



Third Session - Thirty-Sixth Legislature

of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Sixth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ASHTON, Steve	Thompson	N.D.P.
BARRETT, Becky	Wellington	N.D.P.
CERILLI, Marianne	Radisson	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CUMMINGS, Glen, Hon.	Ste. Rose	P.C.
DACQUAY, Louise, Hon.	Seine River	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard, Hon.	Roblin-Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary	Concordia	N.D.P.
DOWNEY, James, Hon.	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
DRIEDGER, Albert	Steinbach	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
ENNS, Harry, Hon.	Lakeside	P.C.
ERNST, Jim	Charleswood	P.C.
EVANS, Clif	Interlake	N.D.P.
EVANS, Leonard S.	Brandon East	N.D.P.
FILMON, Gary, Hon.	Tuxedo	P.C.
FINDLAY, Glen, Hon.	Springfield	P.C.
FRIESEN, Jean	Wolseley	N.D.P.
GAUDRY, Neil	St. Boniface	Lib.
GILLESHAMMER, Harold, Hon.	Minnedosa	P.C.
HELWER, Edward	Gimli	P.C.
HICKES, George	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
JENNISSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
KOWALSKI, Gary	The Maples	Lib.
LAMOUREUX, Kevin	Inkster	Lib.
LATHLIN, Oscar	The Pas	N.D.P.
LAURENDEAU, Marcel	St. Norbert	P.C.
MACKINTOSH, Gord	St. Johns	N.D.P.
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	N.D.P.
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McALPINE, Gerry	Sturgeon Creek	P.C.
McCRAE, James, Hon.	Brandon West	P.C.
McGIFFORD, Diane	Osborne	N.D.P.
McINTOSH, Linda, Hon.	Assiniboia	P.C.
MIHYCHUK, MaryAnn	St. James	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie, Hon.	River East	P.C.
NEWMAN, David, Hon.	Riel	P.C.
PENNER, Jack	Emerson	P.C.
PITURA, Frank, Hon.	Morris	P.C.
PRAZNIK, Darren, Hon.	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
RADCLIFFE, Mike, Hon.	River Heights	P.C.
REID, Daryl	Transcona	N.D.P.
REIMER, Jack, Hon.	Niakwa	P.C.
RENDER, Shirley	St. Vital	P.C.
ROBINSON, Eric	Rupertsland	N.D.P.
ROCAN, Denis	Gladstone	P.C.
SALE, Tim	Crescentwood	N.D.P.
SANTOS, Conrad	Broadway	N.D.P.
STEFANSON, Eric, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	P.C.
STRUTHERS, Stan	Dauphin	N.D.P.
SVEINSON, Ben	La Verendrye	P.C.
TOEWS, Vic, Hon.	Rossmere	P.C.
TWEED, Mervin	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
VODREY, Rosemary, Hon.	Fort Garry	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann	Swan River	N.D.P.
Vacant	Portage la Prairie	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, June 4, 1997

The House met at 1:30 p.m.**PRAYERS****ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS****PRESENTING PETITIONS****Mobile Screening Unit for Mammograms**

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): Madam Speaker, I beg to present the petition of John Makowaychuk, Virginia Cork, Peter Zimmer and others praying that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba request the Minister of Health (Mr. Praznik) to consider immediately establishing a mobile screening unit for mammograms to help women across the province detect breast cancer at the earliest possible opportunity.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS**Mobile Screening Unit for Mammograms**

Madam Speaker: I have reviewed the petition of the honourable member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk), and it complies with the rules and practices of the House. Is it the will of the House to have the petition read?

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Madam Speaker: Dispense.

WHEREAS medical authorities have stated that breast cancer in Manitoba has reached almost epidemic proportions; and

WHEREAS yearly mammograms are recommended for women over 50, and perhaps younger if a woman feels she is at risk; and

WHEREAS while improved surgical procedures and better post-operative care do improve a woman's chances if she is diagnosed, early detection plays a vital role; and

WHEREAS Manitoba currently has only three centres where mammograms can be performed, those being Winnipeg, Brandon and Thompson; and

WHEREAS a trip to and from these centres for a mammogram can cost a woman upwards of \$500 which is a prohibitive cost for some women; and

WHEREAS a number of other provinces have dealt with this problem by establishing mobile screening units; and

WHEREAS the provincial government has promised to take action on this serious issue.

WHEREFORE YOUR PETITIONERS HUMBLY PRAY that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba may be pleased to request the Minister of Health (Mr. Praznik) to consider immediately establishing a mobile screening unit for mammograms to help women across the province detect breast cancer at the earliest possible opportunity.

Obstetrics Closure—Grace General Hospital

Madam Speaker: I have reviewed the petition of the honourable member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak), and it complies with the rules and practices of the House. Is it the will of the House to have the petition read?

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Madam Speaker: Dispense.

THAT the obstetrics program has always been an important part of the Grace Hospital's mandate; and

THAT both people in the community and a number of government studies have recommended against the further closure of community hospitals' obstetrics programs; and

THAT as a result of federal and provincial cuts in the health budget, hospitals are being forced to eliminate programs in order to balance their own budgets; and

THAT the closure of the Grace Hospital obstetrics ward will mean laying off 54 health care professionals, many of whom have years of experience and dedicated service in obstetrics; and

THAT moving to a model where more and more births are centred in the tertiary care hospitals will be more costly and decreases the choices for women about where they can give birth.

WHEREFORE YOUR PETITIONERS HUMBL Y PRAY THAT the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba request that the Minister of Health (Mr. Praznik) consider stopping the closure of the obstetrics program at Winnipeg's Grace Hospital.

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

Committee of Supply

Mr. Marcel Laurendeau (Chairperson of the Committee of Supply): Madam Speaker, the Committee of Supply has adopted certain resolutions, directs me to report the same and asks leave to sit again.

I move, seconded by the honourable member for St. Vital (Mrs. Render), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 50—The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy and Consequential Amendments Act

Hon. Rosemary Vodrey (Minister of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship): Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Labour (Mr. Gilleshammer), that leave be given to introduce Bill 50, The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy and Consequential Amendments Act; Loi sur l'accès à l'information et la protection de la vie privée et modifications corrélatives, and that the same be now received and read a first time.

His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, having been advised of the contents of this bill, recommends it to the House. I would like to table the Lieutenant Governor's message.

Motion agreed to.

Bill 51—The Personal Health Information Act

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, I would move, seconded by the honourable Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Enns), that leave be given to introduce Bill 51, The Personal Health Information Act; Loi sur les renseignements médicaux personnels, and that the same be now received and read a first time.

His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, having been advised of the contents of this bill, recommends it to the House. At this time, I would like to also table the message of His Honour the Lieutenant Governor.

Motion agreed to.

* (1335)

Bill 52—The Statute Law Amendment Act, 1997

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson), that leave be given to introduce Bill 52, The Statute Law Amendment Act, 1997 (Loi de 1997 modifiant diverses dispositions législatives), and that the same be now received and read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

Bill 56—The Family Maintenance Amendment Act

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I move, seconded by the Minister of Family Services (Mrs. Mitchelson), that leave be given to introduce Bill 56, The Family Maintenance Amendment Act (Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'obligation alimentaire), and that the same be now received and read a first time.

His Honour the Lieutenant Governor, having been advised of the contents of this bill, recommends it to

the House. I would like to table the Lieutenant Governor's message at this time.

Motion agreed to.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members, firstly, to the Speaker's Gallery where we have with us this afternoon His Excellency Antonio Britto, Governor of the State of Rio Grande do Sul.

On behalf of all honourable members, I welcome you this afternoon.

Also, seated in the public gallery we have forty Grades 5 and 6 students from the Van Walleghem School under the direction of Madelle Kim Pepler and Mr. Bob Weber. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable First Minister (Mr. Filmon).

Also, twenty-five Grade 6 students from Dr. D.W. Penner School under the direction of Mr. Larry Schroeder. This school is located in the constituency of the Speaker (Mrs. Dacquay).

Also, 10 visitors from Winnipeg Teen Touch under the direction of Ms. Joelle Page. This group is located in the constituency of the honourable member for Broadway (Mr. Santos).

On behalf of all honourable members, I welcome you this afternoon.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

**Manitoba Telecom Services
Ownership**

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, my question is to the First Minister.

On May 2, 1996, the Premier, in announcing that he was going to break his election promise and proceed to sell the Manitoba Telephone System, said: Our first priority is to ensure that Manitobans would continue to control the Manitoba Telephone System.

Yesterday in this House, when we asked five months after the sale had taken place what was the percentage of shares that were indeed controlled by Manitobans, the minister stated that the information was not available. In fact, he said it may be available, it may not be available.

Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the Premier what authority has the government maintained to ensure that his priority, his alleged priority of controlling the telephone system is going to be met.

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Madam Speaker, I think what is important to Manitobans is that they receive in their telecommunication services the highest quality of service possible at a reasonable rate, a very reasonable rate, that it continues to be evaluated by an independent authority such as the CRTC and that indeed the operations are centred here, that the employment is here, that—[interjection] Well, you know, the member who has some very, of course, deep socialist ideology, the member for Radisson (Ms. Cerilli) makes the comment about branch plant. No matter how often they are rejected by people throughout the world for their ideology, they continue—

* (1340)

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Filmon: The whole world, Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Point of Order

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): Point of order, Madam Speaker. I listened very carefully to the comments of the Premier, and I think the Premier is definitely provoking debate with his comments. I think the Premier ought to be called to order to deal with the question as posed by the Leader and not engage in debate, because if he is going to engage in debate he is clearly going to lose.

Mr. Filmon: On the same point of order, Madam Speaker, very clearly, while I was attempting to answer the question of the Leader of the Opposition, I was being interrupted by the constant heckling of the

member for Radisson (Ms. Cerilli) and the member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale).

Madam Speaker, in response to the point of order, the phoney nonpoint of order that was raised by the member for Kildonan, I would not dream of debating or entering into a debate with the member for Radisson, because I do not believe in fighting an unarmed opponent.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. On the point of order raised by the honourable member for Kildonan, I would remind that all honourable members should respect each other when a member is either identified to pose a question or respond to a question. Indeed, other members should respect that member's rights and privileges, and I would also remind all ministers that answers should be direct and respond to the question asked.

* * *

Madam Speaker: The honourable First Minister, to quickly complete his response.

Mr. Filmon: So, as a consequence, I believe Manitobans are more concerned with the fact that they receive their services at a reasonable cost, that they continue to have the services here in Manitoba, that the employment is here in Manitoba and that any expansion will take place here in Manitoba.

The fact of the matter is, Madam Speaker, that all of the members of the board of the Manitoba Telecom Services are either Manitobans or former Manitobans, and their commitment is to providing these services to Manitobans at the best possible rate and in the best possible fashion.

Mr. Doer: Madam Speaker, I think the priority for Manitobans is people that tell the truth, and that is what the member for Radisson (Ms. Cerilli) does every day, unlike the Premier.

Was the Premier telling the truth last year when he said—we know he was not telling the truth in the election when he promised not to sell the telephone

system—our first priority is to ensure Manitobans will have control.

Was he telling the truth then? Was he telling the truth when he said on May 2 in this House, Manitobans will continue to control and own and operate their own phone system, or is he telling the truth now, today, that they do not have the authority to implement their promise that they made a year ago?

Mr. Filmon: Of course, the member opposite is not telling the truth about what I did say during the last election campaign. When it comes to telling the truth, Manitobans have judged him, and that is why he is on the other side.

The fact of the matter is, Manitobans still do control the Manitoba Telecom Services, and it will continue to be thus.

Mr. Doer: Of course, the minister of telecommunications could not tell us whether we controlled 50 percent of the shares yesterday and said he did not know whether that information was available.

I would like to ask the Premier—the Premier has repeatedly stated that he told the truth, but in the press conference on May 2, he confirmed that he did promise that he would not sell the Manitoba Telephone System during the last election campaign. How can the Premier be trusted on other issues of public importance, like Manitoba Hydro, when clearly he is prepared to say one thing before an election and do something else after an election campaign? How can anybody trust this Premier?

* (1345)

Mr. Filmon: Madam Speaker, I do not know whether the Leader of the Opposition acts out of sheer ignorance or out of total dishonesty, but I can tell him that I did not say anything of the sort either at the news conference or during the last election campaign, and he knows it full well.

Point of Order

Mr. Steve Ashton (Opposition House Leader): Madam Speaker, the Premier—as is his wont to use the

term "dishonesty" in regard to the Leader of the Opposition. In the context of MTS, that is not only unparliamentary but absolutely amazing.

I would appreciate that you not only ask the Premier to withdraw that word, but admit to the fact he did not tell the people of Manitoba what he was going to do with the Manitoba Telephone System during the election. Why not just come out and say it, Mr. Premier?

Madam Speaker: Order, please. On the point of order raised by the honourable member for Thompson, the term "dishonest" appears in Beauchesne on both the unparliamentary list and the parliamentary list. However, the use of such words including "untruth" or "not telling the truth," by all members in this House does nothing but promote debate and cause severe disruption in this House. I would ask that all members pick and choose their words carefully.

Orthotic/Prosthetic Services User Fees

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): My question also is for the Premier (Mr. Filmon), Madam Speaker. It might surprise members of the House, but June is spina bifida month in this country. Imagine the shock of parents and of members of the Spina Bifida Association of Manitoba, who number up to 500, to find out the government had decided in their budget to claw back \$400,000 from their pockets and the pockets of others and to charge a user fee for necessary services.

I will table a letter for the Premier that went to the Minister of Health from the head of the association talking about the parents requiring bladder devices at a cost of \$1,000 a year. They are only allowed \$500 a year for a chair; the cost of a chair is \$3,000 to \$15,000 a year. The Pharmacare costs have been eliminated, and then they decide in the budget to impose a user fee on these devices.

Can the Premier answer how an item like that, that the minister is now back-peddalling on, gets through a cabinet that is supposed to be informed of the needs of Manitobans?

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Health): I think we discussed this matter a fair bit yesterday. I have no

problem again entering into the discussion on this particular matter that the member raises. There is no doubt that over the last number of years all provincial governments have been under increasing pressure in their health budgets. Reductions in federal contributions to health care, our own budgetary requirements forced governments all across the country to look at ways of ensuring that they can distribute the dollars they have across the system.

In this particular item, as I indicated yesterday to the media—I think there was coverage of it—that in our whole area of support for devices, for medical equipment, we have a great deal of inconsistency. It has developed over 30 years of ad hoc support in a variety of areas. So what I have said we are going to do before we move in any of these areas is, with Treasury Board, come up with a consistent policy across the system that is in line with what happens across the country.

Mr. Chomiak: Madam Speaker, did it ever occur to the Minister of Health, the Premier (Mr. Filmon) or the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson), in this development of this clawback on this tax on the sick, that, in fact, as we move from acute care hospitals to community based, these devices keep people mobile, keep people out of expensive hospitals, improve their quality of life, that in fact this is an investment and rather than increasing the taxes on the sick, you ought to be removing them? Did it ever occur to anyone on that side of the House to consider that?

Mr. Praznik: Absolutely, Madam Speaker. That is why, in fact, now we are attempting to develop a far more consistent policy, but let us not let the member for Kildonan leave the impression that a co-payment or deductible has not been part of the system across this country for many of these devices for years. In fact, in the area of Pharmacare, there has always been a deductible for Pharmacare; there has always been a deductible for eyeglasses in a variety of areas. The point that I readily admit is that we have a very—and have had, over a number of governments over three decades, a very inconsistent approach in this area, one that is the result of, I think, a lot of ad hoc policy decisions. I think it is time we look at finding a reasonable approach to these areas to avoid the kinds of difficulties that the member has outlined.

* (1350)

Mr. Chomiak: Madam Speaker, my final supplementary to the minister—and it is indeed unfortunate that he did not rule out that he would maintain this tax on the sick. Did the minister ever consider or will he consider, before you decide to impose these taxes on the sick, that you talk to organizations like the Society for Manitobans with Disabilities, the Canadian Paraplegic Association, Independent Living Resource Centre, Cerebral Palsy Association, Muscular Dystrophy Association, Association for Community Living, Spina Bifida Association, all those organizations that are affected by this? You did not even talk to them before you imposed this tax on the sick. Will you at least talk—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Praznik: Madam Speaker, I would not want to see the member get too worked up over this issue, because his point is a very valid one. The department had, in fact, entered into some discussions after the budgetary process. In bringing me up to date on their discussions, I also was not satisfied with the degree of consultation that had gone on. I share that same concern. As well, the advice coming from the organization that was directly affected by this issue on orthotics had another proposal that they made to us, and so that is why, in fact, we have taken the action that we have. I have been in communication with the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson), and we hope to be able to do a much better review in all of these areas, because ad hoc'ing it is not the way to go.

Queen versus Bauder Court of Appeal Decision

Mr. Gord Mackintosh (St. Johns): Madam Speaker, to the Minister of Justice: The Court of Appeal of Manitoba recently made a decision in the Queen versus Bauder that the accused, who was found to have sexually assaulted a child, was not a danger to the safety of the community. One of the parts of the decision that we find most obnoxious and indeed truly a throwback was the conclusion by the court, the finding of fact, that the victim, a child, was a willing participant in the sexual assault.

I ask the Minister of Justice if he can tell the House and Manitobans where did this finding of fact come from, since he knows the Court of Appeal does not make such findings of fact. Where did it come from? Did in fact the Crown agree that the victim had somehow consented?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Madam Speaker, the decision, of course, has been one that has concerned my department very much. It seems to me that, in applying the law in that particular situation, the law makes Manitobans victims on the street or in the community and also appears to victimize people in our courts. If that is the interpretation of the law, then I am very, very concerned. In fact, the department has indicated to me that they are of the opinion that an error of law has been made in that particular case, and without getting into the reasons mentioned by my colleague from St. Johns, there will be an application made by the department for leave to appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada, and that will be done shortly.

Mr. Mackintosh: I think that goes without saying. There must be an appeal, but my question to the minister was what was the position of the Crown. Did they agree to the conclusion of fact that somehow she was a willing participant to the sexual assault? What was the position of the Crown as to why this was even somehow relevant to the finding on sentencing?

Mr. Toews: Madam Speaker, I think that it is not appropriate for me to get into the—

* (1355)

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Toews: Madam Speaker, I think I have clearly made my position known in respect of this particular issue. The department is very concerned that it is sending out a wrong message that somehow children can be victimized or exploited. We feel that that is in fact an error of law, that the interpretation that the court made is not correct.

In respect of the Crown's position, the Crown in fact took a position that incarceration was necessary, and

indeed that was the portion of the judgment that the court overturned.

Victim Impact Statement

Mr. Gord Mackintosh (St. Johns): Would the minister, who has still not answered both my first and second questions, also concern himself as to whether his own department is also sending out the wrong message and also consider was it the position of the Crown that there should not be a victim impact statement filed? What is the position of the Crown in the filing of victim impact statements, which can really help the court and show the court what the victims of Manitoba are feeling when sexual assaults occur?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): One of the things, Madam Speaker, that this government has been very proud of is its record in respect of enhancing services to victims. Both the member for Brandon West (Mr. McCrae) and the member for Fort Garry (Mrs. Vodrey), the prior Attorneys General, have been very strong in respect of ensuring that victims are made a part of the process, that they understand the process, that they brought—[interjection] The member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale) sits there sniping in his seat. If he has something to add, why does he not get up and say it after I have finished speaking, but right now I think the Chair has recognized me and I am answering that question.

The victims, Madam Speaker, are very important. We have done everything that we possibly can to ensure that they remain an important part of the process so that the judicial system understands that they too have a part to play.

Court of Appeal Decision

Mr. Gord Mackintosh (St. Johns): A second series of questions to the Minister of Justice.

This decision is of great concern, I hope to all members in this House and to Manitobans. It should be of great concern also, of course, to the minister. I ask him, would he please answer the simple questions that we posed? Was it the position of the Crown that the victim, the child victim in this case, was a willing

participant? Why did the Court of Appeal make that announcement in their decision? Where did that come from? Was there an agreed statement of fact to which the Crown was complicit?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Madam Speaker, in respect of this particular case, I have discussed the matter with the attorneys who represented the Crown. I understand the particular situation that led about to the entering of a guilty plea. I believe that the Crown attorneys worked very, very hard in respect of securing that guilty plea, and that in fact was achieved. I am not prepared to discuss anything further in respect of that issue other than what may already be publicly known.

Mr. Mackintosh: Would the minister, who certainly openly spoke of this case on election day—and we ask him to again speak openly today—tell this House, if he will not answer what the position of the Crown was on the statement of fact, what was the position of the Crown then as to the relevance of the victim's conduct to the sentencing? Why is all of a sudden the victim's conduct relevant to sentencing in a case like this?

Mr. Toews: Madam Speaker, there are all kinds of things that a court may take into account appropriately. It is our position, the Department of Justice's position that there were certain errors made in this particular case, that there were certain decisions that were wrong, and that is why we have appealed this to the Supreme Court of Canada.

Mr. Mackintosh: Then would the minister at least tell this House whether he has concerns that the perceived consent of a victim or the victim's conduct should be relevant or not when it comes to sentencing? Because clearly the Criminal Code in the 1980s was changed to ensure that the conduct of a victim in a sexual assault should not be relevant. Why is it relevant in sentencing?

Mr. Toews: That raises a good point, and I think that is a point that I can answer very, very directly. Prior to the change in the Criminal Code, there was a specific provision that said that a child could not, under the age of 14, consent. In my opinion, that was an appropriate law, that was the good law. Then what we had as a result of changes to the Criminal Code I think was a

very dangerous erosion of the protection of victims, and that is what my concern is. That is certainly what I want my prosecutors, when they are arguing that case in front of the Supreme Court of Canada, to ensure, that even though the law might be weakened in that respect by the federal government's action, we in fact want to stand up for the victims as much as possible within our area of jurisdiction.

* (1400)

Federal Transfer Payments Minimum Cash Payments

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Yesterday I asked the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) about the cash transfers versus tax transfers in order to fund health care into the future. Given the fact that the Premier over the summer is going to be meeting with his counterparts from across Canada, it is important for Manitobans' perspective that we have a government that is going to strongly advocate that there has to be a cash transfer into the future, guaranteeing those five fundamental principles for health care.

My question to the Premier is: Will he today advocate and give the commitment to this Chamber that he will do just that, protect those cash transfer payments?

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): I find it difficult to be able to respond without a great deal of excess energy to the member for Inkster, whose colleagues in the federal government have been responsible for the largest reduction to transfer payments for health and education in Canada's history, who cut \$7 billion of transfer payments for health and education to the provinces of Canada, over \$220 million annually to our province. It is a tragedy that they could get away with this and have the audacity to position themselves as being the protectors of medicare in this country. Unbelievable, Madam Speaker.

So my short answer to the member for Inkster is: We will be advocating strongly on behalf of all Manitobans that the federal Liberal government stop the cuts that they have been engaged in over the past few years and restore the cuts so that we can indeed properly finance

health and post-secondary education in this province in future.

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, what we are asking the Premier is to take a very strong line in which he will not accept any sort of transfer from cash transfers to tax transfers. Someone like Premier Klein in Alberta, who now endorses Preston Manning, people who want to have a devolution of powers—will the Premier today stand up for Manitobans, take away the rhetoric that he just finished putting on the record and defend the cash transfers over the tax transfers?

Mr. Filmon: Rhetoric, Madam Speaker. This is rhetoric that we have just heard from the member for Inkster. This is nonsense. It is absolutely ridiculous that this member for Inkster, who was standing on the back deck there on Scotia Street handing the sandbag to the Prime Minister and supporting the Prime Minister, would have the audacity to try and get us off in a blind alley talking about tax points or cash. What we need is a federal government that stops the cuts to us so that we can, in fact, support health care.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Inkster, with a final supplementary question.

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, will the Premier acknowledge what Manitobans need is a Premier who is going to stand up for the provinces that are going to rely on the cash transfers, provinces like the Atlantic regions, provinces like Saskatchewan, that cannot compete with Ontario, Alberta and B.C. on the Treasury Boards? This Premier has a responsibility to stand up for those cash transfers and stop playing the political games that he is entering into.

Mr. Filmon: Madam Speaker, this kind of nonsense gives new meaning to the words "Liberal toady." Standing up here attempting to defend his federal government's cuts to health care and education in the provinces is what we do not need. We need a Liberal member of this Legislature who will stand up for Manitobans instead of always standing up to defend his federal cousins. We need a Liberal government in Ottawa that understands the harm that they have created by reducing transfers to the provinces, including their \$220-million annual reduction in transfers to the province of Manitoba for health and education.

Provincial Parks Passes—Private Businesses

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): Madam Speaker, my questions are for the Minister of Natural Resources.

Last spring this government introduced annual \$20 passes for vehicles stopping within provincial park boundaries. Apart from discouraging tourism and being an annoyance for northern residents who live near the parks, the passes are also creating unnecessary red tape and economic hardship for businesses within the park. For example, one lumber operation owned by the Petryk brothers of Cranberry Portage has been in operation before the Grass River Park was even thought of. Yet, the Petryk brothers are expected to have park passes for eight of their vehicles. When the fuel truck comes from Cranberry Portage, that truck is expected to have a park pass. When teenagers work for them, casual labour on Saturdays, those teenagers are expected to carry park passes in their vehicles, and so on.

My question for the minister is: What is the minister willing to do to accommodate these concerns?

Hon. Glen Cummings (Minister of Natural Resources): Madam Speaker, there are provisions that allow for businesses operating within the parks to obtain passes for employees within a reasonable number. There are also provisions to assist those who have fleets, delivery trucks operating in parks, that they would be given additional consideration. I suggest that, if the member has found an anomaly that seems to be unreasonable, we are always prepared to look at those.

Mr. Jennissen: I thank the minister for that answer. I may have found an anomaly, and I hope the minister can answer this question. There is a service station at the intersection of Highways 10 and 39, which is technically within the park, and I would like the minister to tell me: Where there are any vehicles stopping there for gas, does that vehicle technically need a pass or not?

Mr. Cummings: Madam Speaker, I am not familiar with the location of the service station that the member refers to. I will be glad to pursue that if it is somehow sitting on the boundary or in a position that was unanticipated when this policy was put in place.

The fact is, Madam Speaker, for those businesses that are located further within the park's gate, there are a number of policies with some flexibility to them that are intended to allow people who wish to go in for a brief period of time and do business and then leave, that they can do that without any expenditure.

* (1410)

Arizona Fitness Closure

Hon. Mike Radcliffe (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Madam Speaker, I would like to respond to a question put on the record yesterday. The question that was put to me was what was the date by which the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs received notice of the failure of the Arizona Fitness club. I would advise my colleagues here today that the department received one complaint on this issue and only one complaint. That complaint was logged on the 27th of May, 1997, subsequent to which the bureau responded quickly. Thank you.

Madam Speaker: For the record, I assume the minister was responding to a question taken as notice.

Bay Line Railway Future Status

Mr. Steve Ashton (Thompson): The Hudson Bay rail line and the Port of Churchill are important not only to northern Manitoba but particularly important to many Manitobans generally. Now that there will be a strong voice in Ottawa speaking out on behalf of the Bay Line in the form of our new M.P., Bev Desjarlais, I would like to ask on a co-operative note if the Minister of Highways and Transportation, perhaps in conjunction with the Minister of Northern Affairs (Mr. Newman), would be prepared to work with us as northern representatives to bring together representatives of the Bay Line and OmniTRAX to answer many of the unanswered questions about the future of the Bay Line rail line service under the sale to OmniTRAX, the American company that will be operating the Bay Line?

Hon. Glen Findlay (Minister of Highways and Transportation): Madam Speaker, the Johnny-come-lately party has finally got on board with Churchill.

This government has been advocating for months to achieve what is happening today. Somebody is committed to make that line operate for the good of moving product up and down, for the good of tourism, for the good of Akjuit, and that is a process this government has been supporting and endorsing and promoting for months and months, and now, finally, the NDP decides they want to get on board. Catch up.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Thompson, with a supplementary question.

Mr. Ashton: So much for asking for a co-operative approach with the provincial government. Perhaps I will try the Minister of Northern Affairs (Mr. Newman), who was in Pikwitonei, a Bay Line community, with many northern representatives and perhaps had the opportunity to talk to them.

Will he commit to work with northern representatives to bring together Bay Line officials, both councillors and mayors and OmniTRAX, to answer the many unanswered questions about rail service on the Bay Line under the sale to OmniTRAX? Will the Minister of Northern Affairs perhaps try that co-operative approach?

Hon. David Newman (Minister responsible for Northern Affairs): Madam Speaker, I will not commit to any specifics, but I will commit to good-faith dealings with the M.P.s that have been elected in the province of Manitoba if it contributes to the improvement of anything in Manitoba.

Mr. Ashton: Will then the Minister of Northern Affairs support bringing together the Bay Line communities? I am suggesting that what we do is arrange a meeting with OmniTRAX in a central location, perhaps either Churchill, Thompson or The Pas, to discuss the future of rail line passenger service, because there are no guarantees on passenger service. People are concerned the number of trains may be decreased to one per week or two per week. Will the minister perhaps work through his department with the mayors, councillors and northern representatives to work toward this meeting?

Mr. Newman: The northern round table has recently signed a memorandum of understanding between its

component members who consist of George Muswagon, the Grand Chief of MKO bands; Mayor Comaskey, representing the urban municipalities in the North; Bob McClaverty, being their secretariat of the organization; and Sonny Clyne, representing the northern communities. I think that would be the appropriate vehicle to convene such a gathering. I would support that sort of convening and working with that organization that has been established to do that sort of work.

Commercial Fishing Industry Net Mesh Size

Mr. Clif Evans (Interlake): Madam Speaker, commercial fishing season has started this week. As you know, several new regulations were implemented last month by this minister. One of the new regulations was to allow the whitefish fleet to use 4.25-inch mesh instead of the 5 inch that was requested by the fishermen or the 4.75 inch that was allowed last year. My question to the minister: Why is the minister going against the recommendations of fishermen he met with, and who did he consult with before allowing the recommendation to go ahead with a 4.25-inch mesh?

Hon. Glen Cummings (Minister of Natural Resources): Madam Speaker, I think I consulted with about eight to 10 different groups that came in from the various communities and representatives of the various fleet enterprises on Lake Winnipeg before proceeding with what are some very carefully thought-out changes in the fishery regulations for this coming year, the most important of which is that a limit was placed, in terms of the beginning of the fishery, to allow for the spawning to be completed in a more real sense. The 4.25-inch mesh, I believe, in the north basin the member would be referring to is a very sustainable mesh size, and it is supported in the communities as the size that is being used as well. It provides uniformity. At the same time—and I see the member is shaking his head—the limit has been placed on the pickerel, sauger quota of 20 percent.

Mr. Clif Evans: Why then did the minister not go back to the fishermen that he did meet with and advise them of his—as he had said in the previous answer—nonradical deviations they made from the recommendations they made, the fishermen, when the

fishermen themselves in the past three weeks have been saying that 4.25 is beyond radical?

Mr. Cummings: Madam Speaker, I am disappointed that some of the communities that I met with might consider this a radical change. This in fact is the mesh size, as I recall, that is being used in the communities, and this brings some uniformity to the area. The member and others who criticize this change conveniently overlook the fact that the whitefish fleet has been limited to 20 percent of its quota for pickerel and sauger. This is a very supportable, very sustainable net size, and at the same time this, in conjunction with other measures that have been taken on the lake, creates what we hope is the basis for a sustainable development strategy to return this lake to its rightful production.

Illegal Sales

Mr. Clif Evans (Interlake): What action is this minister prepared to take to address the concerns of the fishermen that he has met with regarding the illegal sale of fish, which I know has been raised with his office, previous minister, and is still an ongoing concern? What is he going to do?

Hon. Glen Cummings (Minister of Natural Resources): Madam Speaker, obviously, illegal sale or capture of our resources is always a concern of the department. In fact, from time to time there are some individuals who would accuse the department of being draconian in its measures, but the fact is it was brought to my attention during that series of meetings that I had over the course of the winter with the various fishing interests, and I assured them that we would be doing everything we could to follow up in terms of enforcement. The member may have missed it, but recently in the media within the last two weeks, he will notice there has been a series of charges that have come through the courts, and we have seen some very, very significant fines. One couple I am aware of received a total of \$25,000 in fines just for the one couple, so I want to assure him that we will be enforcing the law.

Arizona Fitness Consumer Protection

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister of Consumer Affairs and concerns the recent closure of Arizona Fitness club and

his nonanswer of a few minutes ago. Madam Speaker, the minister indicated that he acted quickly, but he does not say what he actually did. I would like to know what he is prepared to do for the latest victims that his department has once again failed to protect.

Hon. Mike Radcliffe (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my honourable colleague, the member for Elmwood, across the way for asking the same question today that he did yesterday, because that gives me the opportunity to once more put on the record that the expeditious and effective work of the Consumers' Bureau was to contact the City of Winnipeg Police and to work in concert with the constabulary to investigate this issue and to ascertain whether in fact there had been any fraudulent activities committed upon the good citizens of Winnipeg in Manitoba. So I can point to the effective work of our good civil service in this respect, and if my honourable colleague would like to give me another opportunity to extol our public servants, I would welcome the opportunity to do so.

* (1420)

Fitness Clubs Consumer Protection

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): Would the minister consider making it mandatory that, in the sale of such memberships at these clubs, all the members receive a copy of the limitations of The Consumer Protection Act and that the clubs be required to post such laws governing such memberships prominently in the clubs?

Hon. Mike Radcliffe (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Madam Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to advise my honourable colleague, the member for Elmwood across, that The Consumer Protection Act at the present time says, and I quote Section 125(2) of the said act: "A seller shall not collect payment of the fee under any contract except by approximately equal instalments, no fewer than two in number and payable in approximately equal payment periods the length of each of which shall be the number of months obtained by dividing the number of months in the contract by the number of instalments payable thereunder."

Madam Speaker, this is the state of the law and we, as the honourable member knows, the Consumers'

Bureau is very assiduous to respond to any sorts of complaints that are levelled against any operation in the community, and if there was any further information on this, the bureau would be most eager to respond.

Point of Order

Mr. Steve Ashton (Opposition House Leader): On a point of order, Madam Speaker, Beauchesne is very clear that answers should be related to the question that was asked, and while we certainly appreciate the fact that the minister has read the act or was reading it from his briefing notes, the question that was asked was very specifically about the kinds of safeguards and protections that should be put in place to make sure people are aware of the limitations of the protection that is in place. I am wondering if you would like to ask the minister to give a very serious and direct response to a very good suggestion and question from the member for Elmwood.

Hon. James McCrae (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, it is somewhat surprising that this point of order should be raised. The question asked about the safeguards that are provided in our system here, and the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs was expanding on the details related to those very safeguards. So I cannot quite understand what the honourable member for Thompson is raising by way of a point of order here, but I am sure you will look into it and find that he does not have a point of order.

Madam Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable member for Thompson, the honourable member for Thompson does not have a point of order. It is clearly a dispute over the facts.

* * *

Madam Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

NONPOLITICAL STATEMENTS

Direct-Line Hydro Power Opening Thicket Portage and Pikwitonei

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Thompson, on a nonpolitical statement. Does the

honourable member for Thompson have leave for a nonpolitical statement? [agreed]

Mr. Steve Ashton (Thompson): Madam Speaker, I referenced earlier a very significant event that took place in Pikwitonei this past weekend. I was pleased to be able to join with the Minister responsible for Northern Affairs (Mr. Newman), the Manitoba Hydro and elected representatives of Thicket Portage and Pikwitonei, along with many community residents, to celebrate the opening of direct-line hydro power in those communities.

I think what is significant to reference is the fact that there was, I think, a particular irony of the number of people being present—Bill Shanks who is regional manager for Manitoba Hydro who installed the first poles in the communities of Thicket Portage and Pikwitonei for diesel power in those days. Others were invited. I know Judy Kolada, a former co-ordinator with the Department of Northern Affairs who worked on much of the application that took place, and many of the people who have served as mayors and councillors over the years were either present at the opening or were recognized for their work.

I want to stress how important this is for the communities involved. I know it has been responsible for a lot of people being involved. This will mean that people will be able to have the same kind of access to electricity that many of us in the rest of Manitoba take for granted. If you compare the impact that it is going to have on the community, it is not only going to be a question of greater personal comfort but I believe a tremendous opportunity for the communities, the two communities involved, for economic development.

So, on behalf of Thicket Portage and Pikwitonei, two communities I am very proud to represent in the Manitoba Legislature, I want to congratulate all those who were involved in bringing direct-line hydro power, whether it be at the provincial government level, Manitoba Hydro, and most specifically, I want to really congratulate the people in those communities because they have persevered, they have worked hard, and I can tell you Saturday's event was a very joyous occasion and represented the great feeling of optimism for the future in Thicket Portage and Pikwitonei. So

congratulations to those two communities, Madam Speaker.

Student Volunteerism Sandbag Removal

Mr. Marcel Laurendeau (St. Norbert): Madam Speaker, may I have leave for a nonpolitical statement?

Madam Speaker: Does the honourable member for St. Norbert have leave for a nonpolitical statement? [agreed]

Mr. Laurendeau: With the flood, we have had a large amount of people coming out to work to do some debagging, and we have established a Green Team formula for doing some of the debagging. I would like to congratulate some of those students who came out on the weekend. We had approximately 50 from Murdoch MacKay from the honourable member for Transcona's (Mr. Reid) riding, and we had another 185 from Springfield Collegiate from the Minister of Highways and Transportation's (Mr. Findlay) riding, as well as approximately another hundred students.

They have now cleaned up approximately 99 percent of my community, which was probably the highest ratio of bags in the city of Winnipeg, and I think they deserve a great big hand of applause for the work they have done and also their ability to work together. It brought the communities closer, brought the kids closer, and it gave me a better understanding of all the children within our community and within our province. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Access Programs—Graduates

Ms. Jean Friesen (Wolseley): Madam Speaker, do I have leave to make a nonpolitical statement?

Madam Speaker: Does the honourable member for Wolseley have leave for a nonpolitical statement? [agreed]

Ms. Friesen: I would like to offer our congratulations to the 13 graduates of the Access programs at the University of Manitoba who were honoured at a banquet last week.

Madam Speaker, it has been a long journey for many of these students, and today we want to celebrate their immense achievement and to recognize the support of their families, many of whom were present with them that evening.

I would like to congratulate, in particular, Louise Bombay from Winnipeg from the Dakota Tipi, who graduated with a Bachelor of Arts; Wanda Ferland from Duck Bay with a Bachelor of Social Work; Donna Head from Cranberry Portage, who came through the IUN program from Flin Flon and graduated with a Bachelor of Social Work; Stephanie Hutchinson from Cormorant had a Bachelor of Social Work; George Kemp from Berens River, who graduated in Law; Vanessa Rupp with a BA in criminology from the Peter Ballentyne Band; Brenda Shinoff from Winnipeg, who graduated with Bachelor of Social Work; and Val Vint from Winnipegosis, with a Bachelor of Fine Arts.

In the Special Premedical Studies program, we congratulate Trevor Dandurand of Winnipeg, Sherry Lavallee of Boggy Creek.

Finally, in the Professional Health program, we would like to offer our congratulations to Bonita Flett from Norway House, who graduated as a pharmacist; to Gilles Pinette from Ste. Rose du Lac, who graduated in medicine; and finally, Norman Monkman of Winnipeg, who graduated with both a BSc and an MD and who has been accepted into the psychiatric training program at the Clarke Institute.

* (1430)

I particularly would like to add a note of congratulation to Norman Monkman, whose mother was my student, and Norman himself, many years ago, babysat very welcomingly my younger child.

Madam Speaker, on behalf of all my colleagues on this side of the House, we congratulate them. We wish them well in their future studies and their jobs and in their place in the wider Manitoba community.

Transcona Schools—Concert

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): May I have leave for a nonpolitical statement?

Madam Speaker: Does the honourable member for Transcona have leave for a nonpolitical statement? [agreed]

Mr. Reid: Last evening I had the opportunity to attend the Transcona Collegiate and John W. Gunn Junior High concert, entitled In the Mood. It was a concert whose participants were comprised of Grades 7, 8 and Senior 1 students performing both in bands and choir activities, and it was a very special evening.

This special performance by a number of very, very talented young people was very well appreciated and received by the residents of the community of Transcona. The evening starting with the Transcona Collegiate Institute jazz choir followed by the John W. Gunn trio and the Senior 1 band and proceeded to include performances by the Senior 4 students, including Amanda Ross, Wendy Dobson, Joy Henricks, JoAnna Cometa, LoriAnn Buhler and Melissa Mueller.

This is a very, very well received evening, and I must congratulate not only the students that participated and the teachers themselves, Ms. Judy Ruchkall, who is the musical consultant in the Transcona-Springfield School Division and also Jackie Crowell, the band instructor, and also the principal, Mr. Jim Beveridge, so I would like to congratulate all the participants and the staff of these schools that were involved and thank them very much for a very enjoyable evening.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. James McCrae (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson), 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): Order, please. Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This afternoon this section of the Committee of Supply meeting in Room 254 will resume consideration of the Estimates of the Department of Family Services.

* (1440)

When the committee last sat, it had been considering item 1.(a) Minister's Salary \$25,700 on page 51 of the Estimates book. Shall the item pass?

Hon. Bonnie Mitchelson (Minister of Family Services): Mr. Chairperson, I kept my comments extremely brief last evening when we wound up, because I thought that the Estimates were going to be passed and the time was running out. But, given that we do have the opportunity today to spend a little bit of time discussing some of the comments that my honourable friend put on the record, I thought I just might take some time to expand a bit on our whole welfare reform initiative because I think that is where my honourable friend was being most critical in this department. He seemed to be indicating that we have been meanspirited in our approach to trying to ensure that those that have depended on social allowances should have the opportunity, in fact, to gain meaningful employment through some of the initiatives that we have undertaken not only in our Department of Family Services but also through initiatives in the Department of Education and in our work with the private sector.

We all know that government is not going to be the vehicle for job creation into the future, that it is going to be the private sector that invests in our Manitoba community and our Manitoba economy that are going to be the generators of jobs and economic activity into the future. So I think it is very important that the private sector understand and recognize that there are many of those that have never had the opportunity to have an attachment to the workforce and that are presently on our social assistance caseload that do indeed merit some consideration, as we look to trying to ensure that they are a part of the workforce in a very meaningful way into the future. So I do want to indicate that we have several initiatives that are underway that are very positive initiatives. When we talk about caseload, the single-parent caseload that is part of the responsibility of the Department of Family Services, part of the provincial responsibility as it

presently exists, I think we have been moving in the right direction.

When I look to what some of the other provinces have done and are doing, I think, that our way has been a very balanced way. We have taken a very balanced approach to trying to ensure that those that we have targeted as employable are those with children over the age of six, in school full time. When I look to moving in that direction, I see it as being a very humane way of moving when, in fact, most other provinces right across the country, including those provinces that are governed by New Democratic administrations, have taken some tougher approaches to single parents than we have. In fact, the approach that we have taken is only to benefit those that in the past were never considered employable, where they were allowed to just be maintained or sustain themselves in a life of poverty on welfare until the youngest child turned 18, and then we would be presented with circumstances where women through no fault of their own reached the age of 30 or 40, their children were grown up, had turned 18, and all of a sudden with no self-esteem, no skills, no attachment to the workforce, were expected to go out and get a job.

We all know that kind of a policy only contributes to a life of poverty on welfare for many women in our society, and that is not acceptable. It is not acceptable to our government, and it is not what we want to see. We want to see women in our province have the opportunity to have a workforce attachment, to be trained, and to develop the self-esteem and the ability to be productive and positive members of society. That kind of a life impacts not only them, but it impacts their children, and when their children see a mom that is happy and feeling good about herself and a part of the workforce and making a meaningful contribution to community, to society, I think, that changes the whole attitude of the children in a very positive and meaningful way. So the direction that we have taken, I believe, is an extremely positive direction, and I make absolutely no apologies for the direction that we have taken as a government.

When I look to what is happening in other provinces, and I look to some of the decisions that other provinces have made, I kind of wonder where my honourable friend is coming from when he makes comments about

the direction we have taken in Manitoba, because I know for a fact that—you know, it is fine to sit in the opposition benches and criticize government for decisions that they make, but in reality when you are in government and if my honourable friend ever has the opportunity to be in government, he will recognize and realize that he has to make decisions and be accountable for those decisions. I know that his cousins in British Columbia, for instance, the New Democratic Party there which is in government has taken some very tough decisions and made many decisions that probably go a lot further than what we have gone in Manitoba.

I do want to just read into the record a couple of comments that I have heard as a result of decisions that the New Democratic government in British Columbia has made. I think one of the most significant issues that my honourable friend should be aware of is that, in fact, there is dissension in the ranks of the New Democratic Party in the province of British Columbia as a result of a government that has had to make decisions.

I just look at an article from *The Globe and Mail* on Monday, March 3, of this year that says, and I quote: Party faithful wrap Clark's knuckles over welfare cuts, and, B.C. New Democrats flout party tradition by agreeing to accept corporate donations. That is the subheading under there.

Can I just read a few paragraphs from the article, because I think it is extremely important to note what New Democratic governments do. They talk very differently in opposition with a position that does not necessarily reflect what they do when they have to be accountable for their decisions when they are elected to government.

It says in this article from *The Globe and Mail* that New Democrats challenged—okay, just let me find my spot here: B.C. New Democrats delivered a slap on the wrist and a surprise to Premier Glen Clark's NDP government at their annual convention here this weekend. Despite a concerted effort to defuse the controversial issue, delegates voted overwhelmingly yesterday to ask the government to revise several aspects of its welfare reform package that they believe make life worse for the poor.

* (1450)

There is a quote from someone from the New Democratic Party that says: This party has a historic tradition of standing with the poor and disadvantaged.

Those are the words that New Democrats use, but, in reality, when they are faced with decision making, they are empty words and rhetoric, and although the party put forward a resolution and asked New Democratic Premier, Mr. Clark, to change direction, Mr. Clark's response: The Premier and the party that made the decision in British Columbia agreed that there were some problems with the system but said that overall it had been a great step forward for low-income people in the province—and he refused to commit himself to making the changes that were demanded by his delegates from his own party.

So that is reality, Mr. Chairperson, when you look at the difference between being in opposition and being in government. When in opposition, you can be critical of absolutely every decision that a government makes, but when the reality is you are in government and have to make decisions and be accountable for those decisions, it is a completely different scenario.

I look at other newspaper articles from the province of British Columbia, one here that talks about welfare category being abolished, and it says: The B.C. government has abolished the welfare category of unemployable recipient in a move that could save it millions of dollars annually. The category includes about 27,000 people who have varying degrees of physical, emotional or mental disability. It is suspected about 17,000 will face a cut of up to \$96 a month in their living allowance, a move that would save the government up to \$20 million a year. Human resources minister Dennis Streifel said Thursday, the government is not dropping the category to save money but because it stigmatizes people. Recipients with permanent disabilities will remain at \$596, but others in that category will be reclassified as employable and will lose \$96 a month.

(Mr. Jack Penner, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair)

Now you tell me if that is the kind of policy, the kind of direction my honourable friends might take when

they are in government. Mind you, when they are in opposition, they can sit back and say that we are a hardhearted, meanspirited government. I tell you that the direction that British Columbia has taken is much more severe than the approach we have taken in Manitoba.

There is another newspaper article from British Columbia that says: Welfare parents are worse off in the poverty-fighting program that has been implemented by the New Democratic government in B.C., and that a single mom living on welfare in Honeymoon Bay in British Columbia will have to make do with a little less money this year as a result of the decisions that that government has made.

Here again, we have another article from The Vancouver Sun that says: Welfare is to end for young people unwilling to learn job skills. Cheques will soon end for young B.C. welfare recipients unless they join a new program that helps them find jobs, but Premier Glen Clark denied Wednesday that the legislation translates into workfare for people between the ages of 19 and 24. So they can make these draconian decisions, but he says it is not workfare.

Again, Mr. Chairperson, I want to indicate that the approach that the New Democrats take when they are in government and have to make decisions is completely opposite to the rhetoric that we hear on a day-to-day basis from New Democrats that sit in opposition and do not have to be accountable for anything. They seem to want or think they can have it all ways. I think Manitobans see through that kind of rhetoric and that kind of comment that comes on a regular basis from my honourable friends that sit in opposition.

I think that, if you look at some of the positive comments that have come as a result of some of our initiatives with the private sector, we have an article in the Winnipeg Sun, in the Business News, just this last month, in May of 1997, that talks about welfare innovation paying off in Manitoba. It talks about the program that we have developed with the Mennonite Central Committee, the Mennonite business community and Trainex that has, in fact, seen over a hundred individuals, some single parents, and some that are off the City of Winnipeg caseload. I think it is some 130

individuals that are in meaningful full-time jobs now as a result of that partnership.

I had the opportunity to attend the first anniversary of that program, and they have an excellent, positive track record as a result of initiatives that have been undertaken. One single parent that I had the opportunity to talk to was just thrilled with the opportunity to have a job. There was a single-parent male that had been hired at Palliser Furniture who had two young children that had subsidized daycare spaces. He talked about balancing work life, getting the kids off to daycare, and the challenges that he was presented with in trying to get his life together, but how excited he was about that chance and that opportunity.

There was also an individual that came from a Latin American country to Canada, immigrated here, and because of the language barrier—he was Spanish speaking and did not have any English background, and was a very qualified individual—was unable to enter the workforce at the level that he was qualified to enter the workforce in some sort of a managerial position. He also could not get a job because he was overqualified for many of the entry-level jobs that were available. Although he applied and although he tried, he just could not find employment. Through this program, he now has a position with Palliser, and he is doing some work.

Because of his Spanish-speaking background, because Palliser is looking to expand, he is able to be the link and liaison for Palliser to expand into foreign markets. This was a very positive experience, and he was just elated at the opportunity to find a place of employment in a very meaningful way. It also benefits one of the businesses in Manitoba that is growing, expanding and hiring more people. So there are those kinds of things that are happening, Mr. Chairperson, that I think really speaks to the direction that we have taken and the positive things that are happening as a result.

I know that the Department of Education and Training has entered into many initiatives that are finding meaningful ways of employing and giving people that opportunity to have a work connection, a work experience, to earn a living, to pay taxes and to feel very positive about themselves as a result.

If we were the only place across the country, around the world, that was moving in this direction, I would welcome the opportunity to debate and accept the criticism from my honourable friend, but I know that we certainly are not. It is the direction that the world is taking. We all want people to have the opportunity to have a workforce attachment and connection and to feel that they are contributing in a positive way.

Even if we look to the Labour government that was elected just in England last month, I note an article from the Free Press just a couple of days ago, June 3. It says: In London, declaring life on welfare should no longer be an option, British Prime Minister Tony Blair announced yesterday single parents will be called in for job training once their children are in school. Blair hinted at penalties for single parents and young men who refuse training or job opportunities but gave no specifics.

* (1500)

Mr. Chairperson, that tells me that socialist governments right around the world are making the kinds of decisions that we have made here in Manitoba, that New Democrats have made in British Columbia, that Liberal governments have made in other provinces. So this is not an issue of party policy or party direction. This is an initiative that governments of all political stripes right across our country and right around our world are taking. So I think it is rather hollow for my honourable friends in opposition in Manitoba who do not have to take responsibility, who are not held accountable for anything that they say, to be critical of the direction that we have taken in Manitoba.

I just would like to also read into the record some copies of some letters that I have received from people that have written to those that have helped them find employment, single parents that have meaningful employment as a result of the Taking Charge! initiative or other initiatives that we have put in place. I will not identify the individuals, but I will read into the record a couple of notes that have been received by those support workers that have helped find employment for individuals in our community.

I quote: Just a note to say goodbye and to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your kindness and help

throughout the couple of years I have been in need of assistance. It can be sometimes very frustrating as well as scary being a single mother, and cold, uncaring government offices can as well be very intimidating places. I try to thank you for all that you have done for me and my daughter. You opened doors for me that have helped me a great deal. You got me into a coat—I cannot read this letter or this word—and helped me when I needed a clothing allowance for my job in a bank, as well as at one time helping me to get a hepatitis vaccine when I thought I was going to die. For these things I will forever be grateful. You always treated me like I was a person, always returned my calls and were always fair and kind. I hope you realize what a great help you were to me, and I hope peace and joy are with you always. Thank you very much.

That is from a single parent, a single mother, that was helped through a program, and I believe it was the Taking Charge! program, one of the programs that has certainly changed her life and the life of her daughter.

Here is another letter I will just quote from, and it says: I never thought that I would be thanking you for making me fill out this job plan report, but I guess there is a first time for everything. In the beginning, I did not really care whether or not I found employment, because I knew I would have a job to return to within a fairly short time. With each store I walked into, each dropped off resume or application and each conversation I had with a prospective employer, my confidence grew. I used to be afraid to apply for a job in fear of rejection. Now I look upon this as an opportunity for advancement and pride for trying to get off the system. Although I am starting my regular seasonal fall-time job fairly soon, I will continue to look for part-time employment during work simply because I am perfectly capable of working two jobs. Thank you for helping me to change my attitude to one of excellence.

So these are letters that have been sent to staff in the department, two individuals that have been part of the programs that we have implemented to try to ensure that people get off of social allowance and into meaningful jobs. You can tell by the letters that have been provided and that I have read into the record that indeed there are people that have benefited, that have their self-esteem built to a point where they have confidence in their own abilities to contribute to

society. So I just wanted to put those comments on the record, because, Mr. Chairperson, I think my honourable friend, from time to time, gets carried away in his own thought and philosophy that certainly is out of touch with the reality of what his party and their policies are when they are in government.

Mr. Doug Martindale (Burrows): The point that I would like to make on part of what the minister is saying is that I believe that this government's job-creation goals are way too low. Now, I think that there are some good programs like the MCC training program, so I concede that you are on the right track with that particular program.

(Mr. Chairperson in the Chair)

However, if you look at the numbers of people that are supposedly going to be hired from income assistance into employment programs, they are very small. Taking Charge!, I understand you are working with about 1,100 clients a year; Community Services program, which is actually a City of Winnipeg program, 580 clients; Rural Jobs Project, 50; Opportunities for Employment, 150; Manitoba Conservation Corps, 100, for a total of 1,980, while there are at least 28,000 people who are deemed employable, including the numbers that the member for River Heights (Mr. Radcliffe) included in his misleading letter to his constituents, which we have debated extensively here, where he said that they decreased their caseload from 13,888 to 12,876.

It was only after extensive questioning of the minister that we found out that he did not really intend to say that those are the number of people on income assistance in Winnipeg or Manitoba, just the number of single parents deemed employable, which he did not put in his rather misleading letter to his constituents.

So we know that there are between 12,000 and 13,000 single parents plus the City of Winnipeg caseload of 16,000 people, plus people outside of the City of Winnipeg who are in families and deemed employable. So I think that the numbers of jobs that this minister plans to create or the number of people that she plans to move from income assistance to paid employment is very low, very minimal, pathetic even.

The one thing that this minister is not doing anything about, absolutely nothing except to make it worse, is the problem of poverty, particularly child poverty. The minister summed up her government's policy quite well. In fact, she took the words out of my mouth, because the minister said that I believe her government is hardhearted and meanspirited, and I could not have said it better myself. I was going to say this government is mean and extreme.

Last year we had a debate in these Estimates about Income Assistance workers withholding cheques while they do investigations and, every time I raise this with the minister, she denies it, but I have had it confirmed by the staff at Winnipeg Harvest, who say that they get people phoning saying they have no money to buy groceries with and that their cheque is being withheld during an investigation. I know the minister does not want to believe me, but I would hope that she would believe the staff at Winnipeg Harvest.

The other thing that concerns me greatly, and not just me but people that have written documents, including documents for the government, is the connection between poverty and other social programs. We know, for example, that the Postl report, the health of Manitoba's children, had a lot to say about poverty and pointed out that there is a connection between, first of all, poverty and inequality and inequality and health outcomes, that when you have great disparities in income in a society or a country, those who are poor have poorer health.

They recommended that the food allowance within social assistance programs be increased to allow for adequate nutrition of infants as reflected in formula costs. What has this minister done? Instead of listening to a report commissioned by the Department of Health, she has reduced the amount of money, mainly through standardization, that children are getting, particularly children whose parents are on City of Winnipeg social assistance.

We also have had the Justice Hughes report about the Headingley jail riot, and I quoted extensively from that previously in Estimates, where Justice Hughes really went outside his mandate to talk about the causes of crime and the causes of gangs and talked about the poverty and the hopelessness and despair and how, if

we are going to do something to reform our Justice system, we also need to address the root causes of crime, one of which is poverty.

* (1510)

We also have a very interesting document, really an amazing document, amazing in that it was made public, called Trends, Issues and Innovations in Winnipeg's Human Care Services, a report on discussions amongst United Way of Winnipeg member agencies, dated February 1997. They talked extensively about the problems of poverty and the problems that are presenting themselves to the United Way member agencies.

In this report they said many people require basic physical support such as food, bedding and housing. Many children feel marginalized and need hope for the future. Many people need help to help themselves build a better life. Again and again agencies made the link between poverty and increasing need and stated that changes have affected individuals by impacting levels and availability of services.

Agencies were concerned about increasing levels of anger and despair among young people, even in six- and seven-year-olds. This hopelessness translates itself many times in involvement in gangs, petty crime and prostitution. They made comments such as, we are competing with gangs because they are perceived as having more to offer. They repeated that poverty and lack of employment opportunities had a particularly acute effect on young people, resulting in increased discrimination against young people, increased activities such as prostitution by very young boys and girls, increased involvement in gangs.

I could go on and quote more extensively from this document. They said there has been a shift in philosophy from a justice model to a charity model, and certainly this government is perpetuating that.

Well, I could go on, but I will not. We could talk about the numbers of children living in poverty in Manitoba, which are not going down, which are considerable in the National Council of Welfare report. The number of children under 18 living in poverty in 1994 in Manitoba was 59,000, a 21.7 percent poverty

rate for children in the province of Manitoba. We are perpetually the second highest. We were the worst; now we are the second-worst in Canada, trailing Newfoundland.

So I think that this minister's policies have been a total failure when it comes to poverty. The only thing that she has done is contribute to poverty, and we know that the way to get families out of poverty is to have them off Income Assistance and in the paid workforce. That is certainly the best way. But when it comes to job creation goals, this minister's efforts are far too low; in fact, I said before, they are pathetic.

So, you know, the minister had an opportunity in this budget to make improvements. We know that they have \$400 million in the Fiscal Stabilization Fund, also known as the Tory re-election slush fund, and they could spend this money now. They do not have to wait until the election. They are probably going to use it to buy votes in the next election instead of spending it on children and improving Manitoba's abysmal poverty rate. Instead they will use it for a tax break in the next election. We know that tax breaks do not put a lot of more money into the economy. What they tend to do is to help the rich. We know that, but that is the choice that they are going to make. But I think that Manitobans are concerned about the rate, particularly of child poverty.

So I move that the salary for the Minister of Family Services be reduced to \$117.20 per month, which is the same as the social assistance rate for children up to age six.

Mr. Chairperson: It has been moved by the honourable member for Burrows that the salary of the Minister of Family Services be reduced to \$117.20 per month, which is the same as the social assistance rate for children up to age six.

Any debate on the motion?

Hon. Harold Gilleshammer (Minister of Labour): Mr. Chairman, I am just aghast that the member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) would put the comments on the record that he has today. They seem to be at odds with many of the things that I have heard him say in the past where I think that he praised the minister and the

government for some of the initiatives we have taken. Today, for whatever reason, he puts comments on the record attacking the minister that are completely unfounded. I just cannot sit here and accept his characterization of the situation here in Manitoba.

Now I know that we have just gone through a federal exercise where my honourable friend's party talks about getting back into the taxing business and the spending business, of course, where they have promised at the federal level to increase taxes many, many times and to increase expenditures across government. I would have thought that at this point in history that my honourable friend would have learned that those were the ways of the '70s and '80s practised by the party of which he is a member, and these practices have been discredited and discarded right across the world. Here my honourable friend, I think, has bought into this old theory brought back by his fellow travellers at the federal level, and I tell you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, that this simply is not acceptable. I do expect, of course, a higher standard of honour from my honourable friend considering his background, but every once in a while he disappoints me.

I know that I meet him at Folklorama venues where, again, of course, he is out of character from the way he portrays himself. [interjection] Well, my honourable friend comes to this committee and puts on the record things that are completely unacceptable and, I think, at variance with the facts and plays fast and loose with what the actual facts are, and, by and large, is very much factually inaccurate when he puts some of the things on the record that he does. We know that he also was involved at an exercise down the street here where he marched with the casino workers a few years ago and comes here and portrays himself as some pillar of the community, and we see kind of an inconsistency in the way he acts and the things that he says.

So I do believe that this minister has brought about tremendous reform to the social allowance system, reform that is consistent with what is happening across Canada and in other provinces. I expect that, if my honourable friend from Burrows has done his homework on these things, he probably is aware of these things, but perhaps chooses not to put them on the record—chooses only to put on the record the things which tend to build his case. There is a lack of honesty

there, I think, in terms of the way he portrays himself by putting factually incorrect information on the record.

Point of Order

Mr. Martindale: On a point of order, Mr. Chairperson. The member for Minnedosa is attacking me personally and my motivation, and I would like him to be factual himself. If he thinks my information is inaccurate, I would like to be corrected, and I wish he would tell me what he thinks is inaccurate, but not to attack my honesty. Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member does not have a point of order. It is a dispute over the facts.

* * *

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable Minister of Labour, to continue.

Mr. Gilleshammer: Well, I would ask my honourable friend to be aware of what is happening in other jurisdictions across Canada. In fact, this crosses over many departments as we look at governments around the country. In my new responsibilities, we inherited a situation in Workers Compensation where that particular arm of the Department of Labour was in debt by \$232 million, and I thought this was just a horrible situation. I am pleased to be able to report that over the last number of years this has been remedied to the point where that debt has been completely paid off. So, when I was lamenting this fact with my colleagues from across the country when I first met with them in late January or early February, I came away feeling that maybe it was not so bad because in Ontario after the Rae days their Workers Compensation Board was \$11 billion in debt, and that \$11-billion debt was created after only four years in government. Small wonder that in the province of Ontario where they remember a socialist government, they did not treat them very kindly at the polls in the recent exercise that was just completed.

* (1520)

But I say to my friend he wants me to be more specific about where he is not representing the issues as they are across Canada. He completely disregards the

fact that the governments across this country have had to deal with social allowances and, in many different jurisdictions, have done many of the same things that have happened in Manitoba. I would just ask my friend to recognize that governments of all political stripes have taken the opportunity to make these changes where the system encourages people, encourages people to seek employment, encourages people to find work, encourages people to take training.

I think if he looks at the western provinces, two of them that are governed by fellow travellers of his, this is fairly consistent, yet he portrays this government as being the only one which is taking some innovative steps to get people back in the workforce and off social allowances. So I would ask him to recognize this, that the programs that have been brought in are truly reforms and that they are intended to get people back to work and have people gain self-esteem and be able to support their families.

I would be pleased to ask the minister a couple of questions if that is in order at this time. I think that in all departments across government, in all departments, one of the true tests of relevance is if you compare the rates from one province to another, because it is fine for my honourable friend from Burrows to come to committee and say the rates have to be raised. He knows the statistical basis on which child poverty numbers are generated but does not recognize that because the city of Winnipeg is a municipal jurisdiction of over 500,000 people, that the lines are drawn in comparing ourselves to cities like Vancouver and Toronto and Montreal, and that simply is not an accurate way of defining poverty in our country.

The most true test, I suppose, is to compare our rates with nearby jurisdictions, and I would be pleased to ask the minister how the rates in Manitoba compare to rates in Saskatchewan. Is there a great discrepancy between what recipients receive in Manitoba as compared to the province of Saskatchewan, whether there is a difference between the rates in the city of Winnipeg and in cities like Regina and Saskatoon and whether there is some level playing field between neighbouring provinces.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister, I would just remind the committee that we are to be speaking to the motion that is on the floor, that the salary for the

Minister of Family Services be reduced to \$117.20 per month and so on and so forth.

I would ask that the committee members direct their questions specifically to the—we should be talking about the motion rather than asking questions of the minister.

Mr. Gilleshammer: Well, for clarification, as I read it, the member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) has put on the record the social assistance rate for children up to age six, and I was simply asking for clarification of rates in Manitoba in respect to other provinces.

Mr. Chairperson: Is there leave of the committee for the question to be raised to the minister? [agreed]

Mrs. Mitchelson: It is unfortunate that I do not have staff with me here at the table because we are now on the Minister's Salary, and I do not have a lot of the details and a lot of the comparisons at my fingertips, but I notice with great interest that the motion that was put forward to reduce my salary to \$117.20 per month which is the rate for children under the age of six in Manitoba, those rates go—and I am pretty close to accurate when I say that the rates for children do increase as children get older, and many older children receive the rates of around \$180 or \$189 per month, if memory serves me correctly.

When you compare that to British Columbia, for instance, I know that the rates are \$103 a month across the board for children. Now, you look at the cost of living in the city of Vancouver compared to the cost of living in the city of Winnipeg, and you tell me that a New Democratic government which reduced the rates in British Columbia to \$103 per month per child reflects any of the rhetoric that my honourable friend has put on the record in the last half hour or so.

I mean, it is just unbelievable to think that he, who has absolutely no accountability for any of the comments that he makes because he does not have to make decisions and he does not have to be held accountable by Manitobans for any decisions that he makes, can talk about the meanspirited approach of this government when you look at the cost of living in our province, the tax rates in our province, as compared to the cost of living in British Columbia, in downtown Vancouver, where I know for a fact that the rents are

considerably higher and the costs of many other items and articles are considerably higher than in the province of Manitoba, and yet the rates that they provide for children in British Columbia under his party which is in government is \$103 a month.

Now, you tell me, Mr. Chairperson, how my honourable friend can sit there with a straight face and put forward a motion like the motion he has put forward. I guess I am a little disappointed because I thought that my honourable friend would have done his research and would have looked into the issues in greater detail, would have looked into what is happening in the real world out there, not in his little—whether it be in his caucus office that discusses philosophy and how they think the world should be run and programs should be delivered, when we know in reality that New Democratic governments that have to make decisions have made decisions that are certainly more meanspirited than any decisions that happen in Manitoba.

So I thank my honourable colleague for that question, because it did allow me to put on the record what New Democratic governments do when they have the opportunity to address child poverty in the provinces that they govern.

Mr. Gilleshammer: Well, I thank the minister for that response, because I suspect that my honourable friend from Burrows knew what the situation was in the province of British Columbia but chose not to bring that into the discussion on rates. I, too, am disappointed that he would talk about the minister and the department and the government setting rates that he does not agree with. As I say, the truest test of programs is to compare with what other jurisdictions are doing. I suspect that the member for Burrows, who is a bright person, has done that comparison. I suspect that their army of researchers has provided that information for him.

So it really is a question then what he chooses to put on the record and how he chooses to portray it. That is where my real disappointment is, that he would hide those facts, not choose to bring them forward, and this was a wonderful opportunity for him to praise the minister and praise the government.

* (1530)

Point of Order

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. The honourable member for Burrows, on a point of order.

Mr. Martindale: On a point of order, I would like to ask the minister to refrain from making comments like this, because I am not hiding anything, and if he thinks I am hiding something, he should have some evidence. Nor did he point out what was factual after my last point of order, so I would ask him to temper his remarks, please. Thank you.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister, on the same point of order.

Mr. Gilleshammer: On the same point of order, I accept my honourable friend's comments then that he was not aware of what the rates in other provinces are and that he did not put them on the record, because he simply did not know about them, and that he was talking about Manitoba rates in isolation of other provinces.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Burrows does not have a point of order. It is a dispute over the facts.

* * *

Mr. Gilleshammer: I think maybe this is a good opportunity for him to learn about the rates in other jurisdictions then and to recognize that the truest test of these rates is to look at what people in British Columbia, the city of Vancouver are paying, to look at the rates in Saskatchewan and Alberta and accept that governments and departments do communicate with one another from time to time and that there is some consistency in these rates and, where they are not identical, of course, we are pleased that our rates are higher than they are in other jurisdictions.

I would think that this would be an opportunity for my honourable friend the critic for the New Democratic Party to praise the minister and praise the department in saying, you know, good for you, your rates are higher than they are in British Columbia, where the cost of

living is higher, where the taxes are higher, and this is, I think, a sign of a minister who truly cares for the department and the citizens and the clients that she is responsible for.

To her credit, she has been able to stabilize these rates at a level which does exceed what other governments, and governments, I might add, of New Democratic persuasion who, while they are in opposition, of course claim that they are going to do all sorts of things, but when they are faced with the reality of government and the reality of a Treasury Board and the reality of living within their means—I do not know whether they do have a balanced budget in British Columbia or not. There was some talk about it before the last election, but, so, I mean, they have to take these things into consideration too when they set the rates, because in a beautiful province like British Columbia where, of course, they attract citizens from other jurisdictions, from western provinces in eastern Canada, they have to be aware of what the rates are and be aware of what the rates are in other provinces.

Well, the province of British Columbia, of course, has been very innovative in the way they portray things, very innovative in putting forward proposals and policies of their government which, I guess to be charitable, one could say are sort of at odds with the philosophy expounded here by my honourable friend from Burrows. If their research department has not had time to look at the rates in British Columbia and he has not had time to reflect on them, I would urge him to do that because, again, one of the truest tests of rates, whether it is within the Department of Family Services or right across government, is to look at what other provinces do when they are in government.

Now my honourable friend from Burrows has had the advantage of being in opposition now for almost 10 years, and it is a tremendous opportunity—[interjection] Oh, pardon, me, just six and half years, but he can look forward to many more years in opposition. It is a wonderful opportunity without having a lot of responsibility to be able to devote that time to doing the extensive research that is necessary to get a fuller understanding. I know that he has been a critic in that department for some time and, by and large, does an adequate job of it. I have heard him speak on a number of occasions where he has had a lot of praise for the

minister and praise for the civil servants who work within Family Services. I think in many ways he is gaining more of an understanding of the department and more of a respect for the job that has to be done in terms of providing for disadvantaged people within the province of Manitoba, but he has moved a motion dealing with rates and he has talked about the poverty line.

I did indicate in my first question some concern about his comments about the attempts by government and by the department to train people for work, and he, in a very disparaging way, said it was not enough, that there were only some 2,000 people who are participating in programs like Taking Charge! and other urban and rural programs to find work for them. I am surprised that he would take such a negative attitude towards programs that are working. I would remind him that these are the numbers of people that are participating in the program at any one time, and as there are graduates of those programs and people go into the workforce, there are opportunities for more people to come on board and take that training.

So I would like to compliment the minister and the department for the tremendous job they are doing in creating programs, in conjunction with the municipal level and the federal level of governments, to be able to find meaningful programs which help people to find meaningful jobs.

Of course, this is a far cry from the reality of the 1980s when members of the New Democratic Party had the opportunity to govern, and I believe their crowning glory was the Jobs Fund as a means of throwing money at these issues. Even the current Leader of the NDP (Mr. Doer), I think, spoke rather disparagingly of that program, where he said that they hired people to go out and count flowers and put up green signs, instead of using the resources of government to do adequate training programs. Mr. Doer, at that time who was leader, I think, of the Government Employees' Union, criticized the party that he is now the leader of. Yet we have not seen him or critics or the member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) bring forward alternatives other than to do more and to criticize that not more people are taking part in this, and, of course, to raise the rates, again neglecting the fact that our rates are quite comparable to other jurisdictions in this country.

He also mentioned in his comments a few minutes ago this whole issue of how you define poverty in this country, and it does raise another question in my mind as it relates to rates and to the way the department is doing business. It is my understanding that Statistics Canada is only one of the places that one can go to sort of define where that poverty line is. As I indicated earlier, I would like to ask the minister for clarification whether that Statistics Canada interpretation and determination of poverty is the only way to determine that, and how it reflects to people living in rural Manitoba, for instance, when some of them are quite shocked and surprised when they are told that, because they are only making a certain income, they are at or near the poverty line. I am wondering if there is any information or research that has been done that would perhaps draw a truer picture of that, and a further supplemental question to that, are there any extenuating circumstances in Manitoba that perhaps make that particular test an inadequate one?

Mr. Chairperson: Is there leave of the committee for the question to the minister?

An Honourable Member: No, no leave.

Mr. Chairperson: Leave has been denied.

*(1540)

Mr. Gilleshammer: Mr. Chairman, I am disappointed that the member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) would be here to stifle debate and understanding on this issue. I do not know where he is getting his instructions from, but I would have thought that there were areas of debate and discussion within the Department of Family Services that he would want to get further information on because he obviously does not have a good understanding of what the cross-Canada comparisons are, and does not understand some of the information put forward by Statistics Canada. I would have thought that he would welcome the opportunity to gain more knowledge in that area and participate in that debate instead of just raising points of order to distract the committee when we are here to talk about this department and the work that they do. So I know that he is going to have opportunities over the next coming years to do that research and get that understanding.

As I say, I know there are other members of the committee that want to make comment and ask questions, but this is an issue that, I think, is of concern to all Manitobans. Unfortunately, because of the restrictive nature of the Estimates process, I guess, we are running out of time, and there may be other priorities that the member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) wants to discuss.

But, just in closing, I would say how disappointed I am in him that he would bring forward a motion like this, knowing what a tremendous job the Minister of Family Services (Mrs. Mitchelson) has done over the last number of years in leading this department, in providing innovative programs, new solutions that are being emulated by other jurisdictions and getting, I think, acclaimed from many sources for trying to find long-term solutions to the problems that exist in the social allowance system. So with those few remarks, Mr. Chairman, I would pass the floor to anyone else who wants to make comment.

Mrs. Mitchelson: I just want to respond briefly to the comments that were put on the record by my honourable colleague the Minister of Labour (Mr. Gilleshammer) and certainly want to thank him for his support. I know that he set many of the policies in place in the Department of Family Services that continue to work today under his leadership when he was there, and I want to continue on. We have seen many positive things happen since we took government and have changed the way business is done in many areas of the Department of Family Services. So I thank him for his contribution before my time, and I also thank him for his comments and his support today.

But, you know, around the issue of the low-income cutoffs, although I did not have the ability to answer the question directly, I think it is very important that we put on the record some of the discussions that we have had on an interprovincial basis. As Ministers of Family Services, Social Services get together right across the country, and we are all in agreement with some of the comments that are raised from time to time about whether the low-income cutoffs are indeed a true measurement of poverty. Although I know that they are used and they are the statistics that are gathered by Stats Canada—and I have even written to Stats Canada and asked the questions on what is taken into

consideration as they gather the information and provide detail. Stats Canada has written and I do have a copy. I have a letter of response I have received from them, and I have shared it with members of the media from time to time. I know that when I have been on Peter Warren's show, we had the opportunity to discuss this, and I have shared with him the letter that I got from Statistics Canada that came back and said that the low-income cutoffs are not a true measurement of poverty, but it is the best measurement we have.

They do not take into consideration the demographics, cost of living or any programs that any government has in place that might not be included in income. There are lots of programs, like the CRISP program in Manitoba, that are not taken into account. What is not taken into account is any additional tax benefit that is provided to low-income families. So those things are not taken into account and they are not measured in the income when we look at the low-income cutoff measurement.

Also, they take all cities over 500,000 in population and lump them into one category, so that, for instance, Winnipeg is lumped in with Toronto or Vancouver, and they do not take into consideration the cost of living and any other factors that might impact what poverty might mean. I mean, I would imagine if you are making the same income in the city of Vancouver as you were making in the city of Winnipeg, you would probably be quite a bit better off in the city of Winnipeg, because the cost of living, the cost of housing is considerably lower. But that is not taken into account when the statistics are gathered, so that puts us at a disadvantage. It also does not give a true picture of possibly what is happening in the province of Saskatchewan, because they do not have a city over 500,000. There is a different standard for the city of Regina or the city of Saskatoon than there is for the city of Winnipeg. We are compared to Toronto and Vancouver. We are not compared to Regina or Saskatoon. The expectations and the poverty line is lower in Saskatoon and in Regina than it is in Winnipeg, but if you look at the cost of living, you would probably find comparisons very similar in Winnipeg to Saskatchewan—or to Saskatoon or Regina. So they set the poverty line lower in Saskatchewan in those major cities than they do in the city of Winnipeg only because we have 500,000 people.

So when you look at that, is that really a true and fair comparison when nothing else is taken into account or consideration? I guess, we can argue whether the low-income cutoffs are a true measurement or they are not. I guess, the reality is we all have to recognize that there is poverty, and any level of child poverty is not acceptable in our country, in a country that has so much to offer to families and individuals. So how then do we start collectively to take a look at what we can do to reduce the impact of child poverty? I guess, as a result of that discussion and as a result of premiers right across the country, regardless of political stripes, making this an agenda priority for First Ministers' meetings—indeed, our Premier (Mr. Filmon) has made a recommendation that we look at the issue of child poverty and try to determine how we can deal with it. We also recognize that there is a role for the federal government to play in trying to eradicate child poverty in our country and that there need to be some standards and some consistent approach right across the country in dealing with this issue.

So our Premier has raised it, and I guess I might just comment briefly on why it became an issue on the national agenda for premiers, and that was because the federal Liberal government's decision to reduce transfer payments to provinces for health, for education and for social services. As a result of those reductions, that limited the provinces' abilities to provide the kinds of programs that we needed to provide.

The premiers decided that, with the lack of a federal vision or any federal action on the issue, provinces would get together, and we established a ministerial council with a representative from each province that was to sit down and look at the issue of child poverty and see whether there was a common approach that could be taken by all provinces to try to deal with the issue. As a result of that, we had a report to premiers that did indicate that we should be looking at some national standards, a national approach in recommending to the federal government that kind of approach. So, as a result, the premiers forwarded a report that they all agreed to, regardless of political stripe, to the Prime Minister. I often say I am not sure whether it was timing or what, but the Prime Minister agreed with and endorsed the report and indicated that he would put his ministers together with provincial

ministers to try to look at dealing with the issue of child poverty.

The whole focus, there were three objectives to the approach that was to be taken, and that was to reduce the depth of child poverty, to ensure that people that were working were better off than on welfare, and also to look at the overlap in duplication and administration of programs between the federal and provincial governments so that we could save some money on administration and put that money into supports for families and for children.

* (1550)

Those were the three objectives, and, as a result of that process, we now have an endorsement by the federal government and all provinces on a national child benefit that does in fact start to address the three objectives of what our premiers directed us to do. So I am really pleased that we have made a first step. Now the issue, of course, and the objective should be that no child receives support through the welfare system into the future, but every child in a low-income family, whether they be on welfare or whether they be a working family with a low income, should receive support on a standard basis from the federal government so that the federal government will provide support to children to take children out of the welfare system and put them on a level playing field across the country with a standard amount of support for a child, no matter where they live.

I think it is the right approach to take. I think that all governments of all political stripes across the country have endorsed the process that has been put into place and the new national child benefit. The one issue that we do have, of course, in this province is that we have heard the federal government talk about how wonderful this was and how this, I think, \$600 million that they have put in the budget is a down payment for children. Well I might argue, and I think several other provinces would argue, that it is not a down payment, it is a partial repayment of what they have removed from provinces as a result of the reductions in transfers that they have made to provinces.

What we want to see and what we are all calling for as provinces is incremental stable funding from the

federal government and a commitment to that year after year till we get to a point where all children are off of the welfare system and supported by the federal government, whether they be in working families or welfare families. It is the right direction; I think we all agree it is the right direction to go, and what we need now is a commitment from the new federal government, or the renewed federal government, to ensure that the money they have committed in next year's budget is incrementally higher year after year after year until we get to a level where every child is supported outside of the welfare system by the federal government if they are in a low-income family.

So that was the objective, and that was the purpose, and I think we have accomplished in a fairly short period of time, given that it is the two levels of government that have been working on this process, an approach that we can all endorse and we can all agree to and we can all buy into. I think that has been a very positive step, but I wanted to discuss the low-income cutoffs, and it is an issue that all provinces have highlighted as an issue. I am not sure whether there is any sort of consensus on what might be a better measurement of poverty because I think what we want to do is truly identify those families and those children that are in need and ensure that the programming is there for those children to grow and to succeed.

So there are some things happening. I know that my honourable friend and I might get into some hair pulls or some discussion from time to time because, philosophically, we come from a different background, but I guess I want to stress, and what I really want to indicate is that regardless of whether it was the Liberal social services minister from Newfoundland or the New Democratic social services minister from Saskatchewan or—

An Honourable Member: In Manitoba, a United Church minister.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Yes, as a matter of fact, a very good man, but I do want to indicate, regardless of what our backgrounds or what our philosophical beliefs are, we have attempted to work co-operatively. I think we have all endorsed the process and the outcome of that process, which will mean, ultimately, if the federal government lives up to its commitment of increased

incremental resources year after year, that children will be better served right across this country as a result.

As I said, although my honourable friend and I may have differences in our approach or he may recommend a different way to deal with things, I know that my counterpart in Saskatchewan that is part of a New Democratic government and I are on the same wavelength when it comes to dealing with the issue of child poverty and how we approach that.

I do want to say that we may argue from time to time, but I think the Minister of Family Services in Saskatchewan and I have very much in common and support and endorse each other when comments are made around the table interprovincially, because we all know, we understand the reality as a party, as a government of different political persuasions but also having to make the right decisions for the right reasons for the people that we serve in our respective provinces.

So I just want to leave those comments on the record. I probably have a couple of other things to say around—maybe I will leave it at that for now and see if there is any other comment or discussion.

Hon. Mike Radcliffe (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Chairman, I too would like to put a few remarks on the record with regard to this motion that is before us today. When I look at the motion, and the suggestion from the honourable member opposite is that the salary of the Minister of Family Services be reduced to \$117.20 per month, I react and say, how demeaning can one be? I am incensed that anybody would suggest for a moment that this is the worth of our present Minister of Family Services, and in fact—

Ms. Becky Barrett (Wellington): The high end.

Mr. Radcliffe: The honourable member for Radisson—

An Honourable Member: Wellington.

Mr. Radcliffe: Wellington, Radisson, whatever.

Ms. Barrett: She will be furious.

Mr. Radcliffe: —is indicating that this is the high end of what she thinks the worth is.

As a newcomer to the political scene here, I am incensed that somebody would take such a personal attack against an individual who has committed themselves to the public service. I just wanted to put on the record that I have had the distinct honour and advantage to be able to work with the minister of Child and Family Services when I was a backbencher, which was up until this January of 1997, and I found that our current minister brings a skill and professionalism to her job as responsibility as minister.

She has a professional background. I believe that she brings a real knowledge and grasp of the topic but, more importantly, I think, as well, too often you see politicians, and politicians are perceived to perhaps have a fast and snappy answer or tend to be a bit on the glib side, whereas I would point out to you and through you to our colleagues present that the present minister brings a sense of compassion and real understanding and grasp of the department which she leads. This was nowhere more evident than when we were debating and discussing the parameters for the review of The Child and Family Services Act, in which I had the distinction of playing a very small part, but this was done under the guidance of this minister.

This minister is very analytical and perceptive. She was aware that just because the Province of Manitoba, the government of Manitoba, in its wisdom had seen fit to pass legislation some 10 years ago with regard to Child and Family Services that it was time for a review and readdressing some of the very human issues that were involved with the Child and Family Services department and touching on adoption, touching on child abuse, touching on many of the areas which were within her department.

I can tell you that I have never seen anybody who is more in touch with the advocacy groups, with the special interest groups, with the common individual in the street, and who has greater feeling for these individuals than our current minister. I think that—

Ms. Barrett: She met them outside Beaujolais.

Mr. Radcliffe: Oh, no, the honourable member from, I am not sure, was that—

An Honourable Member: Wellington.

* (1600)

Mr. Radcliffe: —not Riel, but Wellington she comes from, is it, is making another personal imprecation that is in fact trying to demean the dignity and the worth of this individual. I have no problem. In fact, I welcome challenging colleagues opposite to bandy opinions, philosophy, ideas about in this Chamber and in these rooms but, in fact, when it descends to attacks of a personal nature, which this motion to me suggests, that in fact this is the worth of the individual, then I take umbrage, and I must react.

I think that the critics opposite, it is their job to criticize, to be discerning, to look at the policies of our government, to point out the shortfalls, to bring to our attention, perhaps, individuals who are falling between the boards or issues that perhaps we have not considered. That is all fair ball, but when they bring a motion such as this, to reduce the salary of the minister and a minister who is so hardworking and so committed to her task, I think that this is totally unacceptable, and I am feeling compelled that I must rise in the defence of this minister to speak to this.

I remember when the departed Mr. Orchard, I believe it was, made a motion that Mr. Plohman be paid \$1 for his minister's salary. I was a practicing lawyer at that point on the street, and I heard that this was the practice in this House. I think that I would urge honourable members opposite to end this practice, that, in fact, it only reflects upon the originators of the motion, the people who propose this sort of motion. It speaks more of gamesmanship and chicanery than it does of real concern over the individuals whom members opposite profess to be concerned about, and I am sure what I want to emphasize today is what this minister is concerned about, which is our poor, our marginalized and our underprivileged. I can add—

Mr. Martindale: That is why you are cutting the rates.

Mr. Radcliffe: Well, the honourable member opposite says that is why we are cutting the rates, and he has failed to address or acknowledge that in the child support levels between 12 and 16, I believe that Manitoba has one of the higher levels of support if, in fact, one were to remove the component of housing

from the levels of support, which are a local variance from community centre to community centre.

In fact, the rest of the rates for support of families and individuals in all the different categories in which they are designated, we in Manitoba rate at least in the middle of the field, and I qualify those remarks by saying if you take out the housing component across this country. So for a population, Mr. Chair, of 1,100,000 people, Manitoba can measure up to provinces of the economic force of Quebec and Ontario. I think that this is, in fact, very, very significant.

I want to add that I have had the opportunity to watch the leadership skills that our present minister has exercised in the deployment of her responsibility with her ministry, and, in fact, she is a person who believes in collaboration of collegiate thought. When we were about the process of addressing the issues of the workbook of the legislation on Child and Family Services, this minister's, one of her initial reactions was to say, well, what do the spokespeople in the community feel about these issues that the department had addressed to her as shortfalls of the current legislation, and she conducted an assessment amongst some of the more outspoken groups and directed me to go out across the province of Manitoba and to find out what the rank and file thought of the suggestions for reforms.

So this leads me to conclude that here is a woman who is forward-thinking. Here is a woman who is not afraid to address the public. Here is a woman who has commitment to her department and to her responsibility. She shows innovation and leadership. She does not look upon the status quo as acceptable and, in fact, is eager to embrace change where change is going to be a positive element in our community.

So for someone to step forward and be so deprecating and so demeaning as to suggest a rate of employment at this level I think is incredibly insulting and somebody who bespeaks perhaps that they have no awareness of the skills, of the feeling, of the compassion, of the commitment, the sense of commitment that our minister has in this particular area.

I have heard this minister say that, in fact, what she wants to do for the people who are falling under her

charge is to give them the best of help, and the best of help is to find them a job. That is the best security of any Manitoban, and she wants to create an environment where people will seek employment where reasonably possible. I think that we can look to the employment rates in the province of Manitoba today, and our employment rates are among some of the better employment levels in the community in this nation. We are leading the country in many, many cases, and I think that this minister here has also brought a sense of professionalism, of vigour to this job. One of her predecessors, Madam Charlotte Oleson, had a more grandmotherly aura about her, whereas this minister has some vigour.

Mr. Martindale: What aura did Harold have about him?

Mr. Radcliffe: Ah, Harold's was one of rectitude.

But these are just a few of the personal attributes that I think this minister has brought to this office, and for somebody at this stage now to suggest that, in fact, a personal attack is in order or personal criticism is in order, when I have seen the quality of commitment, the level of compassion and understanding of this department—and, Mr. Chair, as you perhaps very well know, having preceded me to this Chamber and public representation, the department of Child and Family Services has the potential to be incendiary, to be confrontational, to be very emotionally laden, whereas our minister has brought a sense of reason, a sense of calm, a sense of order to an area of government which is laden and fraught with many, many emotional difficulties because, of course, we are looking at, in many cases, the raw edge of life where people are being confronted with child abuse issues, with issues of family matters and in fact, as one well knows, one's children are perhaps the most precious and closest thing to oneself that we have in this life. Our minister of Child and Family Services is responsible for all the children across our province, and I have seen her make that commitment, and when there have been cases that have hit the newspaper, I can tell my friend opposite—

Mr. Martindale: How much did she pay you?

Mrs. Mitchelson: One hundred and seventeen dollars.

Mr. Radcliffe: —and I have heard the minister opposite say when any one of those children is abused, be they in care or out of care, those are my children, and that is sincere, Mr. Chairman. I have seen her make those remarks, and I think that the public needs to know that. All facetiousness aside, I think that this is why this minister has done such a wonderful job in this department, and I believe that, rather than continuing to snipe and backbite and critique, it is time to extol some of the real and positive attitudes that this minister brings to this department.

* (1610)

Therefore, I can only chastise my honourable colleague opposite for bringing such a motion, and I would assume that he really has no knowledge of the real incumbent who occupies this position. He has no knowledge of the skill, no knowledge of the commitment; and, if he were aware of those things, he would never have the temerity to advance such a demeaning motion that has been presented today. So this is why I wanted to take this opportunity to put these remarks on the record on the off chance that he might have a change of heart and see the wisdom of withdrawing this motion and letting us get on with the real business of government. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for that.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Mr. Chairperson, again I thank my honourable colleague for River Heights, the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Radcliffe), for the comments that he has put on the record, and I know that, given we have had many opportunities to dialogue and discuss the issues around Family Services and we have had the opportunity to work together through the whole process of The Child and Family Services Act, I just want to say that, although he said some very flattering things about me, I just want to comment on the good job that was done as a result of the whole process of the review of the act. I know members of the Legislature are just now seeing the final product of the consultations and the community input into the changes that we will see undertaken as a result of the new legislation on adoptions and Child and Family Services.

Indeed, the children that are involved in our Child and Family Services system are very often children that

live in poverty, and we know from statistics that those children that are born to single-parent families are six times more likely to use or need the child welfare system, and many of those children are living in social allowance families. So we know, we all know that there are contributing factors to the need for the kinds of services that we provide on a day-to-day basis throughout the province for children that are abused, neglected. So it is very important that any new direction we take is a direction that we believe is going to improve the circumstances and the lives of those children and those families.

But I would like to comment just briefly on some of the, I think, terrible comments my honourable friend for Burrows put on the record about the small numbers of people that have gained employment. When I look at single parents and I look at a total of 1,097 fewer single parents on the caseload today, that was almost an 8 percent decrease in the numbers. I have to think that is significant for our first year of really focusing on trying to find meaningful ways to help these single parents improve their life style and their own sense of self-worth.

When I look at the numbers for the municipal caseload and I see that there are some 3,690 fewer individuals on the municipal caseloads, which is an 18.4 percent decrease in a year, I do not think those numbers are insignificant. I think it is a very positive step in the right direction.

I just want to go back and comment on single parents because not only are there 1,097 fewer single parents on social allowance, that means that there is at least double the number of Manitobans that are not on social allowance anymore. It is probably more, if you look at the average of 1.6 children per family, you are looking at 2,500 individuals who have had their lives impacted in a very positive way as a result of the single-parent caseload going down and another 3,690 possibly single individuals who, through the municipal system, have had their lives impacted in a very positive way. So I do not think that is minor. I think it is a very major significant step in the right direction.

Another statistic or another fact I would like to put on the record is that there are close to some 700

individuals, clients that were formerly on social allowances alone, that are reporting employment income. So I think that is very positive, too, because sometime a part-time job or some income is a positive step in the right direction which can lead to meaningful, full-time employment.

Anyway, those things, I think, warranted being put on the record. I will leave it at that and see whether my honourable friend the member for Burrows might like to reconsider his thoughts and his motion that he has presented this afternoon and take a second sober thought about really how he set himself out and apart from any of the leadership that has been shown by governments of his same political persuasion right across the country.

Mr. Martindale: Mr. Chairperson, I would like to call the question.

Mr. Chairperson: The question has been called. The motion before the committee: Moved by the honourable member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale) that the salary for the Minister of Family Services (Mrs. Mitchelson) be reduced to \$117.20 per month which is the same as the social assistance rate for children up to age six.

Voice Vote

Mr. Chairperson: Shall the motion pass? All those in favour of the motion, please say yea.

Some Honourable Members: Yea.

Mr. Chairperson: All those opposed, please say nay.

Some Honourable Members: Nay.

Mr. Chairperson: In my opinion, the Nays have it.

Formal Vote

Mr. Martindale: Recorded vote, Mr. Chairperson.

Mr. Chairperson: A recorded vote has been—does the honourable member for Burrows have a second person to support the motion—to challenge for the motion?

Ms. Barrett: Yes, I support the call for a recorded vote.

Mr. Chairperson: A formal vote has been requested by two members. This section of the committee will now proceed to the Chamber for a formal vote.

The committee recessed at 4:18 p.m.

After Recess

The committee resumed at 4:48 p.m.

Mr. Chairperson: Order. Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply will resume the debate on the Estimates of the Department of Family Services. When the committee last sat, it had been considering item 1.(a) Minister's Salary \$25,700 on page 51 of the Estimates book. Shall the item pass?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Mr. Chairperson, one of the problems with being in three Committees of Supply is you do not necessarily have the opportunity to be in all places at one time. What we had done was done some background from the member for Burrows in terms of why it is that he had in essence moved the motion and understand it is related to a very important issue which really was highlighted in the '95 election from our former Leader, that being Paul Edwards, of child poverty.

We have always felt very strongly on that particular issue, as I am sure virtually all MLAs do. Now, having understood what it is that the member for Burrows, the point that he was trying to get across, we did feel that was appropriate to be voting with the NDP on that particular motion. I just wanted to get on the record that in fact we did have somewhat of a discussion and to indicate why it is that we voted in that fashion. I know, as I say, the child poverty is an area that needs a lot of work, and there has to be a high sense of co-operation between both levels of government and in both areas there is some need for improvement.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please.

Mr. Lamoureux: I will just leave it at that.

* (1650)

Mr. Chairperson: Okay. I was just going to interrupt the honourable member for Inkster with regard to the motion that is on the floor. The motion was already dealt with.

Mrs. Mitchelson: Thanks, Mr. Chairperson, but given that the member for Inkster had the opportunity to put his few uninformed comments on the record, I would like to indicate that this motion has been debated since somewhere around three o'clock this afternoon, and there were all kinds of issues discussed and comments put on the record. It is passing strange that a party that had such a focus on child poverty was not around to ask one question on the Estimates of the Department of Family Services where we have made significant changes, and there was not a member of the Liberal Party present for any part of the Estimates.

So, when they make a decision that they are going to vote on a motion that was put in place when they have heard none of the debate and none of the discussion and are not informed in any way about the kinds of dialogue that the official opposition and the government have had, I say I am extremely disappointed for a party that professes to support eradicating child poverty, that they have absolutely no interest in the Department of Family Services or the Estimates or the budget or the issues surrounding child poverty.

Also, Mr. Chairperson, I would like to comment again about the offloading by the federal government, the reductions in transfers to the provinces that have left us with \$220 million less per year for Health, for Education and for Family Services. We have been able to maintain the support for single parents with children under the age of six at the levels before the federal government made the reductions.

I am extremely disappointed that the member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) would come in after the fact and make an uninformed decision to vote for his own pure political purposes because it might look right in the eyes of the public, when he knew absolutely nothing about the background or the issue. He might have thought twice about standing in his place and

voting when he recognizes and realizes that our rates of \$117, which were maintained despite federal cuts, which were maintained by our government, are higher than the province of British Columbia, that provides \$103 per child.

So, when he votes on something when he is not informed but based on a little bit of hearsay, without hearing any of the dialogue or any of the discussion that has taken place around the motion, I think it is extremely irresponsible. It does not do anything to promote any sense of ethics or responsibility for his elected position here in this Legislature to make decisions based on common sense and based on understanding and full and factual information. I am extremely disappointed in the Liberal Party in the province of Manitoba for the actions that they have undertaken today. That had to be on the record, because I guess I am extremely disappointed, because I thought very often that my honourable friend did think through the issues and make informed choices and vote based on fact.

What we have seen here today is something that I am not proud to say I am a part of, and that is making a decision without any facts, without any information. I suppose I take my elected responsibility to my constituents and to the people of Manitoba a lot more seriously than the activity I saw here today. I am extremely disappointed. I will ensure that every opportunity I have that the people of Manitoba know how seriously or how insincerely the members of the Liberal Party take their responsibilities here in the Legislature.

There are three committees that are ongoing on a regular basis. There are three members of the Liberal Party. The debates and the discussions have been going on in the Estimates of the Department of Family Services for several days now. It has been a week, I guess, and we have noticed a complete absence of the Liberal Party in this committee room, and there seems to be no genuine desire to discuss the issues of child poverty and yet they make a decision to vote on an uninformed basis.

So, Mr. Chairperson, that will conclude my comments around the member for Inkster's after-the-fact input into these Estimates debates.

Mr. Lamoureux: The minister put some very strong comments on the record, and I disagree wholeheartedly with the minister. I think that what she has done is in fact a disservice to the position which she holds in the sense of negotiations that occurred.

We sit in three committees today because there was a sense of co-operation. The concern that we expressed when we agreed to the leave that allowed the three committees to sit was that you have to respect the fact that we have very strong limitations. You cannot expect that. The minister who just spoke, the critic that is currently here, is not in the Estimates for the full 240 hours. It is unrealistic to believe that three MLAs are going to be able to have a full-time presence for 240 hours when not one member of the government nor one member of the official opposition has had that sort of attention given to the Estimates.

If the Minister of Family Services likes to believe that she has given more time into the Estimates than the Liberal MLAs, I would challenge her on that thought. When the minister says, look, we talk about child poverty and the member for Inkster is ill-informed, I take great exception and I know the temptation might be there to talk about relevance. This is a very relevant issue, because I am going to be talking about child poverty to the Minister of Family Services, and at the end of that I will be posing a question. I will sidestep the—

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. I just remind the honourable member that what we are to be debating here is the Minister's Salary under Resolution 9.1(a) of the Family Services Estimates, and I would ask that you centre your remarks around that aspect of the Estimates section. So if you could do that, the Chair would appreciate that.

Point of Order

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Burrows, on a point of order.

Mr. Martindale: On a point of order, Mr. Chairperson, I would like to suggest that we try and pass this before five o'clock, so we do not have to come back. We have been here for a week, and it was my intention to pass it today. I know the minister would

like to see it pass today, and then we can concentrate on the other two Committees of Supply.

Mr. Chairperson: It is not a point of order, but it is a suggestion that the honourable member has put forward to the committee, and it will be up to the committee to decide.

* * *

Mr. Lamoureux: We are on ministerial salary. There is no staff here and my intentions are to continue to ask some questions, to talk about child poverty, because I believe the Minister of Family Services (Mrs. Mitchelson) is quite concerned in terms of the Liberal Party's sincerity in dealing with what is a critical issue.

You know, Mr. Chairperson, if I reflect on how important it is to the Liberal Party, this particular issue, I would suggest that the minister needs only to look at the last provincial election. In the last provincial election, with the many different issues facing the electors of the province of Manitoba, you will see highlighted the signs of balanced budgets, deficit control and there was a third one which escapes me currently.

The New Democrats focused very heavily on health care as an issue. I think what you saw was a very hard concentration on the issue of child poverty coming from the Liberal Party, and it was highlighted during the leadership debate itself, where you had Mr. Filmon, Mr. Doer and Mr. Edwards sitting around a table talking about a wide variety of issues, and at that particular discussion they talked about the importance of child poverty and it was highlighted by Paul Edwards.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. The hour being 5 p.m., time for private members' hour. Committee rise.

HEALTH

Mr. Chairperson (Ben Sveinson): Order, please. Will the Committee of Supply please come to order.

This afternoon this section of the Committee of Supply meeting in Room 255 will resume consideration

of the Estimates of the Department of Health. When the committee last sat it had been considering item 1. Administration and Finance (b) Executive Support (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits on page 68 of the Estimates book. Shall the item pass?

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): Mr. Chairperson, as discussed, I note that the minister has brought in some officials as requested with respect to some of the areas of questioning we will be proceeding down today.

I wonder, perhaps we should start out by, perhaps the minister can update us specifically as to what is happening or what is the present status of the contractual arrangement entered into between the government and MDS at present.

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Health): Mr. Chair, first of all, I would like to introduce my other staff who are here today. We have Brenda Nylund, Bob Harvey and Chris O'Neill, as well as Tom McCormack, who join us at the back, who deal with many of the issues we will be addressing.

First of all, with respect to MDS, the consolidation of labs, the process that we conducted that I inherited as minister on my appointment in January was one where we had put out a call for proposals that involved a number of pieces. We received those proposals. We evaluated the pieces. We are not proceeding at this time with some of the pieces that we had asked for proposals, such as looking at a plan for the whole province, but we evaluated those and eliminated those proposals that were not able to meet our call, and ranked, based on the assessment, the three of the proponents who were felt could potentially provide us with a consolidation.

Under the process that we embarked upon in ranking those three, we are just beginning now to enter into negotiations with the first choice to see if we can conclude a contract with them for the consolidation of labs pursuant to their proposal. If we are not able to do so to our satisfaction, then we will proceed to negotiate with one of the other two proponents and so forth. So we are not committed to conclude a contract or committed to attempt to negotiate one.

We also in preparation for this, as the member can appreciate, we have had our staff—first of all, the Associate Deputy Minister for Internal Operations, Mr. Don Potter, is in charge of these negotiations. He is putting together our team. They are in the process of putting together the issues and positions that we will advance as a province putting together our bargaining framework, and once we have approval for that framework they will enter into the detailed negotiations in an attempt to conclude a successful arrangement.

As the member, I am sure, can appreciate, the details of that framework and strategy that surrounds it are something that I would prefer not to—would not be in, I think, the province's best interest to get into a public discussion, given the fact that it is a pretty high-level negotiation. I know the member appreciates the sensitivity around that. But that is where we are today.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, can we attempt to narrow down two things, the time frame under which the process is proceeding, firstly, and, secondly, can we narrow down specifically what portions of the SOI we are specifically dealing with with respect to the present negotiations with the preferred company?

Mr. Praznik: First of all, the piece we are dealing with is the consolidation of the urban labs. That is the piece of the proposal call that is the urban public labs that we are talking about.

Mr. Chair, we are conducting now with the hospitals our preparatory due diligence work, and we hope to actually begin negotiations in about three to four weeks. Obviously, we have a fair bit to prepare in doing that, and the length of time, we will set a reasonable time to conclude a contract and see how our arrangements are going. If we are not able to make significant progress in a reasonable length of time, given the reports I received from Mr. Potter, then we will conclude we cannot reach a deal and move on to another party.

But I do not want to be in a position where we are absolutely committed to conclude an arrangement. We have to conclude the best arrangement. MDS and their partners, the Manitoba Health Care Professionals organization or union did come up with, in our analysis, the best proposal.

We hope we can come up with an arrangement, but we are not tied to getting a deal here at all costs. We want to make sure we do it right, as I know the member would expect us to.

Mr. Chomiak: So we are concerned with the eight urban hospitals, and how many other health centres? Can we be specific on that?

* (1440)

Mr. Praznik: Yes, I know this will help, Mr. Chair, members of the committee. For the purposes of our letter of intent, the laboratories referred to or that we will be consolidating are those located in the Health Sciences Centre, the Manitoba Cancer Treatment and Research Foundation, St. Boniface General Hospital, Concordia Hospital, Grace General Hospital, Deer Lodge Centre, Riverview Health Centre, Misericordia General Hospital, Seven Oaks General Hospital, the Victoria General Hospital, Klinik and Mount Carmel Clinic.

Mr. Chomiak: Do you think the minister could table the letter of intent?

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, I appreciate the member's question. If he would give me until tomorrow to review the letter to determine whether or not I can table it, I am prepared to consider that request.

Mr. Chomiak: Can the minister outline for us specifically what deal, what contract, the province is attempting to achieve with respect to the negotiations that are ongoing?

Mr. Praznik: I have to be somewhat careful. I do not want to give away, of course, all our strategy, but some of our considerations—obviously the intent is to see us have a more efficient and cost-effective laboratory system in the city of Winnipeg.

When I say efficient, that is not only in terms of cost but certainly in terms of its delivery mechanisms, one that is giving us modern technology, which becomes important, and a plan, also, that provides for good labour relations. A labour adjustment strategy is also one of the factors that enter into discussions.

Beyond that, I do not want to get into too much detail since we are beginning those negotiations, and it would be somewhat prejudicial to our position if all detail were to be provided to the people we are negotiating with, and I know the member appreciates that.

Mr. Chomiak: I am trying to get an idea as to, at the end of the day, what kind of lab system we are going to see in Winnipeg. I wonder if the minister might elaborate on that.

Mr. Praznik: I appreciate what the member is trying to—the information he is trying to obtain, and I do appreciate he is also respecting the confidentiality of detail in negotiation. I appreciate his consideration. Under the scenario that has been drawn, I think what we are looking at, if in fact—well, I share with him one of the observations that was made to me by Ron Wally who was the president of MDS's partner, the Manitoba Association of Health Care Professionals, the union representing the employees in our labs, and Mr. Wally made the comment to me that if you look to where the future of laboratory services are going in most major centres, they are going to consolidated, very efficient, often highly mechanized, robotic facilities that have a high degree of proficiency, I guess, in the handling of samples. Very efficient, can do a great deal of work in a short period of time, are very, very high quality, high standard facilities, consistent standards. I know the member, just in the area of crime labs, I know we have seen the concern in Ontario with their crime lab and a host of issues around standards and efficiencies and the results that flow from not being as good as one can be.

So we are looking at high standards, high quality, cost effective, efficient, leading-edge technology. Obviously, their proposal was for a centralized lab system that would have the vast majority of work being conducted in probably a highly capitalized facility. The other key to this, obviously, is the ability to move information quickly throughout that system, and that ties in very much with where we are going in SmartHealth and data movement throughout the health system so that results can be communicated very quickly electronically to those who need them within the system, and that is what makes it work, of course, in one central place.

So that is what we envision happening. One of the other proponents in their proposal, I believe, also talked

about a centralized lab system. Also another very critical point for health providers is that the system has to be a rapid responder and be able to move from sampling to analysis to reporting back very, very quickly. As Mr. Wally said to me, his union and the people who work in the current labs looking around the continent and seeing what has happened in other places and examining in detail how they work, his group became convinced that this really was the wave of the future in delivering a higher quality, efficient, fast-response product, and that is why they chose to become part of that particular proposal.

So that is what we are trying to aim for in moving us into the next generation of laboratory services. Also pointed out to me, and I just want to check on one point, Mr. Chair, it should also be noted under the proposal that we have that each facility would still retain a rapid response lab of much smaller proportions to do those things that have to be done very quickly, and current technology or systems do not allow it to be done in one central point. So that is where we are heading and what we are looking for and what we hope to achieve.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, it is a difficult area to try to conceptualize not so much because of what we are seeing happening in other jurisdictions, as much as we have had conflicting messages from the department with respect to direction and with respect to where they are going.

I guess my next question is how consistent is this proposal—and I queried the minister in previous Estimates processes with respect to the recommendations of the laboratory task force. How consistent is this proposal and this direction with those recommendations which included autonomous boards, dividing the city into regions and the like?

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, I believe the reference to regions pointed out to me by my deputy was the four regions in the province, it was not four regions in the city, and that comes down to part of our decision to only move at this stage to the consolidation in Winnipeg. Obviously, there are some concerns about being tied to only one provider of lab services. That is something that has to be weighed out. We obviously want the regional health authorities to have an

opportunity to look at their laboratory needs over the next while. I know that Brandon is very interested in the Westman Lab, how that fits into it, and at some point we may even look for another provider or another contract for other parts of the province. But at this stage this was the largest piece of our laboratory services in need of consolidation, and so we are moving on the Winnipeg phase today. So, I guess, it sort of fits in that we have not moved to a consolidation of one lab system for the whole province. We are still open to our delivery system being somewhat different or have other providers in other parts of the province.

* (1450)

Mr. Chomiak: Under whose jurisdiction will this consolidated public lab system fall?

Mr. Praznik: Our intention—since we are ultimately the payers of this and this is our initiative—will be to consolidate, obtain a contract and then inevitably or eventually we will transfer the contract and the funding that goes with it to the Winnipeg Hospital Authority, so administering the contract will be part of their operation.

Mr. Chomiak: How will this negotiation, these contracts relate to the oft-expressed concerns concerning the other labs in the city of Winnipeg, most notably the private labs?

Mr. Praznik: Today, specifically, the private labs in the system are not part of this contract or negotiation, but I think if one looks down the line a little bit, you know, if you have a large provider who can be extremely efficient and is on the leading end of technology, they will be a very competitive force in the laboratory industry or business in the city of Winnipeg. They are likely to have some effect, what it will be at the end of the day, we are not sure, but you cannot—I do not think it is unreasonable to anticipate that a very significant provider with a very large operation is going to present a competitive force within the city of Winnipeg.

Mr. Chomiak: Two immediate concerns with respect to lab consolidation are the individuals who want assurances they can attend at their local primary health care centre and be able to have tests taken and lab

turnaround done efficiently and, secondly, surgeons and others who provide primary health care being assured that they could have rapid turnaround with respect to the procedures that they are involve in.

Can the minister give us guarantees and assurances that those two significant groups will have their needs accommodated in the new structure?

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, I guess as politicians we are always reluctant, or should be, to give guarantees, because those are hard to do. It is certainly, I would concur with the member—those are the expectations of the public and they have to be significantly the goals of our system. We would not want to be going into a new system that extended turnaround times or made it very inconvenient for people providing samples or practitioners in the system. The key to making this work and having a benefit to us is, in fact, a more efficient system that is convenient to the users and has faster turnaround times, et cetera, and we hope we are able to achieve that. That is certainly a goal and something we will work towards in the negotiation.

I should just point out to him, as well, that for many rural facilities, and my constituency included, the length of turnaround time in having tests taken and results for tests that cannot be done in labs in rural facilities is a rather lengthy one. So I know what he speaks about, that our current structure in rural Manitoba certainly is not a speedy one, in many cases, and the provision back of results is also a bit of a concern. So, at the end of the day after Winnipeg, we would also like, particularly with the new electronic technology, the ability to improve the system overall right across the province, and I would suggest in northern Manitoba, that issue is even more severe in terms of length of turnaround time on tests.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, what are we negotiating with MDS? Is MDS going to be a manager? Are they going to own the assets? Are they going to provide capital? What are we negotiating for MDS to do?

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, I appreciate the breadth of the member's question, because these are some very important issues. I know on the USSC consolidation of food services contract, what in essence they were doing

was contracting the management of the system function. I think we are doing more than that here, but the detail of how we work this out is subject to the negotiations that we are now entering. I just flag with him, the way one structures these sometimes can result in savings that we obviously may enjoy. We are looking for what works out to be the best cost-effective way of delivering a higher service, higher quality product. So I do not want to get too much into the detail because, as we get into those negotiations with them, these kinds of issues will get sorted out as to what elements they will actually own and build and operate.

So I appreciate the breadth of the question. It is an important one. My staff who were involved in these negotiations are somewhat reluctant to get into greater detail, given the fact that we are narrowing some of these things down, and they get into our own strategy and planning for those negotiations.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, will the minister give assurances to us in the committee that when the contract is concluded that all information will be made public with the exception of obvious information that for proprietary or competitive reasons would, obviously, not be something that would be made public but that all of the respective details will be made public?

Mr. Praznik: Yes, Mr. Chair, with the caveat that the member has placed on that with respect to proprietary information, I think as public money it certainly should be public, and we will do that when we have reached that point.

Mr. Chomiak: The process that took place, with respect to the amalgamation of the EITC labs and some of the other labs, saw them move into being special operating agencies and then ultimately privatized. Are we going down a similar road with respect to the public labs in this process?

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, we are not, in the proposal calls and the proposals that were made, looking at a special operating agency scenario here. That is not part of it. So it is a somewhat different trail than we embarked on on those other laboratories.

Mr. Chomiak: Has the EITC lab or Cadham lab been considered for part of this total package by the government or MDS?

Mr. Praznik: Yes, Mr. Chair, at the current time, and under the negotiations that we are entering into, the list, as I have outlined, is the laboratories that we are looking at. Obviously, once we have concluded this lab at Cadham, we would want to see how it all fits into the picture in the long haul, as we would with all of our rural laboratories, but at this current stage of events, we are only dealing with those labs that I have outlined in the letter, and only those will form part of this contract that we conclude.

Mr. Chomiak: Insofar as the proponents of MDS and their partners, as I understand it, have an arrangement with respect to the provisions of jobs, is the government prepared to guarantee, as well, at least job levels commensurate with those containing the agreement between MDS and their partners?

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, I am not quite sure what the member—perhaps he might want to give a little more detail. Obviously, labour relations costs and strategies were part of the evaluation of proposals. MDS and their partners have an excellent strategy in place to ensure that staff who currently work our labs are not left without employment. They obviously will need whatever level of staffing to do the job in whatever system we negotiate in the contract.

I believe, as part of their arrangements, I do not know how much they have talked about this publicly, but as part of their agreement between the union and MDS, they have provided for other opportunities for staff, I believe either within their company or by increasing the workload, attracting extra business in essence from out of the province to a centralized facility that would increase their volume above the staffing levels they would need to run the operation efficiently. So at the end of the day, we would not be seeing people leaving unless it was because they chose to do so. I do not know if the member is looking for something more to that, but that is the information I have to date.

* (1500)

Mr. Chomiak: I think that generally covers it to the extent that the minister seems to be saying to me that it

is the government position, as well, that they agree with the provisions contained in the agreement between MDS and their other partners, that certain staff levels will be maintained.

I guess the second part of my question is: Is the government prepared to assist NICRIS? That gets into negotiations, so I probably cannot get a response to that. But I will try.

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, I think what the important thing to note in this, and I have had the privilege of a briefing from Mr. Wally, the arrangement between his union and MDS is a contractual agreement between the two of them as parties. Based on that contractual agreement, MDS was able to describe their strategy as part of their proposal.

So we will want to ensure that any matter in a proposal is ultimately worked into the agreement, but it is legally enforceable as well, most importantly, I guess, by MDS's partners, and they are satisfied that their interests in employing their members have been satisfied in their MDS agreement. So that is enforceable by them, and it would not be appropriate for me to involve myself in their contractual obligation. My role here would be to make sure that the proposal as made by MDS for their relations is part of our agreement, but that particular union is a party to another agreement with MDS.

I think the two interesting points that Mr. Wally briefed me on was that their members viewed this as moving our laboratory system into the next century in being leading edge which is good for Manitobans, and their members saw greater job security and opportunity in being part of a leading edge operation as opposed to one that is declining.

Secondly, MDS as a company provided the opportunities because, obviously, a consolidation is going to result in fewer positions providing the same service to our system today, but by having leading edge technology, the opportunity to attract other work to that facility from out of province thereby increasing employment opportunities and also being part of a system that operates in many places also gives opportunities for those people within the laboratory industry, not only to ensure they have a job, but I would

imagine, just speculating here a little bit, too, it gives them opportunities to advance and grow in that industry, into management and other positions that they would not have had within the current structure in the province of Manitoba.

So when they weighed out their options, I am advised that they saw this as moving into the future which had more opportunities for them than staying with the status quo. I would not think Mr. Wally and his members would have embarked on this arrangement if they were not satisfied that it was ultimately in their best interests.

That formed part of their proposal. I do not know all the details of their arrangement. It is not my purview to, but what was part of their proposal, ultimately the thrust of their proposal, which was weighed into the assessment process will be an issue that we will want to incorporate or define into our contract.

Mr. Chomiak: So if I understand correctly, those particular aspects of the proposal, for lack of a better word I will use to maximize employment, would be part of the government's position with respect to the signing of a final contract.

Mr. Praznik: By maximizing employment, yes, we obviously want to make sure that there is a good labour strategy here, but, also, too, I believe that the additional opportunities, if part of this leads to more work being done in the province, we certainly would welcome that as well.

Mr. Chomiak: Can the minister indicate with respect to the documentation and the proposal that came back what the time line was with respect to MDS for the formation of the system that the minister dealt with earlier, because the SOI had very specific time lines and deliverables attached to it with specific dates?

Mr. Praznik: Until we have completed negotiations with those firm time lines for completion of MDS's part of the bargain, I would not want to make a commitment on it, but we are very anxious, as they well know, to get on with this and see it happen as quickly as possible. I share with the member as well that part of our capital strategy in redeveloping the Health Sciences Centre, by consolidating laboratories we free up a significant amount of space at Health Sciences Centre, somewhere

near 100,000 square feet of space, and that space is in great demand in the capital reworking program for the Health Sciences Centre. In fact, it allows us to advance some of our projects there significantly. There is also a capital saving involved in that, so we would like to see this all happen as quickly as physically possible in order to move, not only to get into the better lab system but also to make that space available for other capital needs at HSC that we have to address.

Mr. Chomiak: Will the minister be able to provide us with details on the utilization of space and the capitalization when we get to the area of Estimates dealing with capitalization, just so that I have some idea as to where that 100,000 square feet is coming from and those kinds of details? Would that be possible?

Mr. Praznik: Yes, Mr. Chair, I think we are planning on tomorrow dealing with capital, that was the plan, or Monday. So it will be Monday. Then we will have Linda Bakken, my Facilities person here on Monday. We can just make a note, and we will be able to get into those details.

Mr. Chomiak: Just on administrivia here, since we are into the hundreds of thousands of readers, I am sure, of this Hansard debate, so that they will know some idea of where we are going, I am a bit afraid I am going to go on far too long in this area, because I have a tendency to do that, so I am not going to go much more extensively in this particular area, and my plans were to move into SmartHealth and then to start moving down the line by line in the Estimates to then allow us to go into Thursday to deal with, to move into Continuing Care, allow us to go through there and probably, as it was indicated earlier, wrapping up Monday or Tuesday or probably Monday I guess with respect to capital and all those other areas we have not covered. So that is what I am probably targeting for. I just have one or two more questions in this area before I move on.

Can the minister indicate whether or not there has been any difficulty with respect to obtaining information from the various facilities, from the eight facilities and two clinics with respect to putting together the package for the review and the negotiations?

* (1510)

Mr. Praznik: I am advised by our people who are working in this area that ensuring everybody was happy with the processes of gathering information, that hospitals were comfortable with this, that all of that work has been done and that both the facilities and MDS are comfortable with the process of obtaining information or getting what one needs to be able to conclude this contract.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, I am happy to hear that insofar as we know that some of the facilities had another proponent and insofar as the minister has indicated two points, that, should negotiations fail, there is a possibility of moving somewhere else and, alternatively or in addition, there is a possibility of other proponents taking part in a province-wide perhaps future consolidation. There could be a tendency for some interesting negotiations between participants in this venture.

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, the member for Kildonan and I, perhaps because we are both north end or I am north of the north-end boy here, we both know that one should never put all one's eggs in one basket when one is negotiating. I am pleased to say today that we are not so committed to anyone that we would not be able to negotiate the best possible contract. I do not think we would ever want to be in that position, and I appreciate that he has gathered that is, obviously, where we want to place ourselves.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, I was going to move now down the road of the SmartHealth contract and arrangement. This is another area where we have spent literally dozens of hours in past Estimates and time is not going to allow us to do it on this occasion. So I think I would like to commence by—I wonder if the minister might outline for us structurally what is happening with respect to his department and the interrelationship between his department and SmartHealth at present?

Mr. Praznik: Yes, Mr. Chair, if the member will bear with us. I only have one copy of this handy. Staff could make a couple of photocopies, and I would be delighted to table the organizational chart as to how we put this together. I think it makes it much more clearer than explaining it orally.

Mr. Chomiak: I thank the minister. In the interim, I wonder if the minister can indicate what, if any, money has flowed with respect to the interim trust operating arrangement that was structured and set up wherein money was supposed to flow after 18 months, and I believe we are past that period or before the first deliverable.

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, to date, no funds have flowed, I am advised, although there are some, I believe, that are due this fall.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, can the minister indicate what is flowing this fall and for what purpose?

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, I believe it is about \$450,000, and it is for work that was done going back to last year, I believe, as part of this.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, I thank the minister for this chart. The chart is entitled Integral Communication.

I wonder if the minister might briefly outline for me who basically comprises the steering committee, the Health executive management, the Health program management? What I am effectively looking at is an integrated working relationship between, I assume, the Department of Health and SmartHealth and the various governmental committees, so maybe the minister can put it together for me.

Mr. Praznik: With all the committees we have in health care, maybe the minister can put it together for himself, as well, while I am doing this and going through it, just to refresh my memory.

The health information system steering committee to which all of this ultimately reports—and under my tenure I think I have had one meeting of this committee, by and large to be briefed—it consists of myself; the Honourable Eric Stefanson, Minister of Finance; Mr. Frank DeCock, Deputy Minister of Health; Mr. Julian Benson, Secretary to the Treasury Board; Eric Rosenhek, Provincial Controller; Bob Swain, who is Secretary to the Economic Development Board, and that is the steering committee.

Now, the Health executive management group would be—the same structure as mine organizationally—my

deputy minister, Mr. DeCock, and my three associate deputies, Ms. Hicks, Mr. Potter and Ms. Ellis. Obviously, health program managers would be the managers of each of the program areas in Health.

So, really, all of this is coming together through our normal management system, our new management system that has been in place, that just recently we put in place within the ministry, answering to the steering committee, which is really Eric Stefanson, myself and our appropriate people who we have to have there.

Then, under all of this, we have a number of committees working in a variety of areas. The Multi-Stakeholder Advisory Committee—has the member seen a list?

Mr. Chomiak: Yes, I have one. I could just indicate now, when we get to this level, I do have previous documentation, and I am familiar therein with the structure, and I thank the minister.

So where does SmartHealth per se integrate together with this structure?

Mr. Praznik: The Health Information Network, this whole system, in essence, we as the ministry have contracted with SmartHealth. They provide the facilitation. They do the administrative work. They also, most importantly, are doing the technical work in putting this system together for our program managers.

So this is very much an internal operation. It is not like we have said to a contractor, go and come back in so many years with a system for us. We are really saying we want to build the system. Here are our own people who have to be part of building it. They know what they need, and we have gone to the experts who have experience in putting together complex systems. They are working with all of our various areas and advisory committees to do their respective pieces.

So at the end of the day, we will be able to, piece by piece, put this system together. So that is SmartHealth's role, really, as our consultants, technicians, technical people, to be able to build this system with us, and they are very much integrated in this organization.

* (1520)

Mr. Chomiak: All of this technical and all of this work that is being done by SmartHealth is being financed by?

(Mr. Jack Penner, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair)

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, I would just like to revise one of my previous answers somewhat in being advised on this financial matter. The payment we spoke about earlier, the 400-and-some thousand dollars which is due this fall is due because the contract period of 18 months is reached, but I understand we are attempting to negotiate.

We obviously require some more time to get all of these things together. Obviously the privacy legislation is a critical part to this puzzle, so it may take us somewhat longer than 18 months to be in an operating position. The plan obviously in this contract was to pay for the cost of the system through the savings. I know the member has been through this with Minister McCrae. It is important that we obviously match our payments with savings. Because of a few factors in getting the system running, there might be some difference here. We have to work that out with our contractors who are helping to build that system.

It is important to appreciate that we also have within this contract, if we cannot achieve savings, if we cannot achieve better efficiencies to pay for it, we will not proceed. But the full expectation is that we are going to be able to do it. I guess one of my difficulties as a minister today is that the contract, or the ability to start implementing, is very dependent on having privacy legislation in place. It has taken a great deal of effort to put that together. We have advanced that at a phenomenal rate.

Just to share with the member, one of my dilemmas when I took over this portfolio is that the work of the privacy committee, the expectation in January or beginning of February is they were four to five months away from completing their work, which meant we would not have had a bill for this session. So we have had to advance that in leaps and bounds and dedicate a lot of resources. Chris O'Neill has been involved in that, who is here today, a huge amount of effort and time to be able to get that bill in.

As the member knows, I introduced it for first reading today and will be distributing it tomorrow, I believe in the morning, to each member of the Legislature. So again that piece is critical to advance the other pieces. So it is coming together, maybe not exactly how we initially envisioned but pretty close.

Mr. Chomiak: So I take it that the \$26-million borrowing authority is still in place and still intact and has not been drawn on, but that the minister is saying he envisions that \$400,000 will have to be drawn upon in the fall.

Mr. Praznik: Yes.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Alexander has left. Who is replacing Mr. Alexander?

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, we are currently—we have advertised it and are running a competition for that position. I understand that we will be interviewing shortly for it. The position has changed somewhat in our organizational chart, as the member appreciates, as well.

Mr. Chomiak: Can the minister indicate what that position will be?

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, instead of being an assistant deputy minister position before, it will be an executive director position that reports directly to the Associate Deputy for Internal Operations, Mr. Potter.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, is the minister aware of where Mr. Alexander went?

Mr. Praznik: Pardon me, it was to Sue Hicks, the Executive Director of External Operations.

I understand that he is now president-CEO of Rx Canada Incorporated in Toronto.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, so the individual—I guess, in terms of responsibility, I am trying to isolate who is responsible in the ministry for the carrying forward of this project. Ms. Hicks and the individual underneath who will be executive director—where is it sitting in the organization of the department?

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, the member refers to the organizational chart we put out. The project responsibility is with the executive director we are hiring, and who will report to Sue Hicks, the Associate Deputy Minister for External Programs and Operations. So that within my executive, she will have the responsibility to ensure this is done; and on the operations level, it will be the person we are hiring.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, though Mr. Potter is responsible for health information systems, computer systems and operations, that is where I get confused.

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, that is our day-to-day current operations within the department. Once the system is up and operating, it may move over to that part of the department. As my associate deputies when I appointed them, I charged them to go in a room and sort out who would be looking after what in a logical way. It was felt because so much of this network has to deal with building our relations with those who are delivering care, the vast majority of which are outside of the department and regional health authorities, that the building of the system would be best housed there.

Once it is building and operating and it is a matter of just administrating the central system, then the likely place to be is in the internal program side. So this organizational chart does give us the ability to move some things around in reporting relationships depending on their current state of affairs. In some cases where we are building a system and we are working very closely with the regional health authorities, it is best it be there. When it is up and running and the kinks are worked out of it, then it is likely to be better placed once it is out of the construction phase in internal operations. So this gives us the ability and we envision that happening in our organizational chart.

The other area where this will probably be even more the case is under Roberta Ellis's part, the Human Resource planning and projects. Some of the things that we may take on may require an associate deputy, hands on, to get them developed, operating, kinks worked out, and once the construction phase is finished move them to where they are best suited administratively. So we designed our organization to be able to accommodate and have that flexibility.

* (1530)

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, last year when I queried the minister on the whole issue of technology and computerization—and I am not going to go down that road—I got faint assurances from the minister that the co-ordination was basically in the ministry through Mr. Alexander, and between the ISM contract, between hospitals procuring their own systems and between the SmartHealth agreement. I am not totally convinced that there is a consistent theme on this. I wonder if the minister might comment on that.

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, whenever it comes to information technology, particularly as we reach this year-2000 problem that our computer experts are discovering now in the last years of the 20th Century, these are very valid concerns that I share with him. I think it is going to be very incumbent upon the person we hire, and certainly with Mr. Potter's responsibilities in the department and our executive, to ensure that we are not building systems that are incompatible with one another, that they must be able to interconnect. They must be able to deal with the year 2000.

Mr. Webster has spoken to me about this as one of his big concerns because all of the hospitals very shortly have to make decisions in this area. He has advised me that he is already into discussions with them to make sure it is done consistently, and we will want to make sure it is done consistently with us as a ministry and also with the regional health authorities. All the RHAs' CEOs have also agreed, and their chairs have agreed, that we have to take a consistent province-wide approach. So now it is making sure that it is handled. This Health Information Network has to be part of it. Mr. Potter is also well aware that all of our other computer information systems on accounting, et cetera, have to be compatible as well. So they all know their charge from you and I as legislators, from me directly as minister, and I would expect that we will be able to succeed in this important task.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, we have spent considerable time in years past dealing with the issue of specific—and I will use the departmental term “deliverables” with respect to the SmartHealth deal and the various stages. I wonder if the minister can update me and us specifically as to where we are at?

Last year the minister outlined five highlighted areas, five areas that they were prioritizing. Those included DPIN, lab design services, et cetera. I wonder if the minister can specifically outline for us where we are at with respect to each of the deliverables?

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, if I could endeavour to have your staff make a photocopy of this project forecast, with all the appropriate caveats that this is an administrative forecast, I am sure the member will not hold me to it necessarily to the day and I would hope not the month, but if I could have copies made then I will gladly table that. I think that answers the question in a better way than if I were to try to verbalize the information on it.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, just awaiting that, the minister made reference earlier with respect to the public lab consolidation. Is it the plan of the government—and I have not looked at the chart—that the consolidation will integrate one of the components or a number of the components with respect to this project? Now, I know it is certainly the plan within the long term, but I am talking about the short and medium term.

Mr. Praznik: Very obviously, yes, there is a huge relationship between the two, because part of making a consolidated lab system work is the flow of information from the lab, when test results are there, very quickly to the care providers, whether it be at a hospital or a nursing station or they be in a doctor's office. So the two are very much dependent upon another. Obviously, in consolidating labs, we expect to have financial benefits there, and with our information system we also intend to see benefits of not having to repeat tests unnecessarily.

I know my own experience when my daughter was ill a couple of years ago, and we took her to Health Sciences Centre, I know she had a blood test in the emergency admitting when we came in. Three hours later when we got her into a room, which was a reasonable time to wait, I guess, we found that the nurse was coming to give this little two-year-old another drawing of blood for another blood test. I said, well, she just had one. The nurse said, well, I do not have it on my chart. I said, you are going to give another test, we just did one three hours ago. So she

went and she found it. But it is that kind of—the member knows those inefficiencies are there. So this system allows us to prevent unnecessary testing, and so the two fit together, but you need a good information system to make a consolidated lab system work.

With respect to the document I have just tabled, Mr. Chair, I think these are forecasts as to when we expect a number of these things to happen and where we expect them to happen. As I said, in this business there are lots of things that can delay implementation, so this is a rough guide of expectation, not something I would expect to be held firmly to.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, I think that goes without saying, and I think it had also been widely predicted that this probably would be the case with respect to this kind of a project. I wonder if the minister can specifically outline for me detail on this chart, that is, so that I understand it correctly, and going through it item by item, that sometime in mid-1997, all hospitals will have access—no, within, obviously the time frame is flexible—a drug profile of every patient that is being admitted in E.R. Is that what is meant by this initial item?

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chairman, acceding to your request, I really wish I could have the indulgence of the committee to have Mr. O'Neill explain the great detail of this chart. Would that be permissible? Mr. O'Neill, perhaps you would like to address the committee and explain the operation of each.

Mr. Chris O'Neill (Senior Finance Manager, Health Information Network Project): Mr. Minister, Mr. Chairperson, members of the committee, first of all, DPIN stands for Drug Program Information Network. That is the existing information system for retail pharmacies. The intention of that project is to expand that information into the hospital sector, primarily in the emergency rooms and possibly admitting, although we are still looking at the feasibility of doing that, but essentially to provide that information so that when people require health services, the providers in the hospital have access to that information to speed up the process, because right now they are gathering that information manually, and it is very time consuming.

First of all, where we are at on that is we are just at the end of what is known as Stage 1 which is the

conceptual design and the initial design, and we have submissions for Stage 2 which is the detail design that are in the process of going through the approval process in government. Our intention is to get that design done over the summer and start building toward late summer to be rolling out some time in fall this year or winter this year or early next year with that functionality into the hospital sector. So that is what the DPIN is.

* (1540)

DSIN stands for Diagnostic Services Information Network. That is also currently in Stage 1. It is not quite as far ahead as the DPIN, but very much in Stage 1, in the initial design, and very shortly also we will be starting Stage 2 which is the detail design.

The physicians, we are at Stage 0. We have a proposal before Treasury Board for Stage 0 to begin the process of putting that together in terms of our consultation and feasibility study. We also have a proposal before the minister right now to start working on the Stage 0 for community health, so that those we will start doing the feasibility late this summer, early fall, so that as DSIN and DPIN start coming on-line, we will start working on the design of those.

In terms of the infrastructure, we have finished the design, what we call the target architecture. It is the technology design and the technology concept including, I hesitate to use a technical term, but data-entity relationships; in other words, what data is in the system and how it flows between care providers and the ministry. We just in the past couple of days received a work plan to actually start the process of building that infrastructure with, of course, the intention, once DPIN and DSIN start rolling out, the infrastructure will be in place to carry them.

So that, in general, and hopefully in understandable terms, is the current status of the project.

Mr. Chomiak: I thank the minister and the Chair. That was a very useful experience. I have some questions though. We are at the first phase, and I now understand why the lines proceed through on this basis. I did not pick that up, and, again, that is very useful.

When we say DSIN, are we talking about all lab tests in general, or what are the parameters, what is the range of DSIN?

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, if the committee will indulge me, I would like Mr. O'Neill to answer this very technical question.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Penner): Proceed.

Mr. O'Neill: What will be on DSIN will be a diagnostic profile, so it will be a summary of all of your diagnostic history, both laboratory and imaging; for instance, in the imaging, not the X-rays per se but a summary of what X-rays you have had and what the general results of those were and also information as to if a care provider requires the actual image or more detail in terms of the results as to how to obtain that, the location of where the results are and the name of the person to contact, that type of information.

Mr. Chomiak: Now, that is the profile that will be on DSIN. How does that differ from test reporting that is indicated on the chart to come into place for mid-'98?

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Penner): I would interject here, and I would suggest that we are as committee—during the nine years that I have been in this building, this is somewhat of a precedent, asking staff to answer questions, which I welcome as Chair.

I think we should probably have done this much sooner, because I think much of the information that you are seeking is of a technical nature, and certainly there is nobody better qualified than the person answering the question dealing with these issues everyday.

Therefore, I welcome the approach that the minister is taking in this matter, although it might be a bit precedent setting. I hope that maybe others in committee can take some measure of comfort in allowing this to happen. So I would ask that we continue on this basis until we have addressed this issue, if that is the will of the committee.

Mr. Praznik: Give it to Policy, we will get back—

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Penner): Certainly, so proceed then?

Mr. O'Neill: Sorry, now I have forgotten the question.

Mr. Chomiak: Perhaps the question was not put that well, but what is the test reporting there for, on the next line, that is, and how does that differ from the DSIN?

Mr. O'Neill: That is the results of the tests that I was referring to, and that information will be retained on the system. So, if for instance, you have a test done, the results are reported to your physician. Then the next time you access the system, you go to the hospital or you see another physician, the second physician or the hospital can look up the information, and they will see a summary of that.

Mr. Chomiak: I see the time line as we move toward—okay, I think, now I am understanding the flow chart. What does the reference to cards in mid-to-early 1998 refer to?

Mr. O'Neill: We are actually still working on that. That is one of the things that we have to look at when we get into the actual design phase.

Mr. Praznik: This is obviously one area I know a little bit about, but as Mr. O'Neill has indicated on the cards, obviously, the access point to the system becomes the card, plastic card. I know we have talked about the Royal Bank being involved, but it is, in essence, like your banking card with your information. There are a number of details that I believe have to be worked out about what information—will it be an access strip or contain information on the strip. There will be questions about what will the card look like. Obviously, we want it to be something that Manitobans find attractive and are happy with.

There are also security issues related to the card having access numbers, so all of these things have to be worked out and that is what it is about. That becomes as public a matter as politicians, that becomes a very important point, because that is going to be the point at which the public accesses the system. That card, in essence, becomes the focal point of the system. So I would think that is an area that is going to require a great deal of our attention, my attention as minister, and also to make sure it is worked out properly and that it has a high degree of public comfort and acceptability.

So that is what the card is about. Mr. O'Neill may have other things he may want to add to it.

Mr. Chomiak: This is probably to the minister. It is a reiteration of a point that I made. Basically, the card will become the means by which to access the system, but not the carrier of information. Is that correct?

Mr. Praznik: Yes. Although we have not formally seen that decision made yet, it is very likely that is going to be the case because of the inability to store all that information on the card, and also security issues that I imagine would arise with it. Quite frankly, in our financial institutions that have a reputation of high security, their current system is an access card that accesses the system as opposed to the bearer of information.

I guess the equivalent would be a telephone long distance card that contains a certain amount of cash, or information on it that runs out and makes the card irrelevant at some point. That would not be a good system for us. I also would just like to flag with the member one of the questions I had is the need, obviously, for an override ability. If someone is in an emergency situation and the card is not usable or the personal identification number is not able to be conveyed or utilized by that individual, there has to be some way to override the system in the emergency, and that is part of the kind of policy decisions and questions that have to be worked out in this time frame around the general issue of card access.

Mr. Chomiak: I wonder if Mr. O'Neill might take us through the test-ordering portion of the chart as well as electronic prescriptions and perhaps describe specifically what is meant by both of those terms on the time line.

* (1550)

Mr. O'Neill: Again, we have not worked out the exact specifics. That is what we will do once we get into stage two, but on a conceptual level, the intention of the DSIN project is to start with the test results reporting, and also I should add—no, I am sorry it is not on this—but also management reporting practice profiling. So, for instance, physicians who receive the test results electronically will be able to look at a history of that

patient's tests or information as to their test ordering patterns, that kind of thing.

So that is information flowing from the labs back to the care providers. Once we have that in place, then we are looking at coming back the other way with the care providers actually ordering the tests electronically so that we have a complete loop.

Mr. Chomiak: What is the breadth and the scope? Are we talking about dealing initially with, say, the large urban hospitals in Winnipeg and then extending it out, or are we starting in the north and rural Manitoba and extending within? Is there a plan? I do not know, this may be more appropriate to the minister. Is there a plan with respect to how the system will be phased in?

Clearly, it is not going to happen all at once in the province, or maybe it will. Perhaps Mr. O'Neill can outline for us what the scenario is in that regard.

Mr. Praznik: Yes, Mr. Chair, the member is quite right. One would have to phase—and I am just being advised here now that the recommendation to us to administer will be to begin with three pilot projects, one in northern Manitoba, possibly one in rural, and an urban one. That is the recommendation that my technical people will be making to us, and ultimately we will have to make a decision.

Mr. Chomiak: Has there been any major changes or developments with respect of the DPIN program or any new initiatives taken with respect to DPIN since last year?

Mr. Praznik: In looking at how the system was operated over the last year, our staff recognized that one of the gaps was in the hospital sector. So their recommendation—I do not know if we have put it in there yet but it will be. Part of their plan is to put the DPIN into hospital emergency rooms. That was a void that was discovered in our initial planning that I gather now we are planning to fill.

Mr. Chomiak: And that would account for the drug profile issue and on the chart for targeting for 1997, and that is what we are referring to. Is that correct?

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, I am advised that is the case.

Mr. Chomiak: I must admit in a few short minutes of explanation I probably understand more about the process than I did in hours and hours of questioning on previous occasions. No reflection on—it could be a question of my ability to integrate information.

I think this is a fairly concise and accurate explanation. Where are we at in terms of the other projects, though, with respect to the longer-term projects with respect to the SmartHealth project?

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, I am going to, again with the committee's kind permission, ask Mr. O'Neill to update members on this. I think it is a very useful way of getting one's mind around a very complex area and, I admit very candidly, as a new minister, I am still in the process of familiarization with so many of these details. So, with the committee and Mr. Chairman's concurrence, I would like to have Mr. O'Neill answer that question.

Mr. O'Neill: Mr. Chairperson, to finish off the list and go through them, the physicians' component—and by the way I apologize, that is a misspelling, after physician it should not say PCP, it should say PCH, personal care homes. Oh, wait a minute. I am sorry, primary care providers. I am confused myself. Anyway, that is to provide Health Information Network functionality into physician offices and into physician clinics. We have a submission before Treasury Board to proceed with the Stage 0, which is your high-level feasibility study and identification of what it is and what the possible benefits are.

The community health component is, of course, all of the community clinics, health promotion, public health, that sector. We have a document that has not yet gone to Treasury Board, is in the ministry at this point, that is requesting to put together the work plan for a Stage 0 to go forward to Treasury Board to start the high level on that. We have not started on the hospitals or the consumers yet. We anticipate, though, that once we near the completion of the physicians' component and Stage 0 of the physicians' component and community health, then we will be starting the Stage 0 of the hospitals and consumers.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, so where do personal care homes fit into this profile?

Mr. O'Neill: Mr. Chairperson, under the hospitals. The hospitals should actually say hospitals/personal care homes.

Mr. Chomiak: The long-term projects, the preventative projects and some of the issues that the minister talked about two years ago with respect to notifications to consumers of congenital and hereditary defects and things along those lines, where do they fit into this chart?

Mr. O'Neill: Mr. Chairman, I am not sure I understand the question, but if the question relates to the consumers and allowing consumers access, again, we have not started work on that. We are awaiting the outcome of the passage of the privacy legislation on the regulations, and given a number of the privacy, confidentiality, security issues that particular piece probably will not come for quite some time. However, within the ministry and within the Health Information Network project, we understand very clearly that our mandate is to not only try and cure illness, and what not, but to promote health and wellness. We understand very clearly that one of the ways of keeping people healthy, and when they get ill to make them well better, is to empower them with information and involve them in their care. So that is a very important piece, but because of some of the complexities of it, it will probably come later.

I do not have any specific answer, Mr. Chairperson, in terms of timing on that, but that is the general concept that we are working under.

Mr. Chomiak: I thank you for the answer. I guess I was trying—and you did answer it—to understand whether the reference to consumers here was—it is a broader reference. Each of the projects is a broader reference than the long term that the minister, two years ago, was speculating in terms of the ultimate design of SmartHealth and where you are going.

Is it possible, and this is to the minister, is there an update and a status, other than this chart, as to the present status and direction of SmartHealth that the

minister might be able to share with us in terms of description in writing?

Mr. Praznik: I am going to commit to have Mr. O'Neill provide the member with one. He has indicated that we can give him that update. He will forward it to me and I will have it forwarded to the member.

Mr. Chomiak: I thank the minister for that information. Can the minister indicate what the status is of the DUMSC project, whether or not that is proceeding and how it may or may not relate?

(Mr. Chairperson in the Chair)

* (1600)

Mr. Praznik: The Drug Use Management System and Concept is one that makes some very good sense. I know there are many who are promoting this. To date, we have not really gone very far on it for a variety of reasons, probably one of which is we only have so many hands to put onto issues, and minds. But it is one that has been brought to my attention in the last few months and one that we would like to progress on when we are able to put our resources into making it happen. Obviously, the flood was one of the things that put us behind as well.

So I have no further update than probably what the member had last year if he had asked the same question of the minister.

Mr. Chomiak: Administrative matters, again, I—actually I would love to go down this line for a long time, but time is at a premium. I wonder if we might take five minutes and then I am projecting that we can start going through the line-by-line items that should start moving us into tomorrow, and I am assuming tomorrow that we will get into the issues of Continuing Care and the like.

The only qualification, I think, and it may be there may be one or two questions that might arise with respect to the SmartHealth as a result of some of this information that we are looking at, but I do not want to change the departmental plan, so I do not think that we will have to come back to this—I do not think at this point.

Mr. Praznik: In the interests of accommodating the member, we will have Mr. O'Neill here tomorrow at the first part, should a question arise. I must say to the member, in all the years I have done Estimates I have always preferred to do them in a more—a manner like we are doing them today that gives members the freedom to be able to deal with issues and tie them together. I am quite enjoying the discussions we are having.

I fully concur we probably need a five- or 10-minute recess here at this time in the afternoon.

Mr. Chairperson: Is it the will of the committee to take a five- to- 10-minute break? [agreed]

The committee recessed at 4:03 p.m.

After Recess

The committee resumed at 4:16 p.m.

Mr. Chairperson: Will the Estimates of the Department of Health come back to order.

Mr. Chomiak: I wonder if it is possible at this point for the minister to table a list of all outside contracts with all consulting and other agencies with the Department of Health.

Mr. Praznik: I am advised that the standard answer to this question is that they are all available on Public Accounts—the list of untendered contracts. I guess it boils—and I would love to be able to provide a complete list to the member. I guess it is, do I take some staff time in the next while to have somebody sit down and compile the whole list. Is there something that the member is looking for specifically? Perhaps we can be a little bit more accommodating.

Mr. Chomiak: I appreciate the minister's response. I will not give my standard reply. The areas I am looking at are the areas of contracts with KPMG, as well as the contracts with outside parties dealing with the regionalization

Mr. Praznik: Perhaps if the member could give me a little bit sense of the time frame, maybe we could be a little more specific.

Mr. Chomiak: Perhaps all major contracts entered into since the last period—a year ago to now since the last Estimates period.

Mr. Praznik: Yes, Mr. Chair, my staff are just searching their collective memories here. We have not had many, and we will get for him for tomorrow a list of our consulting agreements. I know with KPMG, the only contract they are working on for us now is with respect to implementation, as we discussed earlier in Estimates.

I am not aware of Mr. Hugh Goldie being on contract with us at the current time, certainly not in my tenure as minister, but we will get that list for the member.

Mr. Chomiak: I appreciate the response. Is Barb Biggar and her communication group also still under contract, or has that expired?

Mr. Praznik: Not since completion of the Pathways document, so she is not on contract at the current time.

Mr. Chomiak: Can the minister give us—

* (1620)

Mr. Chairperson: A vote has been requested in the other committee room. We will proceed to the Assembly.

The committee recessed at 4:20 p.m.

After Recess

The committee resumed at 4:45 p.m.

Mr. Chairperson: Would the Committee of Supply please come back to order. Before we recessed, we were dealing with the Estimates of Health.

Mr. Chomiak: I wonder if the minister has figures for me on the amount of money that has been held back in

the preceding year from the federal government with respect to transfer payments as a result of privatization or, pardon me, the operation of certain clinics in the province of Manitoba.

Mr. Praznik: I will have that amount for the member tomorrow. My staff do not have that exact number today.

Mr. Chomiak: In a letter to me concerning the utilization of graduate doctors who are foreign trained, the minister indicated that 50-plus doctors, as a result of the conditional registry, were now working in rural Manitoba. I wonder if the minister could table or provide for us information as to the number of doctors and where they are located. Fifty seems like a high number to me.

Mr. Praznik: I will have my staff have that number for me tomorrow, with their locations as well.

Mr. Chomiak: Can the minister indicate whether there has been any change of policy with respect to the utilization of CT scans both within and outside the city of Winnipeg?

Mr. Praznik: My deputy points out to me that there has been an increase in total what there has been of exams, but there has not been a change in policy that either of us are aware of.

Mr. Chomiak: Would it be possible for the committee to provide in the next couple of days a list of the specific policies with respect to CT scans around the province?

Mr. Praznik: I am just trying to get focused on where the member is coming from and the policy issue that might be here. Would it be somewhere centred around the issue of the ministry not allowing CT scans in the community hospitals on an outpatient basis?

Mr. Chomiak: That is precisely the area.

Mr. Praznik: I appreciate the nature of this issue, having followed it under previous ministers. I know one of the things that governments everywhere are trying to achieve obviously is to have the right number of diagnostic tools or pieces of equipment and have

proper utilization of them. I know we may get into a discussion on—or we did already—bone scans, et cetera, and the issue, you have the equipment, you need the operator, and we have to address that.

It is my hope with the advent of the Winnipeg Hospital Authority, and one of their charges I have given them and the community hospitals as well as the tertiary hospitals, in my meetings with their boards, I stress this: we are trying to get a rationalization, and I say that in the fully broad sense of the word, really a rational use of our diagnostic equipment. So that particular policy may very well change under the Winnipeg Hospital Authority as we co-ordinate the use of our equipment.

I think the genesis of that policy obviously has to do with facility-base funding, each facility wanting to have its own pieces of equipment, raising money to purchase them, not fitting within an overall utilization scheme, and we get into those issues.

So whether one agrees with that approach or does not agree with the approach, the fact of the matter, it does kind of look silly, I think, to the public and to the users of the system. I am hoping that the Winnipeg Hospital Authority, within some of the first issues it tackles, will be able to put into place a utilization plan for diagnostic equipment that will treat it citywide, maximize the use of the equipment that is available, obviously, having proper operating protocols, et cetera, so that this really does not become an issue of outpatient, inpatient, community hospitals. We have to approach it, I think, from a sort of broader perspective and move forward from there. So I offer him my perspective on that particular issue.

* (1650)

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, is the ministry considering any change in policy with respect to patient transfer to take into account the concept that is being voiced with respect to—particularly, the urban centres—the movement from hospital to hospital? Is there any incentive or any change in policy that the department is presently proposing with respect to transfers of patients from centre to centre?

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, we are not at this time specifically looking at a change in policy, but it makes

eminently good sense that, with the creation of the Winnipeg Hospital Authority, the development of single programs, multisite, the better use of resources that I would expect, and I certainly do not want to stand in the way of the system looking at methods to ensure that if you are going to utilize resources properly around the city you may have to provide for transportation between facility transfers, and as part of your overall operation that makes some logical sense as you move away from individual facility-based programming, per se. So, obviously, reviewing that whole area in the proper context, the new context is going to have to happen.

So, although we are not doing it today, that is a discussion we are going to have to enter into with the Winnipeg Hospital Authority. You note, if one blue-skies a little bit, there may be some innovative ways to be able to provide that kind of transfer system in a more cost-effective way than necessarily using ambulance, et cetera. Clearly, if we are building a system-wide organization with multiple site, multiple hospital, and we are expecting to get best use out of resources, that having the mortar or the glue of a transportation system between those facilities becomes part of it. So that is an issue that is going to have to be addressed. We are not addressing it today, but it will have to be addressed over the next few years in putting together the Winnipeg Hospital Authority.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, the other day when I was canvassing, when we were questioning the whole issue of labour relations, I recall asking a question about the Voluntary Separation plan. I wonder: Has the plan changed from its—and can the minister provide us with an update as to the present Voluntary Separation plan that is in existence with the department?

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, just for my clarification, is the member talking about a VSP in facilities or in the department or in what area, because, obviously, it applies somewhat differently across government as opposed to—we try to be consistent, but there are different circumstances here. If he could refine his question a little bit more for my benefit.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, the plan that I was familiar with and had access to and viewed last year

was the plan dealing with employees vis-a-vis the institutions.

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, I understand the member, we are aware, raised this a couple of days ago. My staff tell me they are still checking with the facilities and the numbers that are there. So we hope to have that information for the member shortly.

Mr. Chomiak: Several days ago I asked about the home care strike costs. Do we have that information?

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, I think we have the document. I will table it with the committee.

I understand that his caucus requested this under Freedom of Information. It has been provided already, but I have no problem tabling it with the committee. I believe the date which this was provided to his caucus was May 23—the covering letter is dated May 23, 1997.

Mr. Chomiak: I have not seen this sheet. It may have not made its way—hard to believe, but that is not the case. I thank the minister for this document.

Last year when I asked the minister about the changes, I was under the impression that we were going to see an amendment to The Mental Health Act. There have been long-term discussions. Are we going to be seeing that this year, and if we are not, is it possible to table the draft discussion paper or white paper in regard to the amendments to The Mental Health Act?

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Chair, the member is quite correct. The department's plans were to introduce some amendments to The Mental Health Act. The trouble we got into this year was in the drafting capacity within Justice. We only had so much capacity, and each department was asked to prioritize what legislation it brought forward. As the member can appreciate, The Midwifery Act was already drafted and ready to go when we sort of reached this resource shortage. We had The Personal Health Information Act which needed to be in place this legislative session to accommodate changes in the fall, and we obviously needed to have The Regional Health Authorities Amendment Act to deal with the two Winnipeg health authorities and Brandon Health Authority.

So just, quite frankly, from a departmental point of view, I was advised that those amendments to The Mental Health Act could wait another year to another legislative session. Because of the inability to have the resources, or the lack of resources within Justice just to get the amount of work—and, by the way, in many cases, it was, given the hefty legislative session that we have in terms of some major pieces of legislation, complex pieces of legislation, not necessarily controversial but complex, we were not even able to obtain those resources to complete the work outside government.

So this act was not completed. I think it was a third or two-thirds done, but we just had to set it aside for other priorities. I say to the member today and to members of the committee that, it is our intention once this legislative session is completed to, over the fall, have that bill, the drafting on it, completed when Legislative Counsel has some time on their hands and to move it through our process for introduction in the next session of the Legislature.

Mr. Chairperson: The time being five o'clock, committee rise.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Mr. Chairperson (Marcel Laurendeau): Good afternoon. Would the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply has been dealing with the Estimates of the Department of Education and Training, and the minister's staff has entered the Chamber.

* (1440)

We are on Resolution 16.1. Administration and Finance (e) Financial and Administrative Services (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$881,300, on page 33 of the Estimates book.

The honourable minister, you had an answer to a question that was posed to you last night.

Hon. Linda McIntosh (Minister of Education and Training): The member had asked, just before we broke yesterday, about integrating the public school program plans into the Estimates supplement and how

we were going to put a number of the things that the Auditor recommended we have in the report into the report. Specifically, in reference to the Auditor's recommendation that the public school programs plan be fully integrated into the Estimates Supplement and that we develop long-term objectives and related performance indicators for the public schools program, the annual measurable expected results related to performance indicators of the disclosure of accountability documents, it is disclosed in the full revenues and expenditures of the public system in that and complying with the Department of Finance's instructions on Estimates supplements and annual reports.

We are in agreement that these be in. We did not have time this year to incorporate them into what we put out this year, but we are hoping to have them in subsequent reports that we put forward. We feel it is a good recommendation that we are working actively to ensure it comes to reality. We just did not have time, in time when the Auditor reported to us, and our own report this year had to be ready to have it in this year's book, but she should see some of these things next year.

Ms. Jean Friesen (Wolseley): I recognize that the timing of this is such that the department could not do this for this fiscal year, but I am interested in the specific timing for each of those and, in particular, from the page the minister was reading from, page 75, No. 4, which is the full revenues and expenditures of the public school program. Does the minister expect that can be done by the next fiscal year?

Mrs. McIntosh: Yes, we do.

Ms. Friesen: I wanted to ask, as well, about further evaluation by the Auditor. I know the Auditor works on a rotating basis amongst departments, and as the minister mentioned, this was the first of a particular type of audit done on the Department of Education. Does the minister anticipate, or is there a schedule which addresses the auditing, either, effective aud—I forget the word they use now—functional audits is it, or effectiveness audits that will address the Department of Education? Is there a schedule for that over the next few years?

Mrs. McIntosh: Mr. Chairman, my staff, specifically the deputy and the deputy's staff, do meet annually with

the Auditor and the Auditor's people. They, of course, are free to decide if they wish to meet with us at any other time. We will, in all likelihood, invite a review as a follow-up.

* (1450)

In terms of this particular review coming out of this particular report, we were fully supportive of some of the initiatives that we anticipated we would be seeing in the report. We are pleased in that it is our understanding that the Auditor felt this kind of an audit could be done initially, or started initially, with the Department of Education because as a compliment to my staff, I understand that they are quite receptive to critiques and evaluations of this type, and are eager to start doing things with some of these new ways of presentation. So it is, in all likelihood, something that will happen that my deputy would ask for a follow-up for further commentary, guidance, or whatever, so that as we shift to a new way of putting forward information, we are reaching higher and higher levels of acceptability and accountability.

So, as I say, it is up to the Auditor as to how often or how frequently they may wish to communicate with us, but the door is always open. We are always ready to listen to helpful advice, and we consider this to be very helpful. We like what we are being guided here to do.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, so as I understand it then, there is not a regular schedule of evaluation of departments of this nature; it will be at the mutual decision of both departments.

Mrs. McIntosh: The member may wish to discuss this with the Provincial Auditor when the Auditor makes a report, because when we say that the Auditor is free to decide, by that we mean, while we are agreeable and happy, this does not require our agreement or our happiness. The Auditor is in the position of authority, whereby we could say we would like a particular thing audited and the Auditor could say no. The Auditor could come in and say that they are going to audit some other thing that would not be our first priority, but if it is the Auditor's, it will get done.

So no one has any say over their audit. They can audit us anytime they want on any topic they want.

What we are indicating here is that although this role of Auditor report to the Legislative Assembly, that we welcome our annual encounter with the Auditor and we are always agreeable—like it is agreeable to us, the moves that the Auditor is making, and they are obviously agreeable to the Auditor because the Auditor has the sole and final decision. So you may wish to ask the Auditor if there is a regular schedule of meetings that the Auditor has planned. We would not know that or be able to make that happen. We would, however, be agreeable if the Auditor wanted that. I do not know if that is the answer that you were seeking.

Ms. Friesen: At the bottom of page 76 in the Auditor's Report, there is a section there that deals with planning, commends the department for the initiative on school planning, but makes the point that really good schools—at least this is how I interpret it and maybe the department would like to comment upon this—the Auditor seems to be saying that, until the department itself publishes sufficient and appropriate information on the public school program, the usefulness of any school board performance plans or reports will be limited.

Now I know the department is beginning the process of developing school plans in schools, and I wondered how the timing of this is going to work. The Auditor seems to be saying the department has to move first, then the schools have to come in with their plans. I think a third point that the Auditor is making is also the publication of information on public school programs is an important issue, not just the department has the plans, but that they publish them. I wonder if the department could comment on the Auditor's comments there.

Mrs. McIntosh: Mr. Chairman, the item pointed out by the Auditor, in terms of making full effective use of Information Systems to better assist the field as we enter into new planning and school plans and so on, we see as a phased-in approach, a series of building blocks. We had some extensive dialogue yesterday on the EIS, and that is step one, phase one of the approach to deal with this particular issue. So we are articulating that EIS. It is underway and is already becoming a part of life and will soon, not fully at this point but soon, be having a comfort level and impact through the school

system that will be as accepted as the telephone is now. So that is underway.

* (1500)

We are also developing an indicators project which is co-chaired by the Deputy Minister, Mr. Carlyle. We discussed that at some length yesterday with the member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale), as part of our whole Information System. That indicators project, as it completes its work, will address one of the very main points pointed out by the Auditor. Also underway, again chaired by the deputy, is a team—I am just going to call it a planning group because it is in its very initial stage. It does not have a formal title, so to speak, as yet. But that group will be beginning to develop the aligning of school plans, divisional plans, departmental plans, so that we have consistency and knowledge and understanding of those three areas one to the other. So there are three phases currently underway, some to more degree than the other. Like the three, EIS, indicators and planning, in that order, have begun work. So the EIS, of course, is obviously further ahead than the planning, the team to deal with bringing together the aligning of planning for all of those three areas.

It is underway and, again, this is another point wherein we are in full agreement with the Auditor but have, I think, taken some substantial steps in putting together a series of building blocks that are well underway. Hopefully, it will not be too much longer before we are able to have the Auditor indicate that particular initiative is underway satisfactorily.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, I would like to come back to the indicators project a little later, but maybe just finish with the Auditor's Report first. The Auditor's Report is entitled Public Schools Program Accountability Framework. Yet, on page 67, it does talk about, under the section Independent and Home Schools, the Auditor says, in order to receive provincial funding, independent schools must comply with the requirements set out in The Public Schools Act and regulations.

Now my understanding is that this is not exactly true, that there are sections of The Public Schools Act regulations which do not apply to private schools. The minister and I have talked about this before, and I am

looking forward to the new set of regulations that will be applying to the private schools.

So what I am concerned about here is the Auditor's understanding of what he was dealing with, he/she. This seems to me to be a sense that the Auditor believes that what he is saying is applicable to private schools as well, just because of that paragraph where there seemed to me not a clear definition of which act applies where and when. So I am wondering if the department noticed that, if that had been discussed.

Am I reading too much into this? I am going on with questions here, but I think what I really want to know is: Does the Auditor intend that all of the recommendations that he has made here should apply equally to the private schools?

Mrs. McIntosh: My interpretation of that comment, and I believe it is what the Auditor intended, that when the Auditor says in order to receive provincial funding, independent schools must comply with the requirements set out in The Public Schools Act and regulations, my interpretation of that is based upon my understanding that the Auditor is fully conversant with what conditions they must attain, and those ones that the Auditor says they must comply with the regulations and requirements of The Public Schools Act, those being that, in order to qualify for funding, independent schools must first operate for three years with certified Manitoba teachers, utilizing the Manitoba curriculum, producing audited financial statements for the department, operate under an elected board of trustees, and all other aspects of The Education Administration Act and The PSA Act. At the present time, they are not on frame, but we do have their audited financial statements, and they must comply with that for three years before they are eligible to be considered for funding.

I believe that is what the Auditor is referring to when he talks about them having to comply with requirements and regulations under the act in order to qualify for funding. I say that because the Auditor, although I do not see any reference, well, the Auditor does make reference to nonfunded schools, which are those schools that received no public money because they do not comply with some or all of those items that I just mentioned.

* (1510)

We know, for example, that we have schools that run where they may not all have certified teachers, but instead they will use a musician to teach music or a chemist to teach chemistry or a biologist to teach biology; those types where they may not be certified teachers per se. Therefore, they do not get any funding at all and the Auditor is aware of that, so my expectation would be that he would be or she would be conversant with the subject that they are auditing and that they would be referring to these items that I have just indicated.

I guess with any of these, this is an evolving thing. When we say funded schools must administer exams, for example, well, that would apply to funded schools, including the partly funded ones which are independent schools. I do not know if that is of assistance or not. If we have further accountability directives emerging in the future, in all likelihood they too would apply to independent schools if they do not intrude upon, say, religious rights or something of that nature.

Ms. Friesen: The Auditor focuses upon planning and performance information provided by school boards to the department. He wants the school boards to demonstrate how they are going to address and meet the public school program objectives set by the minister. Can the minister explain how this will be affected with private schools. For example, are private schools going to be required to submit plans, and what kind of performance—I do not think performance indicator is the right term at this stage, but what kinds of levels of accountability will be required from private schools subsequent to the Auditor's suggestions?

Mrs. McIntosh: Mr. Chairman, I had indicated yesterday, in my dialogue with the member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale) on the integrated plans reporting and information systems, that we are in the process of developing a framework for reporting and accumulating data on a wide variety of items, and that framework is not totally in place yet in all areas, although it is in many, as we move into the electronic age and the technological capabilities that are available for us.

Having said that, as I said as well in my previous answer, this is an evolving area. We will have new

subjects that we wish to have reported upon, new kinds of school planning, et cetera. It is our expectation, depending upon the items that come forward, that anything that applies to accountability measures in exchange for funding received would be asked to be reported in a similar fashion from both the fully funded and the partly funded schools. In the partly funded schools, the independent schools, it may not be appropriate for us to ask, for example, you know, which bequests were willed to the school through the church through which the school is associated. If Holy Ghost School, for example, on Selkirk Avenue, has a bequest given to it from Holy Ghost Church, some parishioner there has died and asked that it be an anonymous donation, that would be part of the revenues of the school, but it might not be appropriate or proper for us to ask for the details of that so we might be asking for just a thing that says, revenues other, you know, in a situation like that. Those are still being developed because there is a different system of funding.

The public schools rarely, if any, receive donations from the public or from religious bodies or organization such as that. The independent schools frequently do because of their nature so they will have different revenue streams aside from the one that is provided by government. In terms of saying where government has provided funding, government would like accountability for that funding, that is a fair question, and that is something that we will be looking to build into our reporting mechanisms in some way that is clear to the reader.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, what I was asking about was school programs and school plans that the minister is beginning to set in motion. I assume there are going to be plans required from every school at a certain date, that those plans are to be lodged with the division rather than with the minister, that those plans will be on a somewhat systematic basis and that there will be some professional development, perhaps for principals or for school advisory councils in the development of those plans.

The Auditor is interested in those. He wants to see them preceded by some work on the part of the department, appropriate performance planning information from the department. The minister has indicated that the department has taken that under

consideration and will be working on that. So my question was: Are private schools to be involved in the same policy of development of school plans?

Mrs. McIntosh: Apologies to the member because I did not mean to leave out that part of the answer to the question she asked, and I do recall her asking it.

I indicate, just, first, a small correction. I am not sure if it is clear, but the member made mention of the plans being housed with the school division, and they are, but the division then, in turn—and the member may know this, but just in case I will just provide the clarification—the school divisions then provide a synopsis to the minister. So the schools will provide their plans to the school division.

The school division normally has several schools. They do a synopsis, submit it to the minister. Our desire is that independent schools would do the same thing. Where they do not have a board—the Winnipeg Jewish board, for example, has several schools under it, but many independent schools do not—then that synopsis could come straight to the minister.

We would be looking to receive the same types of information with the one proviso that we do not intrude upon any of the things that they give up half their funding to be, in terms of independent rights and so on. But basically we are looking for the same kind of information, the same kind of understandings as to what is occurring and what kind of accountability would be there.

I have more details I could provide to the member if she wishes, that maybe you had asked about PD and that type of—would you like that now? Okay.

My deputy has handed me some information that then may be of interest to her regarding the school plans initiative. School plans, now this is just generically for schools in Manitoba, not for a particular type of school. School plans are intended to contribute to the development of effective learning environments and programs at the school level. To develop plans, school staff, parents and community members are expected to work collaboratively to identify school priorities, educational directions and areas of needed improvement. The plan will serve to strengthen school

improvement and communicate information to all parents, the community, the school board, the department.

* (1520)

We had about 80 schools as of May 1996. We have certainly many more—because that is last year's figure—than that at this point, but that is the stat that I have here that is the most current one in front of me. So they had 80 schools about this time last year identified by their school divisions as pilot schools for year one of the implementation process for school plans. But we have been working—the department staff being we—with schools on a regional basis, and sometimes have requested on an individual basis since that time.

Last August, we held a summer institute for pilot school principals and superintendents. We presented material at that institute, and that was distributed to all attendees. A database of pilot schools was subsequently compiled and shared so that schools involved in the project could network with schools in similar situations.

In December, all pilot schools completed a status report that highlighted their areas of activities and concerns regarding the project. That data received was analysed and a summary report was distributed to all pilot schools and superintendents in January of this year, 1997. MFIS, the Manitoba Federation of Independent Schools, had asked to be involved, so a couple of independent schools were in the pilot that I have just finished describing.

The pilot schools were submitting their final phase one of their school plans to their school boards a month or so ago. Those boards will be forwarding that information to us, and it may already have been received or should be received shortly. In the Education and Training offices, the regional managers, I think, would probably have them by now, although I myself have not seen them at this point.

We had some workshops as well with pilot schools and superintendents last month, and those were to collect feedback regarding the project, prepare for the broadening of the scope of the school plans

involvement from those 80 pilot schools to all the other schools in the province. That is at about this time, so I do not have immediate update on it, and I do not have Carolyn Loeppky here at this moment to speak to it in detail, but those are some of the things we have done so far.

During the 1997-98 school year, the department will support the development of the first phase of school plans by all schools. School division board offices will play a key role in helping their schools develop a planning process which will result in quality school plans. It is expected that departmental staff will interact with school divisions individually and in regions to promote and guide the first phase of school plans.

We expect the initial school plans, not pilot status but initial actual status, in the spring of 1998. Then those all, of course, will go to the regional managers and the department again. We will use that information departmentally to do a number of things, one of which is to plan and target support services to schools and school divisions. In phase two, we hope to have comprehensive school plans, by all schools, which are expected to be developed in the spring of 1999.

So, as you can see, we are going through a process. We are in the midst of it right at this time, and there will be a lot still to evolve as we go through, but much has already been accomplished. As I indicated to the member, these 80 schools did contain a few independent schools as well in the pilot stage of this whole process. So their participation and their results will also be part of our overall analysis and work.

Just as a final note, my deputy has met with the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents to invite them to jointly begin plans for a fall 1997 executive institute, which would be a two-day executive institute. One of the main topics to be covered at that will be school division planning. That will be for superintendents and assistant superintendents to make sure that they are comfortable and knowledgeable about the intention of government and the way this will play out in the field.

I hope that provides the information the member was seeking.

Ms. Friesen: Yes, thank you very much, and I finished dealing with the Auditor's Report, but in a sense what there is, I think, here is a linking of issues back to the school indicators. But just to conclude with the issue of school plans, I know we are not on the right line, but I am wanting to know what public information will be provided from this.

We have looked now at plans that will go from the school to the division in a synopsis to the minister. When the system is in full process, how will that be communicated to the public? Will it be done on an annual basis, will it be done as part of the school indicator's program, what level of information is the minister anticipating, and is there a model? For example, we have mentioned Alberta in previous discussions, is there a model that the government is looking at to adapt?

Mrs. McIntosh: We do not have any models right now, and I do not have all the answers that I would like to be able to provide for the member at this time. Maybe this time next year I might have more that I could say. What I can tell her in terms of our progress to date—first of all, good questions because they are the questions that we have asked ourselves and the Auditor has expressed interest in, and this is part of our evolutionary process as we move into things such as individual school plans, et cetera.

* (1530)

We will be analyzing and providing comments, and those will come in two ways. One would be straight to the divisions for them to get commentary back from us. The other thing we hope to be doing and we hope to do it something like this, but I am saying it is a hope; it is a goal, because we may alter the way in which we finally do it. But at this point we would like to ultimately in our annual report that we table here in the Legislature be able to have in there the activities that tie educational goals and outcomes, which would include plans, to the dollars spent.

Now that may come together in the form of an indicator, but right now our indicators—when we were talking yesterday with the member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale), we were talking about our indicators being, at the moment, achievement, citizenship, mobility,

those kinds of indicators and outputs. At the moment we do not include that particular aspect, so it could well, indeed, come together as an indicator. It could come together in some other form. We may decide to modify that goal to be slightly different than what I have just stated, but right now I think it is a pretty safe statement to make of our intent as to the second kind of communication reporting we would like—which when you see those details actually spelled out in the annual report with good transparency that could link what the activities are to the dollars spent.

We have received some support for an educator indicator's program from the stakeholders, those four organizations. If I just say the stakeholders from now on, the member, I think, will understand that I mean MTS, MASS, MAST and MASBO, and it will save me repeating them. Those four I will refer to generally as the stakeholders for our future conversation, just to make it a bit easier.

They have offered to help represent us from those four organizations in the department in working through privacy and confidentiality concerns that might be associated with some of these. But we expect a primary data source for the program could be our department's EIS database which is being enhanced in this upcoming, this '97-98 school year to include a new student module containing information on individual students but also a revised educator module containing information on professional personnel and linkages between modules, between students with high school marks, for example.

The consultation that we will be conducting with education stakeholders will be to help determine priorities for indicator development. I have mentioned a few that we have there. The department wants to create indicators which will service the needs of policymakers at all levels across the system. That would be the Department of Education, school divisions and school planning. So there is a spot there in which it could fit, and if we are looking at promoting an informed public, information from the indicators program will be released to the public through annual publications and, as I said, maybe even our annual report or perhaps a separate report on school planning. We are still trying to develop that, so I am sorry I do not have more than that I can say at this time, but I

think that may give you an indication of what we are starting to think and where we are starting to head.

Ms. Friesen: Well, we look forward very much to the indicators project and to the public results of that.

I have raised in Estimates, I think on a number of occasions, and brought the Saskatchewan book and waved it and said, look, I think this is the kind of information that would be very helpful to people in Manitoba. I know that the evaluation of any indicators project is not going to be done on the basis of one example. Its real value is over a 10-year period, but the Saskatchewan practice has been to offer comparisons on the basis of gender, of economic circumstances to some extent as they can be categorized, as well as a regional basis. I am wondering if the department is moving in that direction or whether those are the comparisons that they feel would be useful to the public in Manitoba.

Mrs. McIntosh: The Saskatchewan indicators does interest us. Actually there are a number that are quite interesting. The Saskatchewan one is one. Quebec also has one. The council of ministers as well has put together one through StatsCan. OECD has indicators.

What we are doing, as I indicated when I talked about—we are beginning consultation with the education stakeholders here. What we are going to be doing, or are doing, is, in looking at possible data sets and indicators, trying to find out what the priorities would be for usage by our own stakeholders. What types of indicators do they feel they need? What way do they visualize data being broken down? What do they want to use them for? So we are asking them to help determine priorities for indicator development.

They may wish to lift items from Saskatchewan. That is perfectly fine with us, because we do not have trouble with some of these models. There are many things in some of these models we quite like, but we are really attempting to make sure that our own educators, our own education stakeholders, have the initial say, so to speak, in terms of being able to advise us on exactly what they would like to see. Various source documents will be used for that, and the one the member indicates will, in all likelihood, be a source document for exploration as people indicate their priorities to us.

We have not yet made a final determination, but certainly that is one source that appears to be a good one.

* (1540)

Mr. Chairperson: Shall the item pass—pass.

16.1 Administration and Finance (e) Financial and Administrative Services (2) Other Expenditures \$196,900—pass.

16.1(f) Management Information Services (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$560,300.

Ms. Friesen: I had two questions, I think, on this line. One deals with the Integrated Case Management project. I wonder if the minister could give us an indication of where that is and what the costs to the department are of that and what the end result will be.

Mrs. McIntosh: Mr. Chairman, primarily right now this is Family Services and Education and Training. We might have some possible future linkages to HRDC, but all we have at the moment, we have just received a preliminary draft business case which is under revision. We do not have a final version yet because it is currently being examined and revised and modified as it is studied. We should have a final version in a month or so but not tomorrow or today. So far, Education and Training has spent—and I think it would be probably the amount that we will have spent in total in Education and Training—for the business case, \$75,000, approximately.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, I am not familiar with the terminology “business case.” Does that mean a case example as in a case study? Is this sort of the pilot project? What is meant by the “business case?”

Mrs. McIntosh: Basically, Mr. Chairman, it means a feasibility study.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, what is the government's goal in integrated case management? Who will use the final result, what will be its purpose and what does it replace?

Mrs. McIntosh: I will bring forward more detail in a moment, Mr. Chairman, but it is basically to make

better use of things that can be done in common between various departments. If you just give me a minute, I will come back with some more detail here.

We are looking at trying to avoid setting up parallel systems, hoping by co-ordinating the activities between and amongst departments, primarily here talking about Family Services and Education, although not exclusively just those two. There are so many linkages between the two. The Welfare to Work project, for example, sees people on social assistance being assessed for readiness for training in the workforce, and then Education and Training does training and helps place them in the workforce. There are all kinds of areas in there where there is transition for the people that occurs between the two departments as well, where integrated case management will ensure that we are not duplicating tasks, that we are better co-ordinated, that we have integrated the delivery of service, we have become more cost efficient and effective. We do not have clients having to go knocking on two doors side by side when one point of entry can give them access to the service they require. So we hope to be more cost effective and utilize the money that we have for more efficient service, as opposed to duplicating service.

There is always the risk—for example, in the example I just mentioned—of having both departments do the assessing, when it is really only required that one do it. So we try to get a handle on who is going to do what in this role of moving a person from welfare to work, starting off in one department as a social assistance recipient, ending up exiting through another department as a trained worker. There is a line in there when the two departments kind of come together. That is where we see the integrated case management being very helpful in making sure that we are not tripping over each other or leaving gaps, because leaving a gap would be just as bad as duplicating, and that is just one example, but that is the type of item that we are discussing when we talk about integrated case management.

It is in the early stages of partnership. Many of these initiatives we discussed today are still in their infancy because they are new, which, of course, makes them—it is a good time to ask questions about them as they begin to be developed. But we have new and enabling technologies that can help us do this kind of integrated

case management so much more easily than it could have been done in the past. In short, the future benefit, we believe, would include improved client information that could help both departments to put in measures to help clients become more self sufficient more easily and at a better cost.

* (1550)

Ms. Friesen: I wanted to note for the record some concerns about privacy issues here when two departments do collaborate for reasons of efficiency. I can see the argument for efficiency, but in the past when the educational information system was discussed, there were suggestions that a health number be added to an EIS number. The government quite rightly backed off that, abandoned that, I believe. That kind of layering of information certainly was not going to be, I hope, possible through the EIS system.

My understanding of what the minister is saying here is that this is dealing with adults, that the education numbers that will be attached to students as they come through the education system would not become a part of this, and that the layering of information, and this is the Canadian Privacy Act, that the collection of information for one purpose is not added on to another.

So I am saying that for the record. I would welcome some response from the minister. I wondered if in the development of this business plan whether there had been—was the Department of Culture and Heritage involved? We do have a new privacy act that we will see, I think, later on this week. What kind of overall government planning is this a part of?

Mrs. McIntosh: The member is correct in that we are not intending to use a student number for these purposes or to have that kind of layering occur. I mentioned earlier that we are looking at having the business case made or the feasibility study or whatever the terminology is that is most comfortable to use, and that will deal with this kind of item as well.

We do have the freedom of information and privacy protection under consideration, as the member knows, looking at policies on privacy or laws or rules on privacy that will be government-wide. Those kinds of decisions, once passed into law, of course, will apply to

everything that we do and to all of the integrated case management that we put forward, making sure that they all comply with privacy provisions that will ensure that people do not have their own personal information made public or falling into the hands of inappropriate people.

This particular area actually has—I may have more detail for the member when we get to the post-secondary side. We talk about Employment Development because that is the main area under which this type of work is being done. I could probably provide her with more detailed or more significant answers under 16.5 when we have the post-secondary people here, although I can certainly provide this kind of basic generic answer for the member, Mr. Chairman, in the interim. But I just indicate that we do have people working extensively in this area who could be brought down when we get to the other line if she is looking for more detail than I am able to give her now.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, just a follow-up question; that is, could the minister tell us how much of the budget of this section is devoted to that or how much is estimated to be allocated to that in this coming fiscal year?

Mrs. McIntosh: Mr. Chairman, for this particular year the cost is constrained. It is not excessive. For this line it would be a partial salary for one staff year, probably around \$10,000 to \$15,000, maybe \$10,000 to \$20,000.

Ms. Friesen: I wanted to ask about the departmental information technology infrastructure, but essentially I want to know what kinds of websites, what kind of e-mail is being used, how does it link to the field, what kind of usage is it receiving? For example, the website, is it just one website or are there more, including library, for example, library links? Is there an overall summary of that that the minister has?

* (1600)

Mrs. McIntosh: This information sits in a number of areas, and MERLIN probably has the most information, but we do have information here that I think will answer her question. We have a single website in MERLIN and we, as well, send and receive about 10,000 external—that is external to the department—

departmental e-mails outside the department each month and that would be going out and coming in, sending and receiving, so about 10,000 a month outside the department. All staff have the availability of e-mail and currently about 650 of our staff actually have e-mail.

But what is significant to us is now, at this point, virtually all our schools, universities, colleges and other provinces are on the Internet, and we do communicate back a lot. In January of this year in terms of hits—I love the terminology here. I do not know if that is what is commonly used, but it is what we use, and I guess it is what is commonly used—but the number of hits were around 3,225 in January and by March we were up to 2,800, et cetera. So we have those kinds of accesses being made to our pages, and the pages most frequently accessed from those numbers are school division lists and school links, instructional resources, MERLIN and the departmental directory. We have currently about 622 pages and that is up from 595 in January, so you can get a sense of the number of pages that are being added.

Just a few highlights of additions or improvements that have just been put in place or that we are putting in place. We have added a news release page that points to education-related releases on a government server, so that if there is a news release that goes out that has an educational component, it can be accessed for reading. We have added a What's New page. We have added several links to the school division home pages. We have added some French language curriculum documents or executive summaries of them. We have added the profile of elementary and secondary education highlights and the PDF format in French and in English. Those are the types of things that we are adding on.

Like anything else that we have discussed today, this is again still relatively new. We are hoping to become more and more extensive, more and more sophisticated in this area as quickly as we can. It is a phenomenal growth in terms of new approach. When you look at education in general across the post-secondary and K to S4, the linkages have come incredibly fast. Yet, incredibly fast though they have come, there is still so much more that we know it is capable of right at this moment that we have not yet done, so it seems that

within this particular area, running as fast as you can, it is hard to catch up to the speed at which the changes are possible.

It is our goal to make increasing use of this kind of ability and capability because ultimately we can see it increasing swift access to information in a less expensive way. So that is a bit of where we are. As I say, when we get to MERLIN, if you wish we can give you yet more or you can ask more if you want to now and we will try.

Ms. Friesen: The minister mentioned instructional resources. I just wanted to know whether that was a bibliography of instructional resources or whether the department is actually beginning to develop instructional resources specifically for Internet or website or through this medium.

Mrs. McIntosh: At 1181 Portage and St. Boniface College we have a library. The terminology that we use is "instructional resources." The School Programs division has a library called instructional resources there. BEF, Bureau de l'éducation française, has a library at St. Boniface and it is called DREF.

As in August and in about a month and a half or two months from now, both of those libraries will have their full bibliography on the Internet and teachers will be able to access that, do their booking, getting the materials and everything right on the Internet without having to go down or do anything in person. So they can make all the arrangements and everything, from finding the resource to booking the resource at a time that they wanted it, et cetera, through that particular medium. So it is meant more to access a library's materials as opposed to actually have materials that can be read right on the—which would be the next really great goal, and so that is what that refers to.

Mr. Chairperson: Shall the item pass—pass. 16.1 Administration and Finance (f) Management Information Services (2) Other Expenditures \$304,600—pass.

* (1610)

The committee will recess for five minutes or so.

The committee recessed at 4:10 p.m.

After Recess

The committee resumed at 4:19 p.m.

Mr. Chairperson: The committee will come to order.

Report

Mr. Gerry McAlpine (Chairperson of the section of the Committee of Supply meeting in Room 254): Mr. Chairman, a motion was moved in the section of the Committee of Supply meeting in Room 254 by the member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale).

The motion reads that the salary for the Minister of Family Services (Mrs. Mitchelson) be reduced to \$117.20 per month which is the same as the social assistance rate for children up to age six.

Mr. Chairman, this motion was on a voice vote, and subsequently two members requested that a formal vote be held on this matter.

* (1620)

Formal Vote

Mr. Chairperson: Call in the members.

All sections in Chamber for formal vote.

* (1640)

Mr. Chairperson: The committee will come to order. A motion was moved in the Section of Committee of Supply meeting in Room 254 by the member for Burrows (Mr. Martindale). The motions reads that the salary for the Minister of Family Services be reduced to \$117.20 per month which is the same as the social assistance rate for children up to the age of six.

This motion was defeated on a voice vote, and subsequently two members requested that a formal vote be held on this matter.

A COUNT-OUT VOTE was taken, the result being as follows: Yeas 24, Nays 27.

Mr. Chairperson: The motion is accordingly defeated.

We will now resume the departments that were in operation in the other rooms. This department is the Department of Education.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING (Continued)

Mr. Chairperson (Marcel Laurendeau): We are on Resolution 16.2 School Programs (a) Division Administration (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$253,800. At this time we ask the staff to come back in. Did the honourable minister want to introduce her new staff present at this time?

Hon. Linda McIntosh (Minister of Education and Training): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I have here with me Carolyn Loeppky, who is the ADM for Schools Programs; as well, I have the principal of the Manitoba School for the Deaf, Norma Jean Taylor; and the interpreter accompanying Ms. Taylor is Kevin Klein, who is an interpreter at the Manitoba School for the Deaf. That is the staff who is with me right now. Now, we may, because we have an interpreter, wish to allow a little bit of extra time in terms of the information flowing back and forth.

Ms. Jean Friesen (Wolseley): Mr. Chairman, we are looking at a resolution dealing with school programs, and this is a very large area for the department and, of course, one which has shown a considerable increase, particularly in the area of Assessment and Evaluation. When we come to that line, we will be asking some questions about that. I believe the minister has indicated that she is already prepared with some issues on the research on assessment that she wanted to present.

* (1650)

As we go through this, section (a) deals with the administration, and I wanted to begin this by asking the minister for the actual expenditures in this section of School Programs, that is, 16.2(a). The Estimates that we have in front of us show an increase, not in staff

years, but in Other Expenditures. But given the historic pattern of the department in overestimating by \$7 million over the last few years the amount it has spent in Education, I wonder if as an example the minister could give us the actuals for this section.

Mrs. McIntosh: Mr. Chairman, I should indicate, first of all, that there is no historic tradition of underspending. That is incorrect. Last year, we were between 1 and 2 percent of our budget spending predictions. The member knows that in any given year we will estimate as accurately as we possibly can what we think our expenditures will be. We try to ensure that we have sufficient funds there to cover all those costs, and we would prefer to err on having the maximum amount we think we are going to require rather than the minimum because we do not wish to run short. This year, for example, we expect to be very close to our budget predictions, very, very close indeed, and last year we were between one and two percentage points under what we thought we would need to spend.

That was basically for two reasons, Mr. Chairman: One, there was a slowdown in the implementation of the blueprint, and that was done at the request of the field through the advice of the minister's advisory committee on the implementation of educational change. I have referred to that committee before. It consists of the Manitoba Teachers' Society, superintendents, school trustees, school business officials, principals, independent schools, public schools, parents and the president of the parents' association, as well as parents at large, as well as educators at large, as well as three departmental people.

That group, which is fairly large, meets every month for half a day. They requested that this committee be formed. I agreed. They requested that I be president. I actually chair the meeting. At their request, representing everybody in education, they asked us to slow down the process, which we have done, which meant then, of course, that we did not need to expend all the money we had set aside to pay for that rapid implementation. This was not only acceptable to the field but desired by the field.

The other reason that there is an underexpenditure is that we have, in terms of hiring new staff to fulfill some of these functions, a very competitive process that has

taken longer to go through—the money took long enough to go through that the money was not required at the early stages of the competitive process but rather at the end.

Now the member made mention she wanted some actual figures, and I am sorry that I did not quite catch what actual expenditures she is seeking, but I think that background may help set in perspective that there is no historic tradition of underspending; there is a very careful and close watching of the dollars. We try wherever we can not to overspend, and certainly if we do not need to expend all the money that we have set aside, we will not spend it just for the sake of spending it because that would be a unwise, imprudent and irresponsible thing to do.

Ms. Friesen: Well, we have discussed this historic underspending or overestimating, however the minister wants to present it, at the beginning of Estimates, and I pointed out at that time that there is indeed a historic pattern which shows a \$7-million variance from the estimated amount in 1996, a \$10-million variance in 1995, \$7 million in '94, and '93, \$7 million. It seems to be a pattern there to me, but the pattern had changed in 1992, as we go further back. The variance, then, was only \$2 million, and the year before it had been a \$1-million overspending or underestimating, however the minister wants to look at it. So there does seem to me to be a pattern there.

When I raised it earlier, the minister, I do not believe, mentioned the slowdown of the blueprint or the issues of the time needed for staffing for particular functions. The answers I got then dealt with the difficulty of estimating, at any one point in time, the number of students who would be coming into the system, the difficulty of estimating the number of students who might be coming from a reserve or who might be coming from military school. So I wonder if we are talking at cross-purposes here, because there seems to be a different explanation that is being given now, but that is just a reply to the minister's initial statement.

The question I had asked was, because of the pattern that I saw and that I had raised at the beginning of Estimates, I was looking in certain areas, but not in all areas, for the actuals that actually were expended. The minister did provide—she tabled a response of last year of one year, although in fact I earlier had asked for an

explanation of the long-term pattern of the department, but I appreciate that tabling of the one year. So my purpose in asking for the actuals in School Programs is as one example, and I would like to do it in other areas, but not in every area, of how those estimates are made and what the actual expenditures are.

Mrs. McIntosh: Mr. Chairman, I may not have time to give the complete answer now if we are stopping for private members' hour, but I can begin the response and I have a lot of information that I would like to conclude with next time.

I say, first of all, that there has not been a pattern. The member, in her response—I felt a bit of chastisement there for having given some indications as to what possible causes might have been for the variances, which, I feel, is really quite unfair, given that at the time when she asked the question, we indicated we did not have the appropriate staff people here, that we could hazard some guesses as to why there might be variations and that we would give her some actual reasons for the variances when we have the appropriate staff member here.

What the member has just done is made me want to make absolutely certain that we have line-by-line accuracy before we let her veer off line again in the future. But I will give the answer for her next question.

* (1700)

Mr. Chairperson: The hour now being 5 p.m., time for private members' hour.

Call in the Speaker. Committee rise.

IN SESSION

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The hour being 5 p.m., time for private members' hour.

PROPOSED RESOLUTIONS

Res. 13—Special Needs Review Committee

Ms. Jean Friesen (Wolseley): I move, seconded by the member for Transcona (Mr. Reid), that

“WHEREAS the Provincial Government has not lived up to its promise to hold an independent public review of special needs education in Manitoba; and

“WHEREAS the present Special Needs Review Committee is composed primarily of civil servants; and

“WHEREAS Manitobans in general have concerns about the future of special needs children and special needs education in the province; and

“WHEREAS parents and teachers of special needs children need an opportunity to share their concerns about the ongoing cuts to special needs funding and the impact those cuts have had on their children's and student's education and future.

“THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba urge the Provincial Government to consider holding public hearings and open public consultation on the future of special needs education in Manitoba.”

Motion presented.

Ms. Friesen: I am glad to have the opportunity at this time to look at the special needs issue in Manitoba education because it is certainly one that I know concerns both this side and the government, as well as the Manitoba Association of School Trustees and many, many teachers and parents who are facing some very serious issues in the classroom.

I want to, first of all, acknowledge that the government has moved on the issue of special needs. In 1993, they did promise, indeed indicated in their annual report that a special needs review had begun. During the 1995 election, the government made as an election promise the promise to appoint an independent and public review of special needs education in Manitoba.

So it is in 1997, I think, very welcome, if much delayed, a very welcome situation that the minister has finally appointed the consultants who I anticipate will drive this process, who will be doing the research, who will be convening the meetings and will be producing the report. It is important to note, as well, that in the throne speech of this year the government did make a

commitment to having that report in the minister's hands by the end of this year.

For a report that was promised and indeed reported on in the annual report as having begun in 1993, it would, I think, perhaps have been preferable to have made that a public report, publicly available by the end of this year, but at least I would recognize that the government and the minister has moved on this, and we welcome that, although we very much regret and lament the lost years, the lost opportunities that there have been in special needs education as people anticipated, waited for, delayed plans in anticipation of the special needs review committee.

Review and delay is a common approach of this government. I notice the same thing in education as a result of the Roblin commission. The Roblin commission was campaigned on as an election promise in 1990, but it was not until 1993 that we saw the report. It has been, again, much delayed, the implementation of it, the implementation committee, and then finally the appointment of the committee on post-secondary education. Again, I think, a familiar tactic, in areas of difficult policy direction, the government chooses to develop promises in some cases. In the case of special needs, it even indicated that work had begun on the open and public review that it promised. It was very difficult from a public perspective to see, indeed, where that had begun.

Similarly, in the post-secondary education area, a difficult policy area, but the recommendation that had the support of this side as well as the members of the government, a committee, a council to co-ordinate the college and universities' aspects of education was much, much delayed and is only now beginning to get together to establish its priorities and its plans.

It contrasts, I think, very markedly with the full steam ahead approach that the government has taken in New Directions, an area of much controversy where, in my view, the government does not have the overwhelming support of parents in all areas, yet that has been full steam ahead over public objections, over parental objections and over many other concerns that have been spoken of by teachers, superintendents and trustees, but full steam ahead with the ideology, and

review and delay in areas where there are serious public concerns that have been frequently expressed.

There is a cost to this delay, Madam Speaker. The cost, I think, is in the planning that school divisions have been able to make for special needs children. There is a cost, I think, to parents in their ability to hope for the future, to hope that there will be extensions or expansions or specialized opportunities for particular children, and this has come at a time when many parents are losing hope, I think, in education. It comes at a time when parents of special needs children, in particular, lost respite care, when parents of special needs children were facing, as we see today in health, they are facing increasing costs for pharmaceuticals, as well as increasing costs for aids for some of their children. So at a time of increasing difficulty for parents of special needs children, we saw a government which continued to review and delay an area which had offered in 1993, 1994 and 1995 hope to parents and teachers.

In the classroom, we also see teachers who are having to cope with special needs children, often with fewer and fewer resources. At the same time that the government has delayed the review of special needs education, it has also, many teachers and trustees believe, tried to cap the amount that has been available to school divisions for certain types of special needs. In some cases, I was told that special needs students who were transferring into divisions after September were not eligible for funding which they obviously required as they entered the classrooms of that particular division. It is those kinds of issues of administrative concerns, as well as the concerns of the families involved that parents had hoped that the special needs review would have addressed. I believe that they anticipated in good faith that, in 1995 after the election, the government would have begun that process.

* (1710)

But we are now in 1997. The minister is not going to have the report in her hands until the end of this year. Really, what I believe the government is trying to do is to simply slide this by the next election. There will be a report on the review. There will then be considerations, just as we have seen in the Children and

Youth Secretariat. We have seen report after report, then another strategy and then another discussion of the strategy.

My guess is that is what we are going to see in special needs. I hope that I will be proved wrong. I hope that those parents who in 1995 anticipated a public and independent review, as the government promised in its election promises, that they will be able to see some of the fruits of that. The delay, I believe, is one that was deliberate. I think it is one that has had cost for families and for schools, and it may indeed have costs for the government when it comes to the next election.

But two other issues are of concern, Madam Speaker, and the resolution speaks to that. They are that it be open and public. I believe that was what the government spoke of in 1993. It is what they promised in '95. But as I understand the progress, the slow and stately progress of the special needs review, that it will not necessarily have open and public meetings. The minister has spoken of this in earlier times, because we have exchanged views on this before, and what she has said is that it is not appropriate or may not be appropriate for special needs reviews to be conducted in an open forum, that there may be things which parents require would prefer to say in private. That is a good point, but it does not exclude; one is not mutually exclusive of the other. It is quite possible for parents, as indeed in the Boundaries Commission when Mr. Norrie wanted to have some private meetings, those were accommodated. I think that an open and public discussion of where the community of Manitoba wants to see special needs education go, people who may not be parents of special needs students, people who may be grandparents of special needs students, may want to have a public discussion of the future for their children. I do not think it excludes the opportunities for private conversations that the commissioners, had there been commissioners, would have wanted to take place.

Open and public review would have enabled a commissioner or the committee to travel to different parts of the province and to ensure that the regional perspective, which is so important in Manitoba, would be well represented. Now, it is possible that the committee of civil servants and the representatives of

teachers and a parent who is on that may indeed travel, and I look forward to hearing from the minister on that. But, indeed, if they do travel, would it not make more sense, would it not be a more democratic and a more open and accountable procedure if there were to be a public meeting? I look forward to the assurances from the minister that that is still possible and that is still in the intent, and that perhaps there is a schedule that is being drawn up now that will give people in—what are we now, beginning of June—that will give people at the beginning of June some sense of when they may—over the summer and early fall, which I assume is the window that is open to them—make public representations in an open forum where they can hear their neighbours, where they know what other people are saying, where there is a newspaper account of that so that there is a public record.

This is not the same as simply putting a notice in the newspaper and suggesting people make submissions. That is certainly one form, but one does not rule out the other. It is quite possible to have written submissions, but it is also important, I believe, for people to know what their neighbours are saying. It is very important for people to know in Dauphin what people are saying in Brandon, to have that sense of a public discussion across the province where we have a sense of how different communities approach this. The way in which I have heard the minister speak of it in the past is that written submissions will be invited. Again, I want to emphasize for the minister that I do not think the two processes are mutually exclusive, and I believe very strongly in Manitobans listening to each other within the Perimeter, outside the Perimeter, in the North, in southern Manitoba. It is important that the government foster that kind of public discussion in the kind of community which we have in Manitoba, and I look forward to hearing from the minister that that, indeed, is still possible.

Finally, the minister did promise independence of this commission or this review. It seems to me that that sense of independence has been lost. I know that parents have certainly spoken to me of this. Initially, they had expected that this would be independent of the department, that there might well be departmental people who, as they so often do, act as supports to committees of review like this. They might prepare agendas; they might prepare summaries of what is said.

They might be part of the publication process. They might even take part in a discussion at the end, round table discussions on recommendations.

Unfortunately, what appears to have happened is that the review itself has become a review committee composed primarily of civil servants. I know that the minister believes that the addition of a teacher and of a trustee, I believe, as well as a representative of a parent group, gives this a broader representation, and yes, it does. But, primarily, this is a committee of civil servants as I have heard the minister discuss it in Estimates and in similar debates to this before.

There is no doubt that interdepartmental committees of civil servants would have a role to play in this, but they should not be, Madam Speaker, the commission themselves. They should not be the review committee themselves. That is not what parents were promised in 1995 or, indeed, in 1993. The independence from government, I think, was something that people had looked forward to as offering wide opportunity for debate, for a sense of a broad range of possibilities that could be proposed to the government. Those are not necessarily the kinds of recommendations that you are going to get from a group of civil servants, hardworking, well-meaning, very well-informed about the issues of special needs children, but responsible to a minister and not independent in the way that parents had hoped for. Their support would be welcomed, but their conclusions are not those that I believe parents, teachers, and trustees had anticipated when they looked at the promises of this government made in 1995.

I want to conclude by saying that I believe this is a very important review that will take place. I think it affects many areas of education, not just the special needs children themselves. It affects the way in which trustees and divisions go about their business. It certainly has an enormous impact upon the way in which teachers can carry out their work in the classroom. It is eagerly and long awaited. I commend the minister for finally having appointed the consultants and for getting the process more visibly underway. I would look forward also to seeing a work plan publicly tabled, which gives us an indication of when and if public meetings are going to be held, when and if public submissions will be taken, what the deadline for those is going to be, and some sense of the importance

of the role of those people who are not civil servants on this committee. I hope the minister takes the opportunity in this debate to give us some sense of that process.

Hon. Linda McIntosh (Minister of Education and Training): Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the member from Pembina as well. I think it is important to put a few words on the record from the government's perspective on this resolution because the issue is extremely important. It is, in my personal opinion, one of the most important initiatives that we have undertaken in a long time in education. Amongst so many extremely important initiatives, this one happens to be a personal interest of mine. I can recall back in the early '80s when I first became elected to our local school board, coming down and asking the then NDP government if they could please take a look at this issue and try to put in place some policies.

* (1720)

We were just beginning in the early '80s to see the emergence into the schools of children whose special needs were beyond what they traditionally had been in the schools. Community living was becoming a new thrust, a new approach to dealing with people who had unique and differing needs, and the schools were suddenly receiving these children with no guidance or direction at all from the provincial Pawley government.

School boards were faced with a lot of very difficult decisions in terms of programming and in terms of funding which the NDP provincial Pawley government did not give us or provide us. Neither did they give us any direction, professional development or assistance of any kind whatsoever.

I can remember us having a child come into our school, Madam Speaker, who had a series of multihandicaps, come in with a twin, twin sisters. The parents desired to keep the twins together and brought them to the local neighbourhood school because now we were beginning to see inclusiveness as something that had worth.

The one twin was like most children. The other twin was severely multihandicapped with visual and hearing impairment, noncommunicative, severe spastic cerebral palsy and a whole series of other problems. We were

not certain to what level the intelligence quotient of this child could be measured, and we indicated to the parents that we did not know if we had the ability to cope with the proper instruction for this child.

It became obvious one of the things this child required was a communications system that would enable the child to use a chin movement to work a total communication device that would enable her to respond with a yes or no, so that we could try to figure out how much of the conversation going on around the child was being heard and understood and try to help the child learn to communicate. But to do that, there was physiotherapy needed to help strengthen the neck muscles. We did not have the expertise, the knowledge or the equipment. We appealed to the Minister of Education—at the time it was Maureen Hemphill—and got no help. We were very, very discouraged.

That started my keen interest in special needs, the appalling and dismal lack of assistance that we got from Maureen Hemphill, the NDP Minister of Education under the Pawley administration. That started my interest in this topic. We ended up in school divisions around the province having to do things such as hire physiotherapists using Education dollars. I felt that was a travesty that we had to do that.

I approached many NDP Ministers of Education, Roland Penner, Jerry Storie. They will probably remember me coming as president of MAST and as local school board chairman, asking them for help on this, and in each and every instance the answer we got from the NDP government was no, no, and no.

I am pleased, Madam Speaker, that under our government some of these issues are finally being dealt with. We now have money coming from Health, \$450,000 this year to hire registered nurses so the school boards no longer have to use educational dollars to pay for medical functions, and I am really disappointed that the members opposite whose government would not help in any way with any of these things are now so critical that we are undertaking the reviews they should have done and completed and implemented change in before we ever came to office.

I am disappointed that they do not see the good that has come from the Children and Youth Secretariat that

is doing things such as the transferring of Health money to Education, so that we can have inclusiveness in the schools without having to live the way we did under the Pawley NDP government. I am disappointed that they do not see the worth in the Children and Youth Secretariat and that they disdainfully refer to Dr. Neil Butchard, for example, as a, quote, civil servant. There is disdain in the way that is put, when he is a clinical psychologist who happens at the present time to be employed by the government, therefore also achieving civil servant status. There is nothing wrong with being a civil servant. There are many civil servants who have tremendous expertise in the areas that they were hired to perform in.

We have Dr. James Newton, head of the Manitoba Adolescent Treatment Centre, also an educator, being referred to as a civil servant when he is not an employee of government; he is a clinical psychologist as well, with an expertise and vast experience heading up the educational support services and divisions that deal exclusively, primarily, and only with special needs students. So their expertise is phenomenal.

When the member says, "WHEREAS the present Special Needs Review Committee is composed primarily of civil servants," of course, she is wrong. It is composed primarily of people who have background experience and expertise in the area of special needs.

Two clinical psychologists, one of whom has headed up, for decades, the teaching and working with special needs children in integrated and segregated settings, who heads up the Manitoba Adolescent Treatment Centre or who has had experience in that area, who is not employed by government. Another is a clinical psychologist whose experience and reputation in this area are renowned, not just provincially, but nationally, who happens to also be employed by government, a parent of special needs children and regular children so that she can make the comparison. A teacher, Agnes Collins, wife of a senior executive of the Manitoba Teachers' Society, chosen by the Manitoba Teachers' Society because of her 15 years' experience teaching in an integrated classroom session with special needs children.

Madam Speaker, these are the people who are on the review along with the deputy minister and assistant

deputy minister of Education. The assistant deputy minister, who has extensive experience in special needs, is herself a parent with experience with special needs, as well as an experienced and well-respected educator who has knowledge of the learning experience and differentiated instruction in particular.

These are not people whose first classification I would call civil servants. The member implies by the use of the term that somehow, first of all, to be a civil servant is to not have expertise in any one particular area. The member said because the committee is composed primarily of civil servants, therefore we need to do something different. The implication, of course, is that, if they are primarily civil servants, they cannot do this job, because if they could do this job, we would not need to do the other things she is asking.

If the member has some other interpretation of that, perhaps she could have made that clear. In her talk, I thought I heard her say that people who are primarily civil servants cannot do this. That is why she has got it as one of the "WHEREASes" that we need to change the whole way of doing things here, because these people are primarily civil servants. What a slap in the face to civil servants to imply they cannot do the job for which they were hired, and in Education, in civil service, we hire people to do educational things. But, secondly, it is also not true.

So on two counts that "WHEREAS" is persona non grata. It has no relevance; it is incorrect; and it does not have anything to do with the real expertise of the people on the steering committee which, in turn, has hired the researcher-consultant after examining many proposals, and that researcher-consultant will be doing the research and the consulting that the member wants to have done in a public venue as opposed to in a setting that may or may not be a public venue.

* (1730)

I am not hung up on whether it is public or private. I just want the work done, and, quite frankly, I think with some of the topics that they may have to go through and with some of the people they are consulting, they could probably do it better privately rather than risk putting a family through the ordeal of having to bare their souls in public over the

circumstances of their child or their children or to embarrass or risk hurting the reputation of any particular educator by talking about problems they may have had in the past with a lack of understanding of their child's special needs. I would not expect parents to have to go through that publicly, nor would I expect them to have to go through the humiliation of asking for a private session, which sets them apart from everybody else. That Mr. and Mrs. Jones had to ask for a private session, my goodness, why do they have to go behind closed doors; what is their story all about?

The committee may well decide that they want to have some sort of public opportunity. I do not know that, neither does the member. What we are saying, as the government, is that we will not impose that on them arbitrarily; not everything that is done has to be done on a stage in an auditorium with the opposition having control over who the hearing people are. I do not want this review to degenerate into what some of the other public reviews have degenerated into where the opposition member gets choices, all of the children have choices, and the typical NDP rents a crowd and brings them out to repeat endlessly the same presentation over and over and over—all calculated to appeal to the cameras and the press and the people they can hopefully turn against the government or whatever they can do—as they always do, Madam Speaker, as we know, because it is quite a standing joke in Manitoba about the NDP rent-a-crowd. I mean, it is just a well-known standard joke, and I do not want to have that happen to this. This is too important to me personally, it is too important to the people involved, to play politics with it and to put it into the venue where it could become something that can be the subject for entertaining debate or political gamesmanship. It is just too, too important to be dealt with that way.

Also, Madam Speaker, the member says that, first of all, we cannot do this because the people are primarily civil servants, which, of course, they are not. Even if they were, I would presume they would be civil servants hired to deal with expertise in this area, and I read in that the implication that civil servants hired to do a special job are not capable of doing it, which, I think, as I said before, is an insult.

The second one says: WHEREAS Manitobans have concerns about the future of special needs and special

needs children in the province. Of course, they do. We agree; that is why we are doing the study that they refused to do. When I asked them personally to do it in the mid-'80s, the NDP refused to do this kind of review. So who is showing more concern?

Of course, they have concern and they have concern about the way it is going to be done, and they do not want it to be done in a way that is designed to make it be a political football where accusations about process can interfere with the work of the committee, and I do not want to see that happen. So those two WHEREASes do not have any application to the reality of the work that is going to be done.

It says we have not lived up to our promise to hold an independent public review of special needs education in Manitoba. Madam Speaker, that is not true. We are currently having that review. We have chosen a steering committee of people that are independent; truly they are. If you do not think Agnes Collins is independent, perhaps you should phone her up and tell her you do not think she is. If you do not think Gail Eichler is independent, you should phone her up and tell her you do not think she is. These people have, in turn, on their own, chosen the third, the researcher-consultant, with no input from government. This is independent from government.

She talks about because of the ongoing cuts to special needs funding—is time up? Okay. In fact, funding has doubled, and I will stop there, Madam Speaker. I am sorry I am out of time. I wish I had more because it is a very important topic. Thank you for the time I have had.

Mr. Peter Dyck (Pembina): I, too, am pleased to be able to put a few comments on the record, and in response to the resolution from the member opposite on special education, I wish to add to the earlier comments from my colleague the Minister of Education (Mrs. McIntosh).

Madam Speaker, I would like to respond to one of the comments that was made from the member opposite regarding everyone in education or many in education being upset and not appreciating the type of consideration that is being given to the consultation process that is taking place at the present time. I would

like to respond to that and indicate that in my discussion with educators locally, be they superintendents, be they special needs co-ordinators, I have had a very positive response from them as to the process that we are using in having hearings regarding the special needs people within the area.

Madam Speaker, I agree with what the Minister of Education indicated regarding hearings and the process and the form that they can take. I have been a part of hearings, and some questions that are asked of the presenters can be of a personal nature, and I believe that, in many cases, those who are dealing with special needs children are already needing to deal with some very special cases and cases that are extremely sensitive. So I agree with the minister that the process that we are using is one that can encompass and can take into consideration hearings of a public nature but are not a requirement of that. So, certainly, the special needs people in Manitoba, in my constituency, are people who are special, and exactly that is the term. We need to deal with them in a special way, and they do have special needs, and that is what this process is all about.

Without question, Madam Speaker, this government has an excellent track record when it comes to open and public consultations. I take note of a number of public consultations that have been held during this government's term, and these consultations include the University Education Review, review of education legislation, the Boundaries Review, the Parents' Forum, the Young Leaders of Tomorrow Conference, and apprenticeship task force.

Madam Speaker, during many of these formal reviews and consultations, the topic of special education was discussed. This is important because special education was discussed in the larger context and not as a separate or isolated topic. Regardless of how and when these issues arose, the information was heard and considered by government.

Madam Speaker, I have been a part of many of these meetings in the years that I was privileged to be a part of the education system, be that as an educator or serving on the local school board, and I know that I was able to participate and to, in a small way, contribute to the discussions that were taking place.

The government has acted upon recommendations related to special education in the report of the panel on education legislation reform, and these actions include: Improved co-ordination of services to learners with special needs by the Departments of Education, Health and Family Services; Initiate the review of special education. Special education refers to a variety of programs and services designed to accommodate students whose characteristics, educational needs and strengths cannot be appropriately addressed through the use of the regular curriculum and services alone.

* (1740)

Madam Speaker, I would like to indicate several organizations within the Pembina constituency that are dealing very specifically with adults who have special needs. The first organization that I would like to again put on the record is the Valley Rehab Centre. This is an organization that was founded years ago, and it was founded by one of the local doctors who, incidentally, is still alive today and is 103 years old. He is as alert today as he was 30 years ago. He is a man of great ability to respond to needs, and this is specifically what he did.

It is about 30 years ago that he was the initiator and the person who saw the needs of these special people. Madam Speaker, it is not anything that anyone would be proud of, but I think if you would look 40 and 50 years ago—and, of course, that would be before my time, but so I am told—these special needs people were put to the side. Parents, in fact, would be embarrassed to publicly show and to present these children. So this Dr. Wiebe, in his wisdom, determined that there was an opportunity for these people to be able to contribute to the local society, to the local economy, and, in fact, for them to be able to feel good about the things that they were doing in their contributions to the area.

Valley Rehab Centre right as of today has 108 of these special needs people. These special needs people—and some are older than others, of course; I think there is a wide spectrum of ages from 18 years and all the way up to retirement—but what they do is things such as make floor mats. They have ability to do the same activity and repeat this day after day after day. But, Madam Speaker, they feel good about what they

do; they feel positive about the contribution that they can make.

In fact, I was there about three weeks ago. I spent several hours at the premises and observed what these people were doing. They are making boxes for some of the local factories. This organization, in fact, is fairly well able to recover all their costs by being able to sell the product that they produce.

They do the whole area of waste disposal. They are collecting paper. Again, here is an opportunity for those with special needs to sort the paper. The paper needs to be sorted into different packages and into different boxes because there is the coloured paper and then there is the newspaper and so on. So they are able to do a variety of things like this, the collection of pop cans and plastics. So these are areas that they are able to contribute and are able to live a meaningful life. At the end of the day, they have been able to occupy their time in a profitable way, but also, at the end of the day, they feel good about the contributions that they have made.

So, Madam Speaker, in response to the resolution that has come up, I believe that certainly, as a government, we have a responsibility, and a very tremendous responsibility, towards those in our society who are and who have special needs. But I would go a step further and say that, as communities, we have a responsibility as well to look after and to make sure that those people who have special needs are able to contribute and are able to function within their local communities. So I believe that, No. 1, we are taking this responsibility as a government very seriously. We are looking after our special needs people. We are doing a review now to see if there is something that we could add to, and I would suggest that, yes, at the end of the day we can improve it. Obviously, that is a function and a responsibility that we have as government.

Madam Speaker, I would like to draw your attention to another organization in our area. This is a facility in Winkler known as Trainex. This organization, again, is dealing with those who have special needs, those who are mentally challenged and find it difficult to be able to cope with the day-to-day responsibilities in society.

This organization is running a computer program, and this is, again, for those who find it difficult to act with the pressures that are on in everyday living, and they run a computer program. They are doing an excellent job, and this special needs program is working in conjunction with the Garden Valley School Division. Now, the high school in the division is helping them develop programs, but these are run through the Trainex organization.

So, Madam Speaker, I believe that ongoing we are being responsive and trying to be as responsive as possible to the needs of those in our society who have special needs, who are challenged, and, certainly, we need to continue to be responsive to that.

Students with special education needs can include those with cognitive disabilities, students with severe behaviour disorders and gifted students. Again, if I could refer back to the years that I spent and was able to serve on the local school board, it was my intention, ongoing, that we had a responsibility, as well, to those who were gifted.

Now, I know that in many school divisions this is taking place, that they are running programs which are geared specifically to those who are gifted, to those who have the ability and certainly have been blessed with the ability to work faster and more quickly than the other students in their classes. My daughter has been able to participate in a class such as that, and, certainly, I am very appreciative of what the school has been able to do for them. So here we have the wide spectrum of those who are, in a sense, disabled or severely handicapped to those who are gifted, so I am sure that when the committee does its review, they will also take this into consideration.

Madam Speaker, the purpose of this special education review is to examine the application, the appropriateness, the effectiveness and the use of policies, programs, services and resources to achieve desired student outcomes such as graduation and successful transition to employment, post-secondary education or community living. This review is aimed at improving the effectiveness and efficiency of school-based education and services and strengthening learning opportunities and outcomes. A system-wide review of special education as provided by school

divisions and districts throughout the province is consistent with the need for increased responsiveness, effectiveness and accountability in the education system for the benefit of Manitoba students.

Special education has also been an important thrust and consideration in educational renewal. The renewal of the education system is critical for all Manitoba students, including those with special learning needs. For example, the development of provincial curricula with clearly defined outcomes and standards is important for all students. Education renewal clarifies such concepts as differentiated instruction and the use of the modified and the individualized course designations.

* (1750)

One of the most important features of education renewal in Manitoba has been the emphasis placed on parental involvement. While important for all students, this is certainly essential for students with special learning needs. Now, through the establishment of the Advisory Council for School Leadership, this government has supported parents and community members in being informed, active participants in education programming.

In conclusion, since our government has continued in its commitment to meet the needs of Manitoba students and has ensured that there is a significant consultative component as part of this review, it is not necessary to support this resolution.

Mrs. Shirley Render (St. Vital): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to put a few words on the record. I have to admit that I was not listening to the member for Wolseley (Ms. Friesen) when she was speaking, and I regret that, because many things that the member does say, I think she adds some very valuable points, so I hope I am not taking something out of context but, picking up from something our Minister of Education mentioned, I wondered whether perhaps the member had made reference to the fact that they were not public hearings.

Just a point that I would like to make, having been on a number of committees since I have been elected which have held public hearings, there is always good

and bad in any kind of a review process, but one of the things that I noticed, certainly the very first committee I was on, and that was the Constitutional Task Force and then latterly the teacher compensation committee, is that regretfully sometimes there is a tendency to gamesplay. If this particular review process is done mainly in private, it may be done that way for a very good reason and, as I said, if any review is going to be worth its salt it has to make sure that the information that is coming to it is there for the good of the reason that review committee has been struck, not for political gamesmanship, not for trying to just put forward one particular point of view with no recognition that there are other points of view that need to be seen or heard. As I say, to me, sitting on the committee, it was very evident, I had not realized just how evident the gamesman playing was to other people. I had numerous, numerous people phone me up and were absolutely appalled by some of the things that have happened on some of the public presentation reviews.

So as I say, regretfully, human nature being what it is, I think we always have to try to make sure we do give a balanced, have a good way of ensuring that the information that is coming to us is coming to us for the good of getting the information, not necessarily trying to promote a particular group or a particular point of view.

Like the member for Wolseley and certainly like our Minister of Education, a special education review is long overdue. I think all of us recognize that.

I can think back to my days in high school. There was no such terminology as special needs. The children, the students in our school who either had physical or mental disabilities, they were in our school. We did see them, we did know that they were there. They were in different classrooms. The word "gifted" was not a word that was used in the '50s, but there were applications of different kinds of programs to try to take into consideration those students that did need some kind of extra effort to ensure their continuing interest in such things as accelerated programs. I cannot remember the name of the program that was instituted at the high school that I attended but, again, it was an intent to make sure that the students in Grade 10 or Grade 11 or Grade 12 were not bored out of their minds and drifted away from school.

So throughout the years, I think teachers, parents, students, certainly school division, the trustees, I think everyone has recognized that there has to be an approach that is taken to our special needs students, whether special needs means mentally or physically in need of extra kinds of things or the special needs which apply to your gifted students.

I know talking to some of our teachers in my riding of St. Vital, Al Friesen is one teacher that comes to mind, a teacher at Windsor School. Mr. Friesen works very hard to provide programming for his gifted students. Certainly, Glenlawn Collegiate provides programming for their special needs programs, and I have met with those teachers.

So, Madam Speaker, this government is very, very concerned about education in general. Education continues to be a key priority for this government, as shown in the throne speech, as shown in the budget. It has the second largest expenditure. Despite the reductions from the federal government, our government continues to provide funding for education that is only second to health. So the special education review, just going through the resolution here now as it is laid out by the member for Wolseley (Ms. Friesen)—and, again, I do apologize that I was not listening properly.

Again, like the Minister of Education (Mrs. McIntosh), I am not too sure why it is a negative that the special needs review committee is composed primarily of civil servants. I know last year for the teacher compensation review, we were criticized because there were two politicians on the committee. So, as I say, my understanding is this is a committee that is composed of people with expertise, people who are not liable to the same kind of political pressure, perhaps, that other people are. Certainly, some of the names are familiar to me. Dr. Jim Newton, I think is a very well-known name in this city. I think his expertise in this area is most valuable, so I am very pleased that people like Dr. Newton and the others who are on this committee agreed to do this.

There are going to be a lot of people looking very hard at this committee to see what they come up with because I think all of us have been waiting a long time for this to happen. The committee, I think, is going to be under a lot of pressure, but the Minister of

Education, regretfully, ran out of time to sort of go into some of the details, what the committee is going to do, so perhaps I might just mention it.

Actually, one of the things that I do not think she mentioned, and I am just looking at the resolution again. The resolution reads: Whereas parents and teachers of special needs children need an opportunity to share their concerns about the ongoing cuts to special needs funding and the impact those cuts have had on their children's and students' education and future.

Madam Speaker, I think this is incorrect. My understanding is funding for special needs has doubled since we have come into power. If I am wrong, I stand to be corrected, but, again, I want to correct the record because I think when we put things on the record, we have to make sure that we have done our homework and that we are not putting on incorrect things.

I grant you, Madam Speaker, that it probably does not matter how much money we put into special needs or any education program. There can always be a need for more, but I think we have to be careful about saying that there have been cuts to special needs because, as I say, my understanding is there have not been any cuts to special needs.

As the member for Pembina (Mr. Dyck) mentioned, the purpose of this review—well, they are multifold really—is to identify ways of enhancing the quality and the cost-effectiveness of special education policies and programs in this province.

The review also has to look at the effectiveness and the efficiency of current provincial funding formulas in meeting the intent of provincial policy directions. We all know that policy can be saying one thing, but if funding is not in line, then it really does not matter what policy is saying. So there are a number of things that this review committee is going to have to take into consideration. There are numerous, numerous questions that this committee is going to be asking the people whom it is going to.

I mean, a very basic question is special education programs and service delivery models, what has been developed by the school districts and the divisions, and how do these programs and service delivery models respond to the needs—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. When this matter is again before the House, the honourable member for St. Vital (Mrs. Render) will have six minutes remaining.

The hour being 6 p.m., this House is adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning (Thursday).

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, June 4, 1997

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