie's efforts are successful. That would be reassuring to many people. I do not really know if this bill takes care of that, but I am hoping that it does.

Some of the people who spoke to me were quite upset, and I think understandably so, that an individual could own two cemeteries, make a profit from one and not even pay the taxes on the other. I do not think this is a party position, but it always amazed me why the government did not just take over both cemeteries and use the profits from one to subsidize the other. I know this government would not want to go there because they would not want to interfere with a private enterprise, but it does seem quite amazing that an owner of two cemeteries could extract a profit from one and do absolutely nothing about the other, including not even paying their taxes, and face no repercussions from the government or anyone else.

In fact, the most recent phone call I got about Elmwood Cemetery was pointing out that the house where the office is on Hespeler is for sale, and the allegation that was made to me was that this was for sale by the owner. Now, I do not know if that is true or not. I see the minister

shaking his head so I trust that that is not the case. I am not sure where the office is going to be. I hope that people will still find that they can access the records and that sort of thing in a timely fashion.

So we are pleased to see this bill, especially if it takes care of the problems at Elmwood Cemetery, and I hope that that is why the minister responsible brought it in. We will certainly find out the details when it goes to committee, and we will have a chance to ask questions and get them answered there. We can always put more remarks on the record at third reading. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Gary Kowalski (The Maples): Madam Speaker, I, too, would like to speak to this bill. You know, growing up in the Elmwood area, I have been to Elmwood Cemetery a number of times. I know that there has been a group—I know that there is more than one individual, but I am just aware of the former Mayor Bill Norrie who has been very active in the saving of Elmwood Cemetery.

So I think this bill is a welcome bill. We look forward to it moving through to committee and passing it through third reading.

Madam Speaker: Is the House ready for the question? The question before the House is second reading, Bill 15, The Cemeteries Amendment Act. Is it the will of the House to adopt the motion? Agreed?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed,

Madam Speaker: Agreed and so ordered.

Bill 16—The Court of Queen's Bench Small Claims Practices Amendment and Parental Responsibility Amendment Act

Madam Speaker: To resume adjourned debate on second reading, on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Justice (Mr. Toews), Bill 16, The Court of Queen's Bench Small Claims Practices Amendment and Parental Responsibility Amendment Act (Loi modifiant la Loi sur le recouvrement des petites créances à la Cour du Banc de la Reine et la Loi sur la responsabilité parentale), standing in the name of

the honourable member for Wellington (Ms. Barrett).

Is there leave to permit the bill to remain standing?

An Honourable Member: No.

Madam Speaker: No? Leave has been denied.

Mr. Steve Ashton (Thompson): Bill 16 is a straightforward bill and changes a number of the items that were brought in last year in terms of the amounts in terms of The Small Claims Act and includes amendments to The Parental Responsibility Act that deal with the amount of liability. It is basically dealing with the financial numbers. It is not a significant bill in terms of principle. Those bills were already dealt with. So we are prepared to see this through to committee.

* (1040)

Mr. Gary Kowalski (The Maples): The raising of the limits from \$5,000 to \$7,000 is due, but we would look forward to the possibility that this could be put in regulations later so that we would not have to keep amending it every time we have inflationary moves in this country.

We look forward to it moving to committee and listening to the public input.

Madam Speaker: Is the House ready for the question? The question before the House is second reading Bill 16, The Court of Queen's Bench Small Claims Practices Amendment and Parental Responsibility Amendment Act.

Is it the will of the House to adopt the motion?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Madam Speaker: Agreed and so ordered.

Bill 19—The Agricultural Credit Corporation Act

Madam Speaker: To resume adjourned debate on the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Enns), Bill 19, The

Agricultural Credit Corporation Act (Loi sur la Société du crédit agricole), standing in the name of the honourable member for Thompson (Mr. Ashton).

Mr. Steve Ashton (Thompson): Madam Speaker, I am deferring to our Agriculture critic on this who is definitely a voice for agriculture in this province. I fully agree with whatever she has to say on this bill.

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): Madam Speaker, the Agricultural Credit Corporation, the amendments to this act are basically house-keeping and modernization of the act. The initial plan was simply to change the regulations, but attempts to do this led to the conclusion that it would be easier to change the act as a whole. There are minor changes that are updating definitions and modernizing the phrases, but the major change to the bill adds flexibility to MACC in order to meet the changes to the agriculture economy today.

Madam Speaker, the Agricultural Credit Corporation plays a very important role in the farming economy, and I believe that role could be broadened. There are many ways that the corporation could be used to meet the financial needs of the farming community. One of our biggest concerns is the heavy debt load that farmers have to carry, particularly young farmers as they look to carry on the agriculture industry, because our farming population is an aging population, and many farmers are looking to retire and looking to pass the farm on to children or to sell it to other young people in the community who might want to take over. This requires very large debt loads to be carried, and the MACC plays a very important role in that.

As farmers look at different ways to survive in this economy as a result of changes that federal governments have made, such as the abandonment of the Crow and changes to pooling and other things that we have had, there is tremendous pressure on farm families. There is a role for MACC to play, and it must be broadened out. So this legislation will allow for that.

MACC also had an important role to play that this government has changed. MACC used

to hold a large amount of land that was leased out to farmers. This reduced their burden of having to borrow large amounts of money, but since this government has come into power the number of long-term leases has been tremendously reduced and the amount of land controlled by MACC has also been reduced. The move to sell this land during times of low commodity prices has put a lot of pressure on farmers. This is not addressed in this piece of legislation, Madam Speaker, but it is a concern and a change that this government made that has put pressure on farmers.

Madam Speaker, farmers across the province and particularly in the southwest of the province are under a tremendous amount of pressure and are looking to hear from all members of the Legislature as to how they are going to be supported. We have raised the issue many times about the serious financial crisis that farmers are in, and we look for all members of this House to recognize that it is a very important issue and that we cannot afford to lose any more farmers in this province. The farm population continues to decline, and I think when the last census was taken we see that we have lost another 5 percent of our farmers. We cannot afford to lose any more farmers, so I would think we have to take every step possible to ensure that they have the supports and the financial supports to help them through.

We look to the federal government to provide the same kinds of supports for farmers as were provided during the Red River flood, but that does not look like it is going to happen. The announcements that we heard recently from the federal government to change AIDA and NISA will not help many of our young farmers. These young farmers are going to have to turn to MACC to look for additional support. Many of these people who carry loans with MACC are going to be looking for ways to extend their loans or have their interest payments deferred.

MACC also played an important role during the Red River flood, and they made loans to farmers in that area to offer floodproofing. There is that possibility for those farmers in the southwestern part of the province who are facing very different circumstances because they do not have to floodproof their land. They are going to

be in serious financial situations that they are going to have to look towards MACC, and that is a tool that the government will have to look at being creative with. They were able to be creative through the floodproofing program in the Red River Valley. We will have to look at ways that we can be creative to help the farmers in the western part of the province because unfortunately our federal government does not want to help them out.

The proposals put forward by the federal government to make changes to AIDA and to advance money out of NISA and speed up the process of getting some money will help some farmers, but we know that there are a lot of farmers who do not qualify for AIDA. The criteria to qualify for that program have been highly criticized and should be criticized because as the program is developed, it ends up being a bit of puffery for the federal government where they can say they have put all this money into agriculture but in fact very little is going to be accessed. The federal government also said that they are going to change NISA and allow people to take out money without a penalty, but if you look at the amount of money in NISA that many of these farmers have, if you have got no money in NISA then that particular announcement is no advantage for the producers either.

Madam Speaker, the Manitoba Agricultural Credit Corporation has played a very important role in the farming economy. We had hoped that we would not have to draw on it to help farmers out, but the credit corporation is going to have to look at how they can help these farmers so that we do not have foreclosures and do not lose more people from the economy. We think about the Agricultural Credit Corporation just helping farmers, and some people will question why we have that, but if you look at the impact of agriculture on the economy of this province, you see that it is very important.

You see what is happening in the southwest part of the province now when we have a year where there is going to be a million acres that are going to go unseeded. We hear what business people are saying. We hear what farm machinery dealers are saying. They are basically going to be put out of business. Madam Speaker, I think it is very important that we all

work together, to recognize this crisis and address it. Certainly, the federal government should recognize that they have a much bigger role to play in this situation than they have agreed to, but without that support we are going to have to look at other options. Changes made to The Agricultural Credit Corporation Act will allow the corporation to move quickly when there is a need to lend money when farmers look at different ways to diversify.

So we support the government on this legislation and hope that we will continue to see the Agricultural Credit Corporation play a very important role in the farming community. I hope that all members of this House will recognize the important role that agriculture plays in this province and that we can join together, and rather than play politics as some people say, work together to ensure that we save this farming community and put the supports— [interjection] Let us take, as my colleague says, a nonpartisan approach to this and stand up for Manitobans and ensure that they are treated as other provinces are treated when they have a disaster, because what we are facing in Manitoba, particularly in the southwestern part of the province—and I have to say, Madam Speaker, that there are other problems in other parts of the province where there have been some drowning out of crops and the inability to seed. But certainly, the real crisis is in the southwestern part of the province.

We have to stand united and stand up as Manitobans to ensure that we do not lose the farming community, we do not lose the ability to produce a crop in the southwest part of the province and take a huge amount of money out of the economy. Those people who cannot grow a crop this year are going to suffer for many years. We are going to lose some of them. Hopefully, we will not lose too many. MACC is going to have to play a role in helping them through. The province is going to have to play a role. The federal government is going to have to play a role, and I hope that all of us can stand together to ensure that that happens.

* (1050)

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, for allowing me the

privilege of putting a few comments on record on Bill 19, The Agricultural Credit Corporation Act. I believe that this act is needed, and it is really an update and modernization of our ability to be able to flow money in various different ways to not only encourage and enhance agricultural expansion but indeed secondary processing and those kinds of initiatives.

I congratulate the minister for having had the wisdom to charge his department with the responsibility and encouraging them to rewrite the act in such a manner that it will be a much more acceptable and broader act and bring the act into the modern era. I think that this is clearly an indication of our government's intention to see the further diversification of agriculture in the immediate sense. I think for that reason, there is some urgency in passing this bill.

I would like to, however, also put some comments on record if you would allow me, Madam Speaker, in regard to this act and how it can be used to in fact underpin some of the needs out in western and eastern Manitoba, especially those areas that have had very difficult times seeding, putting crops in the ground, and bringing into being a flow of revenue or a flow of dollars that might otherwise not be possible.

It is very clear that when the 1997 flood took place in the Red River Valley, when the Liberals in Ottawa decided to call an election during the middle of the flood, it was their intention to just bail out the flood and many of the residents in the flood or making it appear that they were pumping huge amounts of dollars into the Red River Valley, almost bringing it in by the bucketload. The Custom Seeding Program was announced. The JERI program was announced. The early start program was announced, although I should tell you, Madam Speaker, that the early start program, virtually all the money had to be paid back later on although the federal Liberals did not tell the people in the valley that that would have to happen, but it was. The JERI program: much of those kinds of funds were initially flowed, then later on recalculated and put into a different area.

I think that this bill will clearly demonstrate our will that we can get involved in the disaster

that is occurring now in many parts of Manitoba not being allowed to seed. The flood assistance program, the DFA program, will kick in for those properties that are not allowed to flood. However, many of those people that will rebuild their properties will need to be able to borrow money to assist them to rebuild, because only a portion of the money under the federal act, only a portion of the losses can be reclaimed and recovered, and therefore it is significant that this new MACC act can be brought into being.

It is interesting to note that the federal government has said NISA should be used as a disaster assistance program in western Manitoba. It is significant to note that they say AIDA can be brought in to become a disaster assistance program. These two programs were never, ever designed to become disaster relief programs. They cannot function that way. It is technically impossible. Number one, the calculations used to determine what amount of money a producer can put into a NISA fund is done by net income. If there is no net income, which normally most young farmers do not have in the first three or four or five or 10 years of operation, it does not allow them to put any money into NISA so therefore no NISA fund. How can those young people then be able to draw from a fund that is non-existent?

Secondly, AIDA is the same kind of a situation whereby farmers in the southwest area over the last couple of years have received decreasing commodity prices. They have suffered drought, therefore a lesser crop, and so their incomes are down at a very low level. To kick in AIDA over a low level and demand a 70 percent drop in return before that kicks in means that they are in a minus zero position before any AIDA can be drawn. What is minus zero from zero calculate to, Madam Speaker? Zero. They will not get any money out of it, many of these people. Therefore, it is absolutely imperative that we give early passage to this bill to allow our Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Enns) to announce that we in fact do have a vehicle where they could at least borrow money from to be able to help them through a process that I believe is sadly needed not only in western Manitoba but indeed in many other parts of Manitoba where we have had pockets of moisture levels that we have never experienced before in our lives.

I think it is absolutely disastrous that the federal Minister of Agriculture dared to come to Manitoba and southeast Saskatchewan, fly over the area and then comes along and says, yes, we must support these people, we will support them, and then comes back a week and a half later and says, well, the only thing we have for you is NISA and AIDA. I think it is a clear demonstration that the Liberal administration in Ottawa does not recognize that there is another part of Canada east or west of Ontario. I think it is absolutely imperative that we as a government impress upon the federal politicians their responsibility to the farm community in western Canada, the same as they did to the ice storm in Quebec, the same as they did to the disaster in the Red River Valley. These people in the rest of Manitoba have seen a drowning out of their ability to generate an income; in some cases, they will not even have enough pasture left to feed their cattle, their livestock.

I think, Madam Speaker, that it is absolutely imperative that our government and everybody in this Legislature, maybe through the media, make sure that Ottawa is aware of their responsibility and their negation of their responsibility. That is why I support early passage of this bill that would allow us at least to be able to borrow money for those people that have not an income-generating capacity for this year.

Madam Speaker: Is the House ready for the question? The question before the House is second reading of Bill 19, The Agricultural Credit Corporation Act. Is it the will of the House to adopt the motion? Agreed?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Madam Speaker: Agreed and so ordered.

House Business

Hon. Darren Praznik (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, I wish to interrupt the call of the bills. It was agreement of the House leaders that we would use one hour for as many bills as we could get through, so we will carry on with second readings of bills at a later date.

* (1100)

At this particular time, Madam Speaker, I will be seeking leave with respect to Private Members' Business. Just by way of background, given the very critical situation in the southwestern part of our province, some discussions have been entered into by members in all three parties, very informally, to see if there would be a willingness of the House to deal on a nonpartisan basis, because we recognize there are a variety of partisan issues involved, but in a nonpartisan basis with a resolution that this House could adopt with respect to the support of aid programs to our very beleaguered farm community in southwestern Manitoba.

The member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Downey), who represents the bulk of the area affected, worked with his colleague the critic from the official opposition the member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk), and kept informed representatives of the Liberal Party in this Legislature, to develop a resolution that could potentially be adopted by this House.

I have had a copy of the resolution distributed. I believe there is a friendly amendment that will be moved because, as one appreciates, this has been coming together in the last few days. This resolution is to be moved by the member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Downey) and, I understand, seconded by the member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk) in part of the spirit of nonpartisan co-operation.

I also want, at this time, to indicate that we have attempted to keep members of all parties represented informed. We appreciate that there are different concerns that different groups have.

At this time, Madam Speaker, because this resolution is not on the Order Paper and I believe we have a copy that has now been provided to the Clerk, we would ask if there is the required unanimous consent of this Assembly to bring this resolution today for consideration. I would add, it would also be our intention, if there is, to ask for leave to limit the speaking time to five minutes per member, so that many members can speak to it, and agreement to bring it to a vote at five minutes to 12. So the idea is not just to debate it, but to ensure that the Legislature has a chance to pass judgment on it as part of

Manitoba's appeal for support for our farm community in the southwest.

So the first leave I ask: is there unanimous consent of this House in order to bring this resolution today? I think the opposition House leader would like to talk on it.

Mr. Steve Ashton (Opposition House Leader): Madam Speaker, I just want to indicate that our caucus is not only prepared to give leave and have this matter dealt with, but, more importantly, to get this resolution passed. We feel there are times when you have to put partisan differences aside and when there is a crisis in southwest Manitoba.

I know many people out there personally. They are looking to us, as members of the Legislature, to act in a nonpartisan way on this and to represent their interests, whether it be the federal government or here provincially. So we are prepared to give leave, and, more importantly, we want this resolution passed as soon as possible to speak up on behalf of the farmers in southwest Manitoba.

Mr. Gary Kowalski (The Maples): Madam Speaker, as instructed by the Liberal Leader, Jon Gerrard, I am not prepared to give leave.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. For clarification, I will ask the question. Is there unanimous consent of the House to proceed with this resolution, the private member's resolution which is not on the Order Paper, Farm crisis?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

An Honourable Member: No.

Madam Speaker: Yes? No? No. Leave has been denied.

Mr. Praznik: Madam Speaker, in fairness to our colleague from The Maples, whom I know we have spoken to about this and who did want to ensure—I want to put this on the record. In the discussions that I did have with him, he did want to ensure that this resolution was one that was

not an attack on the federal Liberal Party, which I respect.

We did share information with him, and we do understand from his comment that as we all have Leaders and have to take instruction from them from time to time, that the member is denying leave on the basis of very clear instruction from Dr. Jon Gerrard, who is not a member of this House, to deny leave for this Legislature to debate and vote on a resolution in support of that farm crisis in southwestern Manitoba. I do want to personally offer my sympathy to the member. I appreciate the dilemma in which he has been placed by the Leader of the Liberal Party.

Madam Speaker, having said that, I would indicate now that we would like to move to Committee of Supply to deal with Estimates. In the Chamber, I would ask for leave to call the Department of Agriculture. The Department of Family Services will continue in the room in which it is meeting. I would also ask leave for this morning to have the department of Seniors, or the Seniors Directorate, to be considered in the vacant committee room, in the other committee room.

* * *

Madam Speaker: We will now proceed back to Orders of the Day. I will seek leave, first of all, to change the sequence for the respective departments in Committee of Supply. Is there leave of the House to proceed with the Estimates for the Department of Agriculture in the Chamber? [agreed]

*(1110)

Is there leave of the House to consider the Estimates for the department of Seniors in Room 255? [agreed]

The Estimates of the Department of Family Services will also sit concurrently, as previously scheduled, in Room 254.

Mr. Praznik: Madam Speaker, I would move, seconded by the honourable Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Enns), that Madam Speaker do now leave the Chair and that this House resolve

itself into a committee to consider of the Supply to be granted to Her Majesty.

Madam Speaker, in doing so, I would also ask for approval of the House that we will be able to move a similar motion this afternoon with respect to this afternoon's activity as well.

So before moving the motion, I would also ask for leave to be able to move the same motion later this afternoon, which I understand does require the unanimous consent of the House.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I will not be posing that question. The honourable government House leader needs leave at the appropriate time he wishes to make that change.

It has been moved by the honourable government House leader, seconded by the honourable Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Enns), that Madam Speaker do now leave the Chair and the House resolve itself into a committee to consider of the Supply to be granted to Her Majesty.

Motion agreed to.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

FAMILY SERVICES

Mr. Chairperson (Gerry McAlpine): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This morning this section of the Committee of Supply will be meeting in Room 254 considering the Estimates of the Department of Family Services.

When the committee last sat it had been considering Resolution 9.4. Child and Family Services (a) Child, Family and Community Development (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits. Shall the item pass?

Hon. Bonnie Mitchelson (Minister of Family Services): Mr. Chairperson, I know my honourable friend had asked for some information yesterday, and I have several pieces of information I would like to provide. One was the placement and related costs for children in care for I think 1998 and 1999 or at least for 1999. I have that information and I will table it.

One of the other questions that was asked that I needed to get some information on was the number of children in care that died. I have information back to 1996 where the total number of child deaths in Manitoba was 209 and the child deaths of children in care was 17. That was in '96. In 1997, the total number of child deaths in Manitoba was 200, and the number of those who were in care was 14. In 1998, the total number of child deaths in Manitoba was 173, and the total number of children in care who died was 12. I do not have figures yet for 1999.

Another question that was asked was the number of foster homes or whether there has been an increase in the number of foster homes. In 1997, there were 971 foster homes with a 2,464-bed capacity in those foster homes. These are March 31 numbers, March 31, 1997. March 31, 1998, there were 1,002 foster homes with a 2,594-bed capacity, and at March 31, 1999, there were 1,024 foster homes with a 2,673-bed capacity.

Another question that was asked was with the reorganization and restructure within the Winnipeg agency. We had indicated that there were going to be 31 positions redeployed to the front line through reorganization, and we asked the question of the Winnipeg agency on where they were going to be redeployed from. The information we received back was that in volume management there would be 13 positions redeployed; in management, there would be two; in accounting, one; in case aides, four; in treatment services, five; medical services, one; intake, two; abuse, one; and family support, two. That makes a total of 31 positions. These functions will all still continue, but in the reorganized structure I guess the work assignments will be changed.

Now another question that was asked was information that my honourable friend had written to the CEO of Winnipeg Child and Family Services for, and that was information around, I guess, provincial funding and historical financial facts. My understanding is, after calling the agency, that this information was provided by letter to my honourable friend on June 15, 1999. I have a copy of the letter and the information that was sent to my honourable

friend. So I would encourage him to in a more timely fashion read his mail and his correspondence so that he has the updated information. So I just wanted to make that point, and hopefully he has that information. If not, I can provide him with a copy of the letter that was sent to him and the information that was provided at that time.

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): Mr. Chairperson, I thank the minister for providing all that information, including information that I apparently already had.

I note that the number of children who have died in care has gone down for each of the last three years, and I am wondering if the minister knows if there is a reason for that trend. It is certainly a positive trend. I am wondering if anyone has looked at why or thought about why.

Mrs. Mitchelson: There has not been any analysis done of why that might be. We can make assumptions, of course, that the front-end work and the case management would be better and children would be placed in more appropriate placements. But I would hate to say that without the formal analysis being done, because we do not know what the statistics for years to come will be. There has been a trend downward that we have seen.

I think overall if you look at the trend of child deaths in the province, both the number of child deaths are down and the number of children in care that have died are down. I would hope that that is significant and that trend will continue, but without any sort of a formal analysis, it is pretty hard to determine.

Mr. Martindale: I believe the most recent March-end figure the minister gave me was 1998. Since this is almost the end of June, I am wondering if the March '99 figure is available yet of children in care and total deaths.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I believe those figures were on a calendar year. The Chief Medical Examiner would report those statistics, and it would be on a calendar year. We would not have his annual report till the end of 1999.

Mr. Martindale: Can the minister tell me when the inquest report into the baby Schmidt death

will be made public? I understand it is supposed to be finished this spring sometime.

* (1120)

Mrs. Mitchelson: My understanding is that all the final arguments have been presented, all of the work has been done, and we just have to await the judge's report. We have not been given any indication of when that might be. I would presume, given that the whole process is finished, it should not be in the too distant future, but that will be up to the judge based on his ability to get the final report completed.

Mr. Martindale: I think I am going to be jumping around from topic to topic in order to go through my three-ring binder here in a logical fashion and get through child and family support sometime today if I can. So my next question has to do with Child and Family Services of western Manitoba. As the minister knows, I put some very positive comments on the record yesterday. My questions were not raised by anyone at Child and Family Services of western Manitoba. They are strictly my own questions.

I noticed in their annual report that was handed out at the annual meeting, on page 3 it says: the biggest challenges are with the procedures for the regional child abuse committee and the increased expectations for the agency to do the steps that the province previously did.

This sounds like a concern on the part of the agency, and I am wondering if the concern is that they have to devote more staff resources to do this. Maybe the minister could just update me on how the new process as a result of amendments to the act is proceeding.

Mrs. Mitchelson: As a result of the new legislation and the strengthened role of the child abuse committees throughout the province, we have done extensive consultations in every area of the province undertaking to ensure that they had details around what the legislative changes would be and what the roles and responsibilities would be with the strengthened committee function. We also attempted to identify issues at a local level on what might come as a result of the changes in the legislation.

One of the issues that was identified through that consultative process in not only the western area but in other areas was the workload issue, and would there be an increase in the workload as a result. I guess our first focus was to try to ensure that we had members of the child abuse committees throughout the province trained in what their new roles and responsibilities would be. We do know that we have done work with the Child Protection Centre who have been involved in the recruitment and training of general practitioners in the regions to help them identify child abuse and diagnose child abuse. We have done workshops throughout the province on the changes to the legislation. I believe there have been 22 workshops that have been held to date, and there are still two to go to be completed, but all that work has been ongoing.

* (1130)

To deal with one of the issues that was raised around the increased workload, we have a committee, and Ken Knight, who is the executive director of the Westman agency is on that committee. We will be reviewing what implications the strength and role of the child abuse committees will have on workload and see how we can deal with that. I do want to indicate that there was an increase in funding to the Westman Child and Family Services agency this year of \$152,000 in their budget, so there has been a slight increase. But we will, through that committee process involving people from different agencies throughout the province, be determining what the workload impact could be or might be, and then we will have to deal with that as we identify those issues.

Mr. Martindale: Maybe the minister could tell me if the increased funding was because of this particular workload issue, or was it requested for addressing other financial burdens, I guess, on the agency. Maybe "burdens" is not the right word; "demands" might be better. For example, when I was at the annual meeting in 1998, I made some notes. The president pointed out that although they had no deficit, they needed \$50,000 more and that it was unfair that Winnipeg always gets their deficit paid, which we heard earlier in the Estimates this week was \$4 million. The president said that salary parity

was needed and was met, but this would pose an ongoing challenge in the coming years.

So I guess there are a couple of issues here. One is the workload issue because of the new child abuse committee process; the other would be salary parity. Possibly, from the point of view of the agency, they see Winnipeg's deficit being covered every year to the tune of millions of dollars, and then they ask for an increase of \$50,000 and a year ago I guess they thought that was how much they were short. Now this year they did get an additional \$152,000, as the minister mentions, but that is a very small increase in their total budget, and it is actually a fairly small increase given that in 1998-99 the Province of Manitoba's support was \$2.6 million. So I am wondering if the minister can tell me what the \$152,000 additional funding was intended to address.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chairperson, the increase that they received this year was a 3.5 percent increase. I understand the issues certainly that Westman and other agencies raise when in fact there is ongoing pressure within the city of Winnipeg, and we always seem to cover the deficits within the Winnipeg agency. There is always that issue around those that believe they managed their resources very well and feel that sometimes they are penalized for good management when they see others getting deficits covered. I know the issues are somewhat different in the city of Winnipeg from some of the issues they deal with in the Westman region, but nonetheless we were able to find the money to provide a 3.5 percent increase.

Total funding that goes to the Westman agency, I think my honourable friend mentioned the \$2.6 million. They also do get additional support for support services project funding, basic maintenance and special rates. So the total funding in 1998-99 was \$4.4 million, and it is up to \$4.554 million would be their total budget. So over and above the basic central support, there is additional funding for other programming and support services.

I have to say that I am really pleased having been out to the annual meeting; I know both of us were out there at the annual meeting. I look

at the volunteer commitment. I look at the special recognition for foster families and the number of people that do come out to support the agency in the Westman region and work with the agency. I am very impressed with the work they do, and I am very impressed that they live within their means and within their budget too. They have to be commended for that, and we have tried to address part of their issue this year.

So the direct answer to the first question would be that this money was not necessarily in recognition of the workload that they felt they might have increased as a result of the strengthened child abuse committees. I have indicated that Ken Knight is on that committee that is looking at workload issues, and I know they will be coming back once they have done their review and sort of indicating to us whether that in fact is the case and what the significance of that workload increase might be. We have not received that information yet, but once the committee reports, we will have to look at whether there is an issue and whether we have to deal with it in a different way.

Mr. Peter Dyck, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Martindale: Mr. Chairperson, I would like to move on to the Child and Family Support branch, and I am wondering if the minister can tell me if there was a reconfiguration or a reorganization of the branch and, if so, how it was reorganized and why.

* (1140)

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chairperson, yes, we have gone through an extensive reorganization within the branch. That was as a result of the sense that we needed to become more relevant within the branch to agency relations and support to agencies. I am told and I know for a fact, because I have received copies of letters that have been sent from the field that have congratulated the department on the new approach. What has happened in the reorg and restructure has been a team approach where rather than having individual people within the branch dealing with specific issues with agencies, we have three teams that have been developed: one team for the north, one for the

south, and one for Winnipeg and the rural eastern part of the province that comprises Winnipeg Child and Family Services. I guess the teams are responsible to provide all of the answers to all of the areas in child protection and family support.

We have, on the residential treatment side, licensing, the placement desk, and the co-ordination of relationships with all of the treatment facilities. On the service to the public side, we have tried to become more efficient and user friendly. Certainly on the adoption side, on the intake side, the Child Abuse Registry side, we have a development component within the branch that is responsible for training for our community development strategy, for our resource development, and the adoption piece.

So it is, I guess, sort of a sense that, just like we have tried within government to co-ordinate between departments or among departments services and supports for children rather than having each different department deal with different pieces of children and families, whether it be Education, Family Services, Justice, or Health, along with Housing, Culture, Heritage and recreation, the recreation piece, and Northern and Native Affairs, we have tried to co-ordinate and look more holistically at our approach to developing services that cross all sectors.

I think it is important that the branch that supports children and families within Child and Family Services has more of a team approach to dealing with all of the issues around protection and family support that it provides. So it has been reorganized in a way that we have people from different areas within the department working together. It is more a team approach. It appears that the community and the agencies that are served, both mandated, nonmandated, and native mandated agencies, are all being asked to work co-operatively together based on dealing with issues in the North that would cross both protection and family support issues in the South, and again in Winnipeg.

So it is a more co-ordinated approach, a more user-friendly approach to the services that we provide, sometimes an area where the general community or population might think that Child

and Family is not user friendly or the most supported part of community intervention among families and members of our society.

Mr. Martindale: Can the minister tell me if there were any new hirings or if there were new people put into existing positions? If so, was that by way of competition or appointment or both?

Mrs. Mitchelson: Some of the changes were reassignments, some were internal competitions, and some were external competitions.

Mr. Martindale: According to the Estimates book, page 62, it looks to me like this branch has a lot of responsibilities. I am wondering if you can tell me what kind of reports or evaluations the branch has done in the past year and what the results were of some of these evaluations. What have you learned? Particularly I see the Family Support Innovations Fund listed there. I am wondering if, from time to time, the branch evaluates this fund. If so, what is the result?

* (1150)

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chairperson, on the Family Support Innovations Fund, there are annual full evaluations of whether the programs are working, whether they might need some modifications or whether, in fact, there might need to be redirection of those resources to some other family support project because there does not seem to be a positive impact.

We work with the mandated and nonmandated agencies that would receive support from the Family Support Innovations Fund, and if, in fact, there are modifications that need to be made, we work in co-operation with them to make those modifications or to look at areas where they might redirect resources if there are programs that are not working. We report annually to Treasury Board as an accountability mechanism on those projects.

Mr. Martindale: Since we are talking about, what, I think about \$2.2 million, I would assume that evaluations are done, and I am wondering if any of those are available to me. I know there is one organization that I think in the past has gotten money from this fund, Andrews Street

Family Centre. I am wondering if there has been an evaluation of that and if a copy is available for me.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I have nothing that I could share with my honourable friend right at this point in time. I do know, for instance, that Andrews Street Family Centre, as we have worked with them through the process, we have determined that the moms helping moms program through the Family Support Innovations Fund is working, and we are continuing to fund it.

But I might take my honourable friend's question maybe as a suggestion or a recommendation that we do some public reporting annually on the projects that are supported through the Family Support Innovations Fund. Right now, most of the information is internal to our analysis and accountability of what is happening, and we believe from any information that we have that the program is doing well. But I certainly will take under consideration looking at doing something on an annual basis that could be a public document on how well programs are working under the Family Support Innovations Fund.

Mr. Martindale: I thank the minister for that answer, Mr. Chairperson. I would like to ask her about the Children's Foundation. Now I do not have very much information on this, but I understand that there was a fund called the Children's Foundation that had several million dollars in it that I think might have been set up by the Children's Aid Society. I am wondering, when CAS disbanded, what happened to that money which I understand was in a trust account and the interest was to be expended and distributed to agencies.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Prior to October 1, 1998, the advances of the Children's Foundation of Winnipeg were treated as restricted funds, but this is under—I guess they moved from the Children's Aid to Winnipeg Child and Family—the foundation. The funds were used solely for investment purposes. The income derived from investment activities was only distributed to the corporation when an application was made to fund specialized projects that were beneficial to

children. Otherwise, the income was retained by the foundation, and the foundation could not encroach upon these funds for any purpose before October 1, 1998.

On November 17, 1998, all of the assets of the Children's Foundation were donated to the Winnipeg Foundation to create the Children's Foundation of Winnipeg Fund. That was just in November 1998, and I would have to ask the Winnipeg agency what has happened since that time, and I will try to get that information as soon as possible and provide it.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Dyck): Order, please. The hour being 12 noon, committee rise.

SENIORS DIRECTORATE

Mr. Chairperson (Ben Sveinson): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will be considering the Estimates of the Seniors Directorate. Does the honourable Minister responsible for Seniors have an opening statement?

Hon. Jack Reimer (Minister responsible for Seniors): Yes, I do, Mr. Chairperson. As Minister responsible for Seniors, I am pleased to present the 1999-2000 budget Estimates for the Seniors Directorate. Seniors are the fastest growing segment of our society. In 1996, there were 152,165 citizens over the age of 65 in Manitoba. This was 13.6 percent of the population. Today, that number has increased to over 156,000 seniors. We know that this number is going to continue to increase dramatically in the years to come. Between the years 2011 and 2021 with most baby boomers retiring or retired, our senior population is projected to increase 231,200. The Manitoba population projections include 29,900 persons aged 85 and over. This is nearly double our 1991 figures. The growth in the numbers of seniors is occurring not only because of the aging of this population segment but also because of the increased life spans of both men and women. The overall health and the well-being of seniors has shown continuing improvement throughout the century. Life expectancies continue to increase as seniors overall health status improves. The 1996 Statistics Canada survey, Aging and Independence, reported that seniors between the ages of 65 and 69 report excellent or good health. At the age of

80 and over, 57 percent of the seniors continue to report excellent or good health.

Statistics from Manitoba Health from June of 1997 show that 12,576 people over the age of 65 were admitted to Home Care. This compares to 11,337 in 1995. A large portion of today's seniors are well educated, healthy and have greater disposable income than ever before. Consequently, seniors lifestyles and expectations are changing. As Minister responsible for Seniors, I have continued to reflect the changing expectations and needs of Manitoba seniors at the cabinet table. The Seniors Directorate also continues to work diligently to ensure that seniors needs and concerns are addressed in the development of government policies and programs. They work closely with government, nongovernment and community-based agencies which impact on the life of seniors. The directorate works in partnership with the community to address the needs of seniors throughout Manitoba. They have a close working relationship with Manitoba senior groups allowing the directorate to continue its ongoing dialogue with seniors.

The following are some of the highlights of 1998. In my discussion with seniors and representatives of seniors organizations, the concern for individual safety and security of older persons continues to be a very important issue. The growth of the number of seniors who are relatively healthy but who may be increasingly frail due to longevity brings them in an increasing demand for government attention to the safety and security needs of seniors. The Seniors Directorate is part of a federal provincial working group which is working on three key areas. These areas focus on prevention efforts which will increase awareness and promote safety and security within the communities.

The areas being looked at are: Injury prevention. By enhancing injury prevention we hope to minimize the overall number of injuries and injury-related deaths to seniors. Crime prevention and abuse of elderly. These areas all entail public awareness and the sharing of information across Canada. Ministers responsible for Seniors continue to meet to exchange ideas and work co-operatively and effectively to address the needs of our older populations. In

1997-98, we affirmed our joint commitment to include seniors perspectives and needs in relevant legislation, policy and program initiatives, and to continue to work co-operatively to this end. I am pleased to say that ministers from across Canada are continuing to work on the key issues of importance to seniors today: safety and security, palliative and continuing care, as well as supportive housing for older persons.

As I mentioned last year, we are developing a national database of federal, provincial and territorial policies and programs for seniors. This project is in the final stages. This database will be for use with the National Framework on Aging. It will contain information on health, social housing and income supported programs, and other services.

* (1120)

In 1997, a set of principles and policy questions were developed in collaboration with seniors across the country. The five principles are based on what seniors expressed as their consistent values and aspirations for a high quality of life: security, independence, dignity, participation and fairness. These principles enable the application of a seniors lens to government initiatives at all levels. The principles and the policy questions contained in a guide entitled Principles of the National Framework on Aging: A Policy Guide was completed and distributed in 1998. This project spans three years and will provide government departments with a unique tool to enhance their ability to meet the needs and the priorities of the older citizens.

The Seniors Directorate continued to be the central point of contact for seniors and their organizations. The Seniors Information Line was again well used by seniors and their families, providing them with information, assistance and referral. The type of calls received reflect the issues and the concerns of seniors throughout Manitoba. In 1998-99, there were over 6,000 calls received on the Seniors Information Line. This represents a continued increase in the number of calls requesting information assistance. This does not include the additional calls made by the directorate on behalf of the callers to various departments and services.

The computerized housing directory which is maintained by the directorate continues to be a popular resource for seniors looking for a place to live. The directory lists rental units, condominiums, townhouses, mobile homes and residences for seniors, 55 and over, around the province. The list includes housing available for rent, purchase, or life lease. The directorate reviews and updates this list on an ongoing basis.

Directorate staff supported the Manitoba Council on Aging in undertaking its function as an advisory body to the Minister responsible for Seniors (Mr. Reimer). The insight and the recommendations from the council have been an invaluable resource in providing a direct link between the older Manitobans and our government. The Manitoba Council on Aging held consultation meetings with seniors in various communities in Manitoba. Seniors in Churchill, Swan River and Russell met with the council to discuss concerns regarding health care, pensions, housing, transportation and other issues of concern.

The directorate continues to play a leading role in the area on abuse of the elderly. With the concept that service delivery reflects our values, the directorate provided abuse training workshops in 1997 for professionals in various disciplines. Abuse of the elderly is a multi-faceted problem which must be acknowledged and addressed.

Through other eyes, the training workshop targeted at business and agencies providing services accessed by seniors was launched last year. These two-hour workshops help businesses and organizations see their establishments through the eyes of the seniors. The aim is to remove physical and psychological barriers that may discourage seniors from using their services, products and facilities. Staff delivered workshops to retail, banking, and government departments to provide services or interact with seniors. For instance, all drivers' testers and clerical staff of the Motor Vehicle's licence office in Manitoba completed their course in 1998. Participants stated that the training had increased their knowledge of seniors and made them reassess how they communicate and interact with older citizens.

In June of 1998 during Seniors Month, special celebrations were held in The Pas, Altona, Winnipeg, St. Vital and at Assiniboine Park. Each year the directorate works with host seniors groups to plan these events. My columns in Seniors Today and MSOS General continue to receive a very positive response. Seniors have told me that the information is useful and helpful.

In 1998-99, the seniors handbook was given a facelift and released with a new name and title, The Manitoba Seniors Guide. This new guide is supported by advertisers which allow the directorate and the Council on Aging to update and distribute a new edition each year. This ensures that information Manitoba seniors receive is current and accurate.

In 1992, the United Nations Assembly designated 1999 as the International Year of the Older Persons. The United Nations theme for this year is Canada: A Society for all Ages. It will foster a world-wide awareness of the importance of seniors roles in society and the importance of intergenerational harmony, respect and support.

In October of 1998, it was my pleasure to launch IYOP in Manitoba and announce the theme for Manitoba would be Manitoba: A Province for all Ages. During 1999, I believe IYOP initiatives will not only affect the way we, as Manitobans, view the aging process but will enhance the respect and understanding between generations.

The Manitoba Council on Aging presented their recognition award to seven Manitoba recipients on June 26, 1998. The intent of this recognition is to honour organizations, businesses and individuals whose efforts have benefited Manitoba seniors. It also recognizes services and initiatives that reflect a positive attitude towards older Manitobans. The seven recipients honoured in 1998 were Leo Fillion of Great Falls; Dennis Storsley of Winnipeg; Frances Roesler of Hudson; Frances Labarre of Flin Flon; Heather McCaine-Davies of Oakbank; Florence Remus of Emerson; and also the Arborg Credit Union.

Some of the initiative plans in 1999-2000 include safety and security, which continues to be a priority for my government. During 1999-2000, the Seniors Directorate will be providing assistance to victims of abuse, their families and concerned citizens through the newly established elder abuse line. This confidential service will provide information, support and referral. As well, the directorate will have an elder abuse consultant who will provide educational workshops and seminars for professionals, seniors organizations and services in the community at large. The consultant will work with communities to develop appropriate responses and act as a resource for communities. We want to ensure that seniors are well informed and aware of the preventable measures. It is equally important that communities are prepared and able to meet the needs of the older victims. My staff also continues to participate on a network of interagencies' representatives on safety and security.

During 1999, the Manitoba Seniors Directorate will act as a central contact for the International Year of the Older Person. It will publish events across Manitoba, share ideas and provide assistance wherever possible. The theme for Manitoba is Manitoba: A Province for all Ages. A special grants program has been established to stimulate activities throughout the province. Many of the projects will be inter-generational in scope and will involve not only seniors but also youth and school-age children. This year will provide Manitobans with the opportunity to enhance communication between the citizens of all ages and build bridges of understanding between generations.

As part of the Manitoba government's celebration of IYOP, the Seniors Directorate and the Manitoba Council on Aging have produced an educational video that conveys positive messages about aging and the older persons to school children. By exposing as many elementary school students as possible to images of healthy aging, the video will leave an enduring mark on the youth of today once IYOP has officially ended.

As part of its educational mandate, the Seniors Directorate will continue to offer Through Other Eyes to raise awareness of the

special needs of aging adults and people with disabilities. Responses from business and service providers have been encouraging. Those who have used the training within their organizations reported that it enabled them to make positive change which benefited their older customers.

The directorate continues to respond to requests for educational print material on topics most requested by older persons such as legal, health care and safety. The senior citizen guide, the eighth edition, is now being distributed by the Council on Aging. The Manitoba Council on Aging will continue to honour Manitoba citizens with the recognition awards for exceptional acts which benefit seniors for those valuable services which reflect a positive attitude towards our older persons. Awards will be presented at a recognition ceremony to be held at the Legislative Building in June of 1999.

Physical activity is one of the most important things seniors can do to maintain their physical and their mental health. Their ability to live independent lives often depends on seniors being able to do things for themselves. The Seniors Directorate is working with a planning group to involve key Manitoba organizations and departments who are in a position to contribute to the health and the well-being of older persons in Manitoba to develop an active living summit for seniors. The purpose of the summit is to promote the concept of healthy active living with older adults and to improve and enhance their quality of life. This summit will be held in September of 1999. It will generate partnerships to develop a provincial strategy plan for the enhancement of active living. Bringing together a cross-section of citizens from communities throughout Manitoba will enable them to identify opportunities and examine the strengths, the weaknesses, and the barriers to active living for seniors. Seniors will, of course, have an important leadership role in all aspects of the summit.

*(1130)

As Minister responsible for Seniors, I will continue to actively participate at federal, provincial and territory meetings of ministers of Seniors across Canada. I will continue my commitment and support for development of the

National Framework on Aging. I will also continue to collaborate with other jurisdictions on common issues, such as the enhancement of safety and security for seniors, sharing models of service delivery to maximize quality care to older persons.

I remain committed to increasing awareness of the choices pertaining to palliative care and the sharing of best practices in the provision of supportive housing. I will continue to support and attend activities for the International Year of Older Persons in 1999. I will continue to voice and represent the aspirations and the priorities of seniors for consideration in all undertakings of this government. To this end, a two-way communication system for the sharing of ideas and visions and planning is critical.

In closing, I believe the Seniors Directorate and the Manitoba Council on Aging are continuing to fulfill an invaluable role within government by ensuring that we are meeting the needs of Manitoba seniors to the maximum extent possible. Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.

Mr. Chairperson: We thank the Minister responsible for Seniors for those comments. Does the official opposition critic, the honourable member for Broadway, have an opening statement?

Mr. Conrad Santos (Broadway): Yes, Mr. Chairperson. I would like to start with a statement that I want to focus my comments on the significance of 1999 as the International Year of Older Persons. Given that 1999 has been designated by the General Assembly of the United Nations as the International Year of Older Persons, I would like to say that all this importance called by the United Nations Assembly from basic documents such as the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as the International Plan of Action on Aging.

For the purpose of discussion of the International Year of the Older Person, I would rather pin my remarks on what I consider the five basic values enunciated by various documents which

form the nucleus of the significance of the International Year of the Older Person. I will categorize these values as (1) the value of dignity; (2) autonomy; (3) participation; (4) care; (5) self-actualization. So I will discuss each topical heading and will restate the principles involved, and maybe we can illustrate it with some activities of government and nonprofit organizations.

Let us start with the topical heading of the value of dignity. The various principles associated with dignity are stated as follows. The first principle, older persons should be able to live in dignity and security and be free of exploitation and physical and mental abuse. To live in dignity, one must have security. If a person is insecure in his person or property or anything related to his well-being, how can one say that he lives in dignity? Dignity is the respectability that we give to a fellow human being on the basis of his being a member of humanity. To be able to live in dignity a person has to be respected as a person of equal worth and importance.

I am just reminded of Rodney Dangerfield, who has been filming a movie in Vancouver and who is in the news today. He has built his career on the statement that he gets no respectability. Respectability, therefore, hits the chord in everyone's heart, and therefore we should be able to be cognizant of the fact that our senior citizens are entitled to such respectability and dignity as a human being.

This comedian, Rodney Dangerfield, has won a lot of awards by his theme of no respect. In the paper today, I will cite some of his joke lines that gives him this prominence in the world of entertainment. He said, for example, I am a bad lover, you know. I was caught peeping by a peeping tom and he booed me. Next joke: I told my wife that a man is like a good wine; he gets better with age. So she locked me in the cellar in our home. Next joke: When I was a kid I had nothing. I was poor, really poor. My rich aunt died and in the will I found out I owed her \$20. He said that he was an ugly kid, so one day he got lost at the beach and he asked a policeman if he could find his parents. The policeman said I do not know, there are lots of hiding places for

your parents. He said he consulted his family tree and he found out that he was just a sap.

A man with no respect has a difficult existence. He said he bought himself some rat poison and the girl said: Should I wrap it or are you going to eat it here? One time, when he says his house was on fire, the wife told the kids: Be quiet, do not wake your daddy up.

So respectability is part of life; so is humour. Without the sense of humour, indeed life would be very dull and so routine that we might not like to live it. Dignity is an essential part of our humanity but, as I said, security is a precondition to such a sense of dignity. Without that, a person cannot have any respect, cannot be looked upon, and can always be subject to abuse by others. Abusive treatment by those who refuse to recognize the dignity of the older person or any other person for that matter sometimes leads to physical, mental or even financial abuses. We know that most abuses suffered by seniors are physiological, if not financial, in nature.

G. K. Chesterton once observed that when people begin to ignore human dignity it will not be long before they will also ignore human rights, because if you look at a person and he is without respect, without dignity, of course, you are liable to abuse his basic political rights as well as other rights. So that is the first topic that is essential that we should preserve in this year of the elderly, the dignity of the person, not only in words, but in our behaviour, in our dealings with other people, in our relationships particularly with the older person.

Words as you see, you have heard this new guy who replaced Peter Warren. What is his name? [interjection] Chuck Adler said talk, talk, talk, talk. There is a lot of talk in the world, but what we want is behaviour, the actual behaviour of people in our dealings with seniors. They are entitled to dignity and respect.

*(1140)

That is the first principle we stated. Older persons should be able to live in dignity and security and be free of exploitation and physical or mental abuse. A second principle related to

this value of dignity states that the older person should be treated fairly, regardless of how old he is, his age, or his gender or racial or ethnic background or even a disability or other status; he should be valued as a person independently of his or her economic contributions to society. The individual, being a member of humanity, should be treated fairly at all times, but then we will say, life is not fair. There are some people who enjoy certain privileges that other people do not enjoy, not because of the natural order of things in the actual world.

I just read in the paper today when I was scanning the Winnipeg Sun that, when the police busted this escort service, there is a ban from the courts. It affected only those privileged people like professors and medical doctors and judges and other high-ranking people who frequent all this legitimized escort service, which, we know, is an undercover for the oldest profession in the world, but the ordinary working man who wants to have the free time sometimes will get his name published, but not these high-ranking people.

Very recently, we can illustrate this also with the court treatment of a policeman of seven years service who happened to be off duty when he took a girl on a motorbike ride, and the girl consented without a helmet. She died when the motorcycle hit a post, and it turned out that he did not get the penalty that is attributable to the death of the woman. He only got the penalty for refusing to submit to a breathalyzer test.

Life is not really fair as soon as we consider the artificial distinctions in society accorded certain people because of their status or their rank or their vocations or profession in life, but it is an ideal principle that everyone should be treated fairly, particularly our senior citizens. If we cannot accord any such senior the human dignity that he or she deserves, we are prone to treat such a person with prejudice.

Prejudice can take place on an individual basis as well as on a group basis. When prejudice takes place on a group basis, the discriminatory treatment is usually enshrined in some laws, some rules, some norms. Normally these rules are formulated by the dominant group in a particular society to protect their interest.

For example, in our own society, we should not be free from criticism. Self-criticism is the most important one.

In matters of certification and accreditation, for example, these are rules written by the people who are entrenched in their particular position. In their effort to eliminate the members of minority groups who know how to apply hard work, imagination and better methods than themselves, by their requirements which are sometimes unreasonable these groups are prevented from participating and thereby precluded from exercising their profession, their business in their field of endeavour in order to ensure the position or jobs of those who are already entrenched in them. So institutionalized discrimination is not uncommon even in our own society.

Now, let us go to the second topical heading. This could be a long one, but these I think are important values we have to bear in mind. Cognate to human dignity is the second virtue, the second value that we should remember is important to every individual human being and is what I will call autonomy. Sometimes we call it independence. Autonomy is the degree of flexibility or range of freedom, personal independence, to which the older person should be entitled to, unless, of course, he is restrained by some kind of affliction, physical or otherwise, or some kind of disability.

One principle that will promote basic human autonomy and independence is the principle that asserts that the older person should have access to adequate food, water, shelter, clothing, health care through the provision of adequate income, of family and community support and facilities for self-help. To be truly autonomous and independent an individual who is hungry or lacking some basic necessity cannot really be autonomous, independent. He will be subservient to the one who possesses and controls all these resources.

So this basic value can only be promoted if we make sure that seniors have adequate income, especially those women who on account of the earlier practice in our industrial and workaday world were not able to work themselves

and therefore are very deficient in terms of support in their old age.

Without the basic necessities of life and of living, no one can be expected to be able to feel personally independent in order to do or not to do whatever activities he or she decides. Without adequate food, water, shelter and clothing, no one would be able to keep oneself in good health, much less to be able to feel he is free and independent.

Beyond the basic necessities of life, of course, the older person should have access to appropriate educational and training programs. These are essential in order to retool the person with new knowledge and with new skills. If he is still able to function fruitfully, the elder person should be given opportunities to find ways of using his skills and energies, and if he needs to find employment, have access to some income-generating kind of activities no matter how nominal. For example, we sometimes read in the newspapers some older seniors who are already retired and who make themselves available for some kind of work activities in homes, and they will be able to apply their skills. Once we do not have the opportunity to apply our skills, we gradually lose our skills, as practise and doing activities are essential in human life.

Given that the survival needs of the older person are assured and that he is given the opportunity to exercise his talents in productive ways, then we can rest assured that there is a greater likelihood that the older person will feel and act with autonomy, with independence, with dignity and with self-confidence.

The third value is what we call care for the elderly. No doubt, the older we get, the more personal limitations we have. True, the mind does not get old as long as you use your mind. If you do not use it, you watch TV like a vegetable all the time, it will deteriorate as well. Therefore, every older person should have facilities provided by the family or the community to protect such an older person against all the big decisions of life, not all, but the most difficult ones. The elder person should have access to health care to help such a person to maintain or regain an optimum level of physical, mental and emotional well-being and

to prevent or to delay, at least, the onset of illness.

* (1150)

The elderly person should be able to utilize appropriate levels of institutional care when he needs it. This kind of care will provide protection, rehabilitation, social and mental stimulation in a humane and secure environment.

Moreover, the elderly person should also be able to have access to social, medical, legal services in order to enhance personal protection, autonomy and independence. There are some lawyers here who have some discount rates for seniors, some accountants who help seniors with their financial problems and they give, accordingly, some kind of discounts to senior citizens.

The elderly person should also be able to enjoy his or her basic human rights and fundamental freedom even when residing in a shelter, care or treatment facilities. Such an elderly person should be entitled to full respect for his or her own beliefs, needs for privacy, including the right to make decisions about the nature and level of care that he needs and the quality of life that he or she wants to live. Such care can only be possible if there is co-operation in the family circle, as well as in the community at large.

The fourth topical heading in this year of the elderly is what we call participation. The older person should be able to participate actively in the formulation and implementation of policies, especially those policies that directly affect his or her well-being, including the opportunity to share acquired knowledge and skills with members of the younger generations. For example, due to the enthusiastic participation of many older persons, even the hated Prime Minister, Brian Mulroney, had desisted from clawing back the security pensions for the elderly. The former Prime Minister considered this a sacred trust, and if it is a sacred trust he should not claw it back.

A more recent example of the efficacy of political participation of the senior citizen was the federal government's proposal to integrate the Old Age Security Program and the Guaranteed Income Supplement into a new kind

of program they call the seniors benefit program. Apprised of the effects of the federal proposal introducing and eliminating the Old Age Security payments at certain income levels, the seniors organized and protested in a co-ordinated fashion such that on July 28, 1998, the federal Minister of Finance, Paul Martin, Jr. announced, and I quote: "In the light of the structural enhancement to the public pension system, the turnaround in the country's economic prospects, and because of our commitment to sound fiscal management, the government is today announcing that the proposed seniors benefit will not proceed. The existing Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement will be maintained."

On the following day, July 29, 1998, Al Cerilli, well-known labour leader now retired, he is a member at large for the Congress of Union Retirees of Canada Executive. He withdrew his application for funding from the Court Challenges Program of Canada, an application that was made possible so that the stakeholders forum to debate this issue of the seniors benefit program could be thrashed out so that it can be debated whether or not such a program would violate the rights of man, and, in particular, women individually and as a whole under Section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

We know what that provision in the Charter of Rights provides, equality rights it is called, 15.1 says every individual is equal before and under the law and has a right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination, and in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

The older person should be able to seek and to develop opportunities for service to the community. He should be able to serve as volunteers in many positions appropriate to his own interests and capabilities. The older person should be able to form movements and associations of older persons for purposes of promoting objectives that they commonly share.

Finally, we come to the last topic or the last value, the last of the five values that we are

actually trying to analyze. This is the value of self actualization. Self actualization means that the elderly should be able to pursue opportunities to the fullest development of his or her potential as a human being. Self-actualization means self-fulfilment to the highest possible degree of self-development. Therefore, it is essential that the elderly person be given access to cultural, recreational, educational and spiritual facilities and resources of society.

In Canada, when the various federal, provincial and territorial ministers of the Crown responsible for seniors agreed to establish a 15-member Canada co-ordinating committee to spearhead the implementation of the principles and values enunciated by the various documents promulgated and approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations, these ministers also approved the theme, as the minister had intimated in his opening statement, a society for all ages, under the heading of which Canada's co-ordinating committee are called upon to promote the following five objectives, and I quote them: first, to enhance understanding, harmony and mutual support across generations; second, to increase recognition of seniors contributions to their families, their communities and country; third, to improve understanding by all Canadians of how individual and societal choices and decisions made today will affect individuals in our society in the future.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. I hate to interrupt the member, but the time is twelve o'clock. When we next convene, the member will have four minutes remaining. Committee rise.

* (1110)

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Chairperson (Marcel Laurendeau): Will the Committee of Supply come to order, please. This section of the Committee of Supply will be dealing with the Estimates of the Department of Agriculture. Would the minister's staff please enter the Chamber at this time.

Hon. Harry Enns (Minister of Agriculture): Allow me simply to introduce senior staff of the Department of Agriculture. My deputy minister,

Don Zasada, regional director, Les Baseraba and my policy advisor, associate deputy minister, Craig Lee.

Earlier on in the week, we had commenced with our agricultural Estimates and its review. I am delighted to have this opportunity to provide this opportunity to my Agriculture critic from the New Democratic Party, who, by the way, looks very spiffy today. I want to invite her to put any additional comments on the record about this unforeseen turn of events. We are discussing agriculture, and while we have allowed ourselves a fair bit of latitude in terms of which topics we want to discuss, we have dealt with the major corporations, the Manitoba Crop Insurance Corporation, the Manitoba Agricultural Credit Corporation. We could be on a policy line of the Estimates right now, under which we could have a wide latitude of discussion.

I certainly want to invite my own colleagues, the honourable member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Downey) and other colleagues, my colleague from Springfield (Mr. Findlay) or from Emerson (Mr. Penner), to also participate in an expression of concerns that face agriculture and how governments, provincially and federally, should be responding to them. Thank you.

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): The minister just indicated that we were on the policy line. I want to thank the minister for allowing us to move—

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. The honourable minister, on a point of order?

Mr. Enns: Just further clarification. I apologize for interrupting. My staff advises me that we were actually on the AIDA line, the farm income support line, when we adjourned the committee when we were last dealing with the Estimates. So it is quite appropriate, the subject matter that I know that the honourable member wishes to discuss.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, it is very timely that we should be able to discuss agriculture this morning. We are facing a very serious situation. We have raised the issue of the flooding and the

problem of not being able to seed probably close to a million acres in this province many times over the last couple of weeks. Our Leader has raised the issue as a lead question several times, and we have had lots of discussion on it. We have been hoping that we would get some answers that would help our producers and give some stability to them to know that there is going to be some cash flow and getting some answers.

We know that there was an announcement on AIDA, and we talked briefly about that the other day and how our concern is that the AIDA program is a very flawed program. Although the federal government has made some changes, it is going to mean very little cash flow coming into the community because many people do not qualify for AIDA. The government made announcements on NISA, and again, although there is money in NISA, many of the producers, young producers in particular, have no money in NISA.

So we are looking for how we can help farmers. We were hoping that the federal government would do this, but in fact they are not going to, so today's action, an agreement of all parties to work together to try to come to some resolution on this. When the member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Downey) brought forward this resolution to try to work through this problem that we have. The concern we have is that there is not going to be any cash flow, that there is going to be loss of economic growth or loss of jobs, and a crash of the economy in that part of the province.

We looked at the resolution and we are prepared to make a few amendments. The Leader of the Opposition yesterday suggested an all-party committee that we could work on to perhaps work through the problems that we have, come up with some solutions, pressure the federal government to realize that they have a role to play in this. Just as they found money to help those people in the Red River flood, they should be able to find money for the farmers in the southwest part of the province.

Federal governments nor provincial governments should determine how much support they are going to give to producers who are in crisis,

should not be determining it on the basis of whether or not they are in a federal election; unfortunately, that is what happened. During the 1997 flood, there was a federal election. The Prime Minister came out. He was not quite sure what to do with a sandbag, but he came out to help out. He did not know what to do with the sandbag, and then we had all kinds of announcements ahead of the federal government from people who were candidates in that election, but they found money all over the place.

Now we have a group of farmers, 4,000 families perhaps, who are at risk of losing their income. Many of them that we talked to are worried that they may not be able to hang on to their farms. Where are all these people going to go? Are we going to send them all off to Winnipeg to look for jobs here in the city, or are we going to lose more people out of the province? We have to take a strong stand and encourage the federal government to recognize that the provincial government has made some moves, but it should not be the province that picks up these costs.

So I say to the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Enns), I would ask him whether he would support the possibility of an all-party committee to try to resolve this, to pressure the federal government. Certainly we do not have the Liberals on board today. I am really disappointed in Dr. Jon Gerrard who is not in the Chamber now, who from outside the Chamber is denying us the ability to debate an issue that is so important, denying us the ability to talk about this crisis in this Chamber.

I cannot imagine a man who was, during the last federal election, a candidate and was supporting all the assistance to farmers in the Red River Valley, now, as the Leader of the Liberal Party, he would deny us the ability to have this debate. What he is saying is that the Liberal Party does not support the farm community. The Liberal Party does not recognize that there is a crisis in rural Manitoba. The Liberal Party does not recognize that we have low commodity prices, increased input costs. Hundreds of people have spent thousands of dollars to prepare the land and put fertilizer

into the land, and now they are losing that. He does not understand that.

Mr. Chairman, we have to find a way, through this Chamber, to recognize that this is a very serious problem. I do not know whether we can educate the provincial Liberals on this to stand with us and lobby Ottawa, but we have to find a way to stand together, put politics aside, and I think we have to pull the two provinces together. Saskatchewan is affected as badly as we are, and their farmers are suffering. We have to find a way to be nonpartisan about this and recognize that there is a crisis here and that we have to put pressure.

So I ask the minister: does he support the concept of an all-party committee? Does he see a way that we can put pressure on the federal government to get money and some commitment that will see money flow into farmers' hands through other avenues, other than AIDA and NISA? There was money in the JERI program during the Red River flood. There was money that was available to help farmers with their fertilizer costs and the land with chemical costs. The people in the southwest part of the province right now are facing another serious problem, and that is weed control. The cost of cleaning up those weeds and getting that soil back into some kind of condition that they can grow a crop next year is critical, and the federal government has to recognize that there is a need. They come to aid in other crises.

* (1120)

Now the federal government tells us that the province has not taken the necessary steps to trigger the disaster assistance. We have seen the letters that the province has written. So what steps can we take? Are you prepared to have this all-party committee? Are we prepared to put pressure on the federal government through this Legislature to ensure that those issues are addressed?

Mr. James Downey (Arthur-Virden): I do not want to take the time of the opposition, to take away from their time, but I do feel it is important that I put a couple of comments on the record as the member for Arthur-Virden and particularly in light of the unfortunate position that the

member for The Maples (Mr. Kowalski) was put in by the Leader of the Liberal Party who does not have a seat in the Manitoba Legislature. He is, as an honourable member, the member for The Maples, and I quite frankly feel for him as the message that he had to deliver today that his Leader wanted to use his political power over this Assembly for what he saw as his own political good—that is a shame.

He is doing so on the backs and at the expense of people in not only southwestern Manitoba but other parts of Manitoba that are so stressed out, Mr. Chairman, that the parties in this Legislature, the elected members of this Legislature took the decision this morning to bring it to the general public forum, which we should be doing, to debate some of the possible solutions and how in fact we could get to resolve some of the problems. Again, I have to say, as much as the Leader of the Liberal Party may not understand it, the media, the general public throughout Manitoba I now think have a relatively good understanding of how serious the situation is, and just let me paint it very quickly.

We have producers who have the same kinds of financial commitments as people on a wage or a salary. Whether it is in the North, the south, the city or wherever, they have commitments to make. Their children want to go to school and to the different programs that they have to get education; they have certain day-to-day commitments to keep their households alive.

What they are faced with today is for some 18 months, 18 months from today, they will not have any return off the land that they in fact are responsible for farming. So how would anyone in society, if you are a wage earner, like to be faced with a situation where there will not be a pay cheque this fall from what you would put in the ground; there will not be a pay cheque next spring from the produce you would be selling whether it is through the Canadian Wheat Board or wherever it is from, and you will not have until next fall any potential income off of the land? What kind of mental stress does this place on a family of young people who are trying to make a go of it in a society today which, yes, we have couples working, we have everyone working because everybody wants more, but

everybody has to do that to maintain the lifestyle which has become part of the Manitoba and Canadian way.

The unfortunate thing is that we should have had the opportunity to debate that here this morning and again collectively send a message to Ottawa, but we have again the Leader of the Liberal Party playing a political card to deny that from taking place, in some way trying to defend the Liberal government in Ottawa which, the last time I checked, do not need a whole lot of defending in western Canada.

The point again that has to be made is—and I say this to the minister as well, and it is important to note—that I compliment our minister. I do not want to be overly political. I compliment opposition members because the resolution had friendly amendments that recognize all members have been concerned on this, people from this Legislative Assembly, the Premier (Mr. Filmon), the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Enns), my colleagues who not only live in the area but have spent time in those communities. Several times they have been out there and have felt the stress of those people.

We were in Melita at a meeting with municipal people, with the Premier and the Minister of Agriculture. You could feel the desperation of those people who were still, at the first part of June, watching it rain and could not get on their land. Why they are stressed is because they have commitments and they will not be able to fulfill the commitments. In fact, many of them are threatened.

Now, let me just go over why I think the Minister of Agriculture in Ottawa missed the mark. He said what he will do is advance 60 percent of the AIDA program. Well, first of all, CAP, the people who speak for farmers and farmers themselves, and our own Minister of Agriculture, the member for Lakeside (Mr. Enns), was reluctant to enter the program because he said it is basically flawed and will not meet the needs of producers. Let me point out a couple of reasons why it is flawed. We have not had the greatest of times in agriculture in the last couple of years. Prices have been low. If your income last year was not very good and this year your margin is very small, you are

not going to get anything out of the AIDA program. A lot of producers who have phoned me fall in that category. They may get a few hundred dollars, but a lot of them will not get any.

I will give you an example. The producer next to me, and he said it publicly with the meeting of Mr. Vanclief, he said he is farming 2,000-some acres. He has a very small percentage, 8 percent of his crop in. He cannot get it in. He has three young children. He has commitments to make. He does not get any money out of AIDA virtually. His brother, who is a pharmacist, who owns some land of which he farms will get a substantial amount of money out of AIDA. Where is the fairness? Where is the fairness in the federal government's mind? It is incredible.

We have many producers for management's sake. I had a phone call yesterday who said my year-end for the reporting period ends the end of June, right now, because it was management. He is covered for '97-99, '98-99, but he does not get the results of his '99 crop. He missed it because his own financial year ends the end of June.

There are many people who are eliminated from the program because of that. That is not fair. Every time we turn around, we keep talking about such a fair society that Canada is. Well, it is, but we need to have the people in the administrative offices that deliver that fairness, and that is not happening. A lot has been said about NISA. Opening up a savings account is a great idea. We all believe in savings accounts, but again if you have either been under financial pressures or you have not been farming, new farmers coming on, this is their first year, they say, so what help is that, you have not any savings. It is absolutely a move that the federal government made, got the headlines that I am sure they will like, but the end result they will not.

I can also tell the minister, I have had calls that there is a rally being prepared and developed for the Melita community on Tuesday night. There is a group of farmers that is going to gather to develop a strategy. Unfortunately, what the federal minister has done is caused people to

be very upset. When you get large gatherings of people like that, then sometimes it is not always the best result that comes out of it. We do not need to have disruptions in our society and people put through the stresses. They are talking about potential blockage of roads which is inappropriate, but again people are pressed to do inappropriate things because of irresponsible actions of government. Those are the kinds of things that I think we could have debated here this morning, if we would have had the opportunity to do so with the private member's resolution which, by the way, is not going to be a secret. If the Liberal leader of the party in Manitoba thinks that this is not going to be distributed and talked about, he has got another thought coming.

I want to go back again: no one is playing politics with this. That is why I am telling you the people of the city of Winnipeg do not want to play politics with the lives of any part of this country. There is a lot of pressure in our society today to help the people of Cape Breton who, by the way, are losing their livelihoods. I think the federal government to us are seen to be responsive and acting to it. They do not ask those people to take money out of their savings account. I think the federal government have offered \$60 million or \$80 million. I am not going to speak to the amount and the appropriateness of the amount, but what I am hearing is the federal government is sympathetic. They are not saying there is a program in place for you. They are saying here is some extra consideration for the people of Cape Breton.

* (1130)

What did they say to the people of the ice storms? They did not say, use your Canada Savings Bonds or your savings account or your pension funds to live off. They said: We will come with some support. We have said many times our farmers deserve at least the same programs as the people in the Red River Valley when flooded. I compliment my colleagues for taking that stand because, again, it is the whole issue of fairness in the country of Canada.

Something else that when we are in these situations, and I know it is important that we put on the table, I also think that when one looks

across the country, we can have many examples. The Peace River Valley, for example, which the Premier (Mr. Filmon) mentioned the other day and my colleague has referred to, paid an acreage payment to those producers when they were flooded out.

Mr. Chairman, this is not a matter about bureaucratic formulas or whether somebody may get paid a few dollars more. There are systems in place that can deal with that. We can make sure that people who get paid and should not, do not continue to keep those resources, but I can tell you there are many people who will not have an income for at least 18 months. They have commitments to make, and I am really troubled that the Leader of the Liberal Party in Manitoba would use his political influence over his member in this House to deny the debate. So the politics of this, if he says it is political activity we are involved in, he is the one who is carrying out the political activity not the Province of Manitoba or any members who are sitting in this House.

So I say in my concluding comments to the minister, if I have to conclude with a question and I think it is important that he respond to this, I think in the next few days and would hope that he and my colleagues would come out with a very clear definitive statement as to exactly what the Province of Manitoba is going to do in this situation to force the federal government to come to the table with the same kind of proposal. People have asked for \$50 an acre on unseeded acreage. I agree with that. I think, if we put a \$25 offer forward, which I have heard my minister talk about, that 60 percent of that would be a \$35 payment from the federal government. If it is an advance on AIDA, fine, use that money. But if they have other money, use that as well. The payment for fertilizer that has been spent, we need the same commitment and the same support on paying half of it to the producers. The unseeded acreage has been well appreciated, although some people would say not. I say it has been.

I think also, again, what this House has to look at, and I would suggest to the Department of Agriculture, that crop insurance has been and should continue to be the instrument which protects people against natural disasters. Well, we have never lost a crop and it has always been

said we have never lost a crop in the spring of the year in any part of the province of Manitoba. Well, history was made this year. I think since a hundred and some years of that area and some areas being cultivated, this is the first time there will not be a crop planted and a crop harvested. So people did not take on unseeded acreage insurance. That is why it is incumbent upon crop insurance to make some moves so that the farmers are covered on an unseeded acreage basis at a reasonable level. I make the reference to the same kind of ability to buy crop insurance for unseeded acreage as they now are able to buy for hail insurance, that if you lose 50 acres because of unseeded, you get paid for 50 acres unseeded. You do not have again another way of taking away from that because you have had crop on other pieces of ground. Let them insure for what they lose. There may be some people who would argue against it, but I can tell you, I am a strong supporter of that.

Today, there is a release gone out again from what they call the RDR, the Rural Disaster Recovery Coalition, from KAP. I will table it, Mr. Chairman, so that everybody has it. It is made up of the Manitoba Cattle Producers, Brandon Chamber of Commerce, Association of Manitoba Municipalities, Canadian Association of Ag Retailers, Brandon Economic Development Board, Manitoba Chamber of Commerce and Canada West Equipment Dealers. They are all supporting what we are asking for. That is why I cannot understand why the federal government are taking what I would consider a very tough, callous position. It is almost an uninformed position that I think they are taking. Mr. Vanclief, with the greatest of respect, should tell his bureaucrats what the public will not tolerate, and that is what his job is.

So I conclude my comments, Mr. Chairman, and I thank the opposition for giving up their time for allowing me to put those comments on the record. I do compliment my colleague the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Enns), our Premier (Mr. Filmon), and colleagues for being extremely sensitive and, I would say, proactive to the issues that they are having to deal with. Thank you.

Hon. Leonard Derkach (Minister of Rural Development): Mr. Chairman, I would like to

rise to put some remarks on the record as they relate to the situation in western Manitoba. I want to say thank you to the opposition critic for Agriculture, who, I think, has been able to put the issue of politics aside in a situation where, indeed, we all have to do that and look at what we can do to support not only the farm families, but the communities in general, in western Manitoba who are undergoing some very, very serious times.

I am actually shocked this morning because I could not believe that one who is not even elected to the Legislature has used his power, through another member of the Legislature, to deny an ability for this Legislature to debate a situation in this province which is as grave as we have ever had in terms of disasters in this province. I just cannot believe that the leader of a political party, who wants to enter this Chamber at some point in time, would be so callous and would lack such understanding that he would deny leave to debate a situation that I think all Manitobans would want us to debate as an important issue in this Legislature.

Mr. Chairman, I want to congratulate also the position that has been taken by our Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Enns), who, indeed, is facing an enormous amount of pressure as he deals with the farmers of Manitoba to try and create a climate of some comfort out there, in a very difficult situation, to assure them that as a province he and his department and this government and Manitobans in general are supportive of giving some much-needed support to that region of our province.

When the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Doer) yesterday indicated that his party would be prepared to join the government of Manitoba to lead a delegation to Ottawa, I think this shows that there is indeed an understanding and concern for the plight of Manitobans today in the face of some very difficult situations. I think we all together collectively understand the importance of this.

I come from the western side of the province, as does the member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk), and I guess through the phone calls that we get we hear some fairly serious situations on farms right now, where families are

feeling enormous stress because of the fact that there is no grain in the ground. There is no crop in the ground. They have no prospect of getting any kind of income this fall.

What that means is, of course, somebody in that family is going to have to start searching for a job very quickly. Then, again, that has been hampered by the fact that today we are seeing businesses in these rural communities not hiring anyone; as a matter of fact, the opposite is happening, as the commercial side of the community is also starting to feel the impact of this situation. Let us not fool ourselves, that is going to be felt right through our whole economy and right through the province of Manitoba and right here in the city of Winnipeg.

I think, by and large, from talking to the people in this city, they have a clear understanding of the magnitude of the situation. I am really appreciative of the fact that people in the city have stopped me and have asked questions and have expressed their concern about what is happening in the west side of the province.

It is just unfortunate that the Leader of the Liberal Party does not have that understanding. I do not know whether he is just basically out of touch with what is happening in this province or whether he is just drumming up, I guess, the political favours of the Liberal caucus in Ottawa.

* (1140)

Mr. Chairman, let us just examine what the real situation in western Manitoba today is. Although it is the farmers who are the first line of people who are facing this tremendous challenge, we cannot underestimate the impact that this is going to have on every individual in the western side of the province in the near future. This is not a problem that can be solved overnight. It is not a situation that is going to change in the next six months. It is not a situation that will change in the next year. This is going to be around for the next 18 months at least, before people can actually get back on their feet, if they can get back on their feet at all.

Mr. Chairperson, when you consider that this is a creation of wealth that is going to be lost to the production of wealth in our province for

good. This is not something that is just postponed. It is lost. It is not coming back. It is not going to be able to be circulated in our communities at all, so there are some really difficult issues that are being faced by us in the western part of the province, indeed, in our neighbouring province as well. I know that the Premier of our province has been in discussions with the Premier of Saskatchewan, because they are facing the same situation.

I cannot believe the insensitivity of the federal government to this situation in Manitoba today because in 1997 we saw the outpouring, if you like, of concern by federal members of Parliament, by the government. The Prime Minister made a point of coming to Manitoba to view the situation, and at that time, I thought his intentions were sincere; but, when you look at the situation today, you have to ask yourself the question: was that just a political move because of the election that was in the offing.

Today, the situation is no different in Manitoba, but we have a complete lack of members of Parliament who are in the Liberal caucus from visiting the area and really getting a clear understanding of what it is. Our Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Enns) has time and time again called on the federal Minister of Agriculture to meet with him, to sit with him, to visit with him. The Minister of Agriculture arranged for a helicopter to transport the federal minister to any community he wanted to visit, to land in any field he wanted to see, to see for himself what the impact was. The federal Minister of Agriculture is a farmer himself and should understand what kind of impact this has on the economies of those communities and on those families.

Mr. Chairperson, it is just unfortunate that we have not had the opportunity to discuss this resolution, because this resolution does really lay out the fact that we have come together as the Legislature in the province of Manitoba, not as political parties, separate agendas or anything else. We have come together as the Legislature speaking with one voice to the federal government asking and expecting some results as they relate to support to the farm families in western Manitoba.

I know that our Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Enns, has indeed understood the problem. He is doing everything in his power to try and not only support the farm families out there, but to make sure that our federal counterparts understand the magnitude of this situation. Unfortunately, his voice is not being heard in Ottawa.

Mr. Chairman, I just wanted to say that, as a member elected from the western side of the province, I am committing myself to do whatever it is I can to ensure that, over the next period of 18 months or whatever it takes, we lend the kind of support to these people as we have done in other adverse situations in this province to the people of our province, so that indeed these farms can be saved, so that farmers do not have to leave their farms, so that people do not have to abandon their livelihoods and search for new ways of life, because that is not the way that this province deals with its citizens. That is not the way this government has dealt with its citizens. It is not the way that we deal with our neighbours and the people that are our friends and our neighbours in this province, so I thank you for the opportunity to be able to put some of these remarks on record.

I just wanted to say one more thing as it relates to the Assiniboine Valley Region, which is on the western side of the province. We talked about the Red River Valley and its importance. The Assiniboine Valley has undergone some tremendous stresses over the last five years. In 1995, we saw the flood of the Assiniboine Valley. In that time it was different than the Red River flood again, because there were farmers there who could not put their crops in for a period of two years. In the Red River Valley, fortunately, the farmers were able to get their crops in, all but for a few acres.

So the situations are different. The topography is different. We need to understand that there are different needs, but there are also different solutions that have to be found to address the situations that exist. Nevertheless, we have to show at least the same kind of support, the same willingness to support those families as we do in other disasters, and I do not see that from the federal government at this point in time. Through our debate, we can at least call on the federal government to become

much more attentive than they have been to the issues that we have, that we are facing here in this province.

Mr. Glen Findlay (Springfield): I will speak for just a few minutes. As someone who has been involved in the process of farming in western Manitoba, a former Minister of Agriculture when we had an economic crisis, the same as now, in the whole province with low grain prices dating back to '89, '90, '91, and we worked very closely with the federal government to come up with solutions at that time. They were called GRIP and NISA. NISA is still alive, and GRIP served for a five-year period and was no longer needed.

But there is no question that there is a lot of desperation in western Manitoba right now. I dare say there are two million acres out there that are in some kind of trouble. I would suggest at least a million that will never get seeded because it is so wet, and I would suggest there are another million acres out there that have been seeded under some significant stress in terms of the crops. Muddying a crop in does not get you very good germination or a very good crop at the end of the day.

There will be the big economic impact on the farm, as other members have indicated, the lack of any income for about 18 months off productive acres normally, but there is also the economic impact that goes away beyond the farm gate. It is services not bought. It is services not used. It affects all the fertilizer dealers, your chemical dealers, your machine dealers, your hardware store, your grocery store. It will affect the ability to collect property taxes this fall. It has a broad economic long-time impact.

Reflecting on the Red River Valley, there was definitely a very serious disaster here in the spring of '97. The water rose, buildings were damaged, cropland was inundated. But, when you think back now how it unfolded, the federal and provincial governments both responded with program after program to deal with the circumstances, and the buildings were rebuilt. There was an economic boom created by the building of the buildings. The water receded in '97, and it receded also in the spring of '96

because there was a miniflood then. It receded and the land was cropped, so the economic activity of the area was back on its feet very, very quickly. In this situation, that is not going to be the case. We have been watching it unfold over the last two months, saying: well, it is wet, it will stop raining, it will dry, the crop will get in, maybe a little late.

Here we are now at the crop insurance deadlines, some passed already, and anything that has been planted in the last two weeks is under a very significant threat in terms of frost in the fall that may not amount to anything. There will be a big call on crop insurance for those people who have got crop in. There is no question about it. But we must, as a provincial government, we and Saskatchewan, work very diligently to get Ottawa to recognize this disaster and the broad implications of it that will affect not only today and tomorrow, but those communities for a long time to come.

I watched the federal government respond in various regions of the country very, very effectively, including the Red River Valley here in '97, and these people in western Manitoba need a similar consideration. Equality is great. Other members have talked about equal treatment across Canada. It is imperative we get that, and our Minister of Agriculture, I know, has been working very aggressively to try to get Ottawa to recognize we have a problem.

The federal Minister of Agriculture made a trip out here, what, about two weeks ago, sort of flew over and sort of casually noticed there was a problem. Then he made an announcement that he is coming back; it was last week, last Friday or Thursday. It gave the impression he was going to really announce something, and he did not. So further desperation sets in as nobody is worried about us. They do not care if we survive or not, and we are talking families of all shapes and descriptions out there, on farm and off farm, that are in serious trouble right now.

* (1150)

So I just want to put these few comments on the record that, unless we as responsible Canadians respond very effectively to give them some mental assurance in the next short while

that there will be something down the road that gives them a chance to keep their economic engine in the whole community running, there will be great trouble out there.

I am shocked that the Liberal Leader here in Manitoba took the position today. He did not want to have this debate to protect his federal colleagues. It is shocking. It shows he does not recognize that he is trying to be a leader in Manitoba.

It causes me to remember that that member, Mr. Jon Gerrard, when he was an M.P. responsible for economic development and Western Economic Diversification, I guess it was in Manitoba, met with myself as the Minister of Transportation, the Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Enns, at the time, and with municipal leaders and with farm leaders, all of whom had decided that the Crow infrastructure money should be used for roads. Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta were all of the same opinion: use it for roads. Not a lot of money, \$26 million, \$27 million in Manitoba.

Mr. Gerrard came and met with us. We said: we are all onside; we want to use it for roads. He walked out of the room and had a series of meetings. He said: if we do not use it for roads, what would you use it for? And they pork barrelled. They put a lot of money into water infrastructure in the Interlake where he was going to run in the next federal election, up into Swan River into a road and other projects where a member at that time was a Liberal M.P. who lost in the next election.

This man has done some crazy things over the course of time politically as an M.P. and now as a Liberal Leader in Manitoba, but we must look beyond that and respond as a provincial government with Saskatchewan working hard with Ottawa to get a reaction. I really am pleased that we have a non-party process here, that both opposition parties and ourselves are on track with recognizing and trying to come up with solutions that work for the betterment of the communities in a large area of Manitoba. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, I realize that the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Enns) will want to

respond to these, but there are a few comments that I would just like to add. I want people to be aware that the resolution that was put forward was not a critical resolution of the federal government. It was a resolution to call people to work together. In fact, we looked at it, and we proposed, with the member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Downey), amendments. Unfortunately, because we were denied leave to debate that resolution, it will not be on the record.

So I would really like to have permission or request that the resolution be recorded. I would like to table the resolution with the amendments that we are putting forward, and I would like to seek agreement that we would have that resolution printed in these Estimates so that the public when they look at it can realize that this was not a critical resolution. This was a resolution to pull people together to have them recognize that there is a crisis out here and there is a role for the federal government to play, just as in other areas.

So, Mr. Chairman, I would like to table the resolution, along with our amendments, and ask that it be written into the record, and if people will agree with that, I think it is very important. I think that we have to recognize that at this time it is agriculture in the western part of the province that is in crisis. It was the Red River Valley at one time. It was Quebec and the flood. One of the members mentioned the crisis on the East Coast. There is a role for the federal government. When there is a crisis, the federal government has a responsibility. They cannot wash their hands of it. Whether we have a crisis in transportation, we have a crisis in agriculture, when it is an economic crisis, there is a role for the federal government to play in it.

The members talked about the desperate situation. We have met with many of those farmers and their families, and we know that it is very desperate. They tell us that people in the city are about two pay cheques away from being broke. Farmers usually plan their activities on 12 to 18 months, when you are going to put in the crop and when you are going to take it off. But when you do not have that crop in, there is not going to be anything to come off. There is no money there, and this is putting tremendous pressure on farmers and on their families and on

the whole community. I believe that it will go far beyond the western part of the province.

In the Red River Valley, there was an economic boom. Things picked up. In Quebec there was an economic boom because they had to rebuild everything. In this situation, what has to be rebuilt is the soil, and if we cannot rebuild the soil then there is a real problem.

I guess my real point is: can we put that on the record?

Mr. Enns: Mr. Chairman, allow me to express my appreciation to all members in the Chamber that participated in this short hour on this issue. Let me make it very clear, I believe it was important and helpful to senior members of the Department of Agriculture to listen to this debate. They have an understanding that as far as this Chamber is concerned, on both sides of the Chamber, there is a genuine appreciation for the concerns, if somewhat unusual. I suggest it is pity that we do not more often speak with some unanimity in this Chamber, but certainly on this very important issue there is that unanimity that was expressed by the honourable member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk), along with my colleagues in the Chamber.

I have no difficulty at all in the tabling of this resolution with the proviso, of course, that it is acknowledged that the member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Downey) move the resolution, seconded by the member for Swan River, and I would ask that it so be recorded.

Mr. Chairman and colleagues, I will continue my level best with the support of staff and the staff of other departments, and as it now is apparent with the full support of Her Majesty's loyal opposition, to provide two things, equitable treatment, in the case of the farmers that are in trouble. There is that question of equitable treatment, because there was no question that specific programs were freely offered, I might say, in the '97 situation that are not being offered today. Number two, an understanding that we require the flexibility to use those funds that had been allocated for farm support. There have been just too many expressions of concern about the workings of the AIDA program, but I am and I have indicated publicly at the press conference

that the federal minister was present at, the member for Swan River was present at, if that can translate into basing a payment for unseeded acreage to the level of \$25 as part of our commitment to the AIDA program, then that should be done.

I really do not appreciate some of the rumours or games that are being played. I hear today, this morning, that the federal minister offered us a \$25-an-acre payment. I asked the same question: when? My staff asked the same question: when? I asked him that two weeks ago Friday about whether we could, because what is missing today is some certainty. What I hear from honourable members who represent those areas or the farmers, they may not even be happy. It may not even be adequate, the amounts that governments finally choose to provide in these circumstances, but they need to have some certainty that a sum of money, a level of support, is coming, that they can take to their bank managers, to their credit union managers, to other people where they have credit, that they have some indication of some support coming.

As the member for Arthur-Virden pointed out, there are people that will be adequately covered under the AIDA program. Too many people will not be covered under the AIDA

program. For the region, it is a tremendous economic crisis. Quite frankly, there is a need in my judgment for significant injection of money to replace that lost money the member spoke about that is not going to be recovered for at least 18 months.

So members, I thank you very much for this contribution. Mr. Chairman, I thank you for your indulgence in this latitude that we have used in the consideration for the departments of Estimates, but I want to tell you it is far more important to talk about this issue than worry about how many pencils or paperclips my staff have used or not used effectively in the last years or propose to use in these Estimates. This is by far the most important issue facing agriculture, and I am delighted that we have had this opportunity to discuss it. Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: The hour being twelve o'clock, committee rise. Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Marcel Laurendeau): The hour being twelve o'clock, I am leaving the Chair with the understanding that the Speaker will resume the Chair at 1:30 p.m.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, June 24, 1999

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