



HAN

Fifth Session - Thirty-Sixth Legislature

of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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Speaker*



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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-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.
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DOER, Gary	Concordia	N.D.P.
DOWNEY, James	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
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DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
ENNS, Harry, Hon.	Lakeside	P.C.
EVANS, Clif	Interlake	N.D.P.
EVANS, Leonard S.	Brandon East	N.D.P.
FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
FILMON, Gary, Hon.	Tuxedo	P.C.
FINDLAY, Glen	Springfield	P.C.
FRIESEN, Jean	Wolseley	N.D.P.
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.
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MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
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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.
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STRUTHERS, Stan	Dauphin	N.D.P.
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TOEWS, Vic, Hon.	Rossmere	P.C.
TWEED, Mervin, Hon.	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
VODREY, Rosemary, Hon.	Fort Garry	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann	Swan River	N.D.P.
<i>Vacant</i>	St. Boniface	

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 25, 1999

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

**PRESENTING REPORTS BY
STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES**

Committee of Supply

Mr. Marcel Laurendeau (Chairperson): Madam Speaker, the Committee of Supply has considered certain resolutions, directs me to report progress and asks leave to sit again. I move, seconded by the honourable member for Charleswood (Mrs. Driedger), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

**Standing Committee on Law Amendments
First Report**

Mr. Jack Penner (Chairperson of the Standing Committee on Law Amendments): Madam Speaker, I would like to present the First Report of the Committee on Law Amendments.

An Honourable Member: Dispense.

Madam Speaker: Dispense.

Your Standing Committee on Law Amendments presents the following as its First Report.

Your committee met on Wednesday, May 19, 1999, at 10 a.m. and at 2:30 p.m. in Room 255 of the Legislative Assembly to consider bills referred. At the 10 a.m. meeting, your committee elected Mr. Dyck as its Vice-Chairperson.

Your committee heard representation on bills as follows:

Bill 27—The Essential Services Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services essentiels

Don Fotti – President, Emergency Response Service Employees Association of Winnipeg (Paramedics)

Wes Shoemaker and David Shepherdson – City of Winnipeg

Janice Johnson – Private Citizen

Ian MacIntyre - Manitoba Teachers' Society

Ray Orr – Private Citizen

Alex Forrest – United Firefighters of Winnipeg

Jon Gerrard – Leader of the Liberal Party in Manitoba

Your committee has considered:

Bill 27—The Essential Services Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur les services essentiels

and has agreed to report the same with the following amendment:

MOTION:

THAT section 3 of the Bill be struck out and the following substituted:

Coming into force

3 This Act comes into force on a day fixed by proclamation.

Mr. Penner: I move, seconded by the honourable member for Steinbach (Mr. Driedger), that the committee report now be received.

Motion agreed to.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Flood Conditions

Hon. Glen Cummings (Minister of Natural Resources): I have a statement for the House.

Madam Speaker, we have seen additional heavy rain this past long weekend in southwestern Manitoba, and it has worsened the flooding of agricultural lands in the entire area,

not only the areas next to the Souris and its tributaries. We now have an estimated two million acres of agricultural land in the Souris basin that are under water or so soggy that the land cannot be worked, and recent rains will further delay the return to normal conditions.

Some new road washouts have been reported, and there is heavy rain near the U.S. border. Levels along the Souris River are cresting between the U.S. boundary to Napinka at close to mid-April crests. From Hartney to Wawanesa water levels will rise another two-tenths of a foot in the next few days. The levels at Souris and Wawanesa are expected to be higher than mid-April. These forecasts are based on favourable weather conditions for the next ten days, and according to Environment Canada, no precip is expected in the next few days but there is a chance of thunder showers later in the week. So we are watching closely to provide whatever assistance can be made use of in the valley.

In other areas the heavy runoff in the upper Pembina River from the weekend rains has caused creeks to rise in that area with significant flooding that will continue for several weeks, especially in the area between Rock Lake and Swan Lake. Rock Lake is presently cresting. The Assiniboine River is rising between Brandon and Portage la Prairie and is flooding some low-lying land near the river. The Portage diversion will continue to be used to reduce the flooding from Portage la Prairie to Winnipeg. The Red River is now near its crest again, and further rises should be no more than a few inches.

So, needless to say, Madam Speaker, what is now needed is hot sun and drying winds for farmers in the southwestern and western part of the province.

* (1335)

Mr. Stan Struthers (Dauphin): I would like to thank the Minister of Natural Resources for the statement that he has made to the House today concerning the terrible flooding conditions that we have throughout parts of Manitoba. I had an opportunity last week to tour through the Pembina Valley and take a look at the Pembina

River and how high that is and also to tour through the southwest part of the province, several of the R.M.s that have now declared themselves emergency zones, and take a look at the amount of water that is collecting in those areas through rain, through runoff, through drainage, through all of the factors that have contributed to what is really an awful situation in the southwest part of our province, and not just the southwest but in other parts as well.

Madam Speaker, I want to point out particularly in the Pembina Valley, Rock Lake, Pelican Lake, Swan Lake, all at very high levels. I talked there with one farmer whose cattle were hemmed right in up against the wall of the Pembina Valley, a farmer who was forced to buy extra hay for his cattle because of the wet conditions, an expense that this farmer has not normally had to make, along with the extra expenses involved in bringing hay to his farm.

I also talked to another young farmer who farms a century farm—it has been in his family for 120 years in the Pembina Valley area—who may have to give up the farm because he has faced several years of flooding, he has lost hundreds of dollars in anhydrous ammonia that he has put down on a crop last fall which is now being washed away.

These are the kinds of cases that need to be looked at, Madam Speaker.

In the Pembina Valley as well, many obstructions in the river are causing havoc for farmers, holding back water and causing damage on their fields and to their cattle productions. A Ducks Unlimited dam in particular is causing havoc, and a bridge that was recently constructed is really constricting the flow of the river in the area. These are things I think the government needs to take a look at and needs to act upon.

In the southwest part of the province, again hay land, I particularly remember looking down at Oak Lake and Plum Lake, Maple Lake and seeing the original outline of those lakes being way, way inland with water flowing outside of the original, the usual limits of that lake, causing massive amounts of hardship for farmers who usually take hay from the area.

Madam Speaker, I want to make sure that we encourage the provincial government to work with the local councils in providing immediate drainage for those areas, working with them in terms of a compensation package to help out farmers who have incurred expenses because of this flood, and also to provide long-term relief in terms of licensing and enforcement of the water rights that exist in this province. Thank you very much.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Leonard Derkach (Minister of Rural Development): Madam Speaker, I would like to table the 1999-2000 Departmental Expenditure Estimates for the Department of Rural Development.

Hon. Rosemary Vodrey (Minister responsible for the Status of Women): Madam Speaker, I would like to table the Supplementary Information for Departmental Expenditures for the Manitoba Status of Women.

Hon. Mike Radcliffe (Minister charged with the administration of The Civil Service Act): Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure today to table the Supplementary Estimates for Legislative Review of the Employee Benefits and Other Payments of the Civil Service Commission.

Hon. Shirley Render (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Madam Speaker, I would like to table the Public Utilities Board Annual Report for 1998.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 26—The Physiotherapists Act

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to move, seconded by the Minister of Family Services (Mrs. Mitchelson), that leave be given to introduce Bill 26, The Physiotherapists Act (Loi sur les physiothérapeutes), and that the same be now received and read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

* (1340)

Bill 202—The Fire Departments Arbitration Amendment and Consequential Amendments Act

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): I move, seconded by the member for Wolseley (Ms. Friesen), that Bill 202, The Fire Departments Arbitration Amendment and Consequential Amendments Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'arbitrage relatif aux services de pompiers et modifications corrélatives—my French is not very good, Madam Speaker, obviously—be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House. I should have practised my second language.

Motion presented.

Mr. Reid: Madam Speaker, by way of just a brief explanation, this bill will move The Fire Departments Arbitration Act into the 1990s by removing the old gender-specific language and now acknowledging that firefighters can be both men and women. This bill will also provide binding arbitration for the City of Winnipeg ambulance service employees. This will ensure that the residents of Winnipeg continue to receive uninterrupted emergency services while providing paramedics and the City of Winnipeg the opportunity to resolve contracts fairly.

Motion agreed to.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the public gallery where we have this afternoon twenty Grades 11 and 12 students from River East Collegiate, and from the Muriel Snowden International School in Boston, Massachusetts, who are here with the Maple Leaf Exchange Program. The students are under the direction of Mr. Robert Carpenter and Ms. June Robinson. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Minister of Family Services (Mrs. Mitchelson).

Also, we have thirty-two Grades 4, 5 and 6 students from Montrose School under the direction of Mrs. Judy Harapiak. This school is

located in the constituency of the honourable Minister of Labour (Mr. Radcliffe).

We also have forty-eight Grades 5 and 6 students from Landmark Elementary School under the direction of Mr. Russ Dirks, Mr. Tom Koop and Mrs. Janice Peters. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable member for La Verendrye (Mr. Sveinson).

Also, we have twenty-seven Grade 9 students from St. Boniface Diocesan High under the direction of Mr. Marcel Lizotte. This school is located in the constituency of St. Boniface.

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

**Bill 202—The Fire Departments Arbitration
Amendment and Consequential
Amendments Act**

Madam Speaker: It appears, although I am not absolutely convinced, that the wrong motion was read. So I will reread it into the record to ensure that it is accurate.

It has been moved by the honourable member for Transcona (Mr. Reid), seconded by the honourable member for Wolseley (Ms. Friesen), that leave be given to introduce Bill 202, The Fire Departments Arbitration Amendment and Consequential Amendments Act (Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'arbitrage relatif aux services de pompiers et modifications corrélatives), and that the same be now received and read a first time.

Motion agreed to.

* (1345)

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

**Flood Conditions
Impact on Farmers**

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, over two million acres of farmland may not be seeded this year due to the flooding that has taken place, as outlined by the minister a few moments ago in his statement. This could dramatically affect over 3,000

producers here in Manitoba. We know that there was more rain over the weekend, and we know from the minister's statement that we all should hope for good weather.

I would like to ask the First Minister (Mr. Filmon): what are the contingency plans for so many producers that are so directly affected and impacted by this flooding?

Hon. Harry Enns (Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, I this morning met with the executive of the Manitoba agricultural producers organization to discuss the issue that is of very serious concern to all of us in Manitoba. Regrettably, the weather did not let up in that region over the weekend. I also had a luncheon meeting with the chairman of the Manitoba Crop Insurance Corporation. It is simply too early at this stage to assess the overall situation, but I want the House to be assured that all agencies involved in farmer protection, essentially the Manitoba Crop Insurance Corporation—I know that my colleague the Minister of Government Services (Mr. Pitura), along with his organizations, have been in the region not once but on numerous occasions and are monitoring the situation on a daily basis.

Drainage Issues

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): I can appreciate the answer from the minister, but he knows that producers want to know specifics that will be available to them. I know members opposite met with producers over the weekend as well as along with our member, the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers), on this issue, and they really want to know where they stand and where the government is going.

Madam Speaker, there is a real concern we are hearing with the drainage from neighbour to neighbour and from rural municipality to rural municipality. The flood report, the Water Commission report, last year, tabled in this House, talked about this issue as well, calling on the provincial government to take leadership. Is the provincial government taking leadership on these drainage issues on behalf of the situation in that area of the province now and in potential areas in the future?

Hon. Glen Cummings (Minister of Natural Resources): Yes, Madam Speaker, I certainly indicated previously in this House and am glad to indicate again that we are prepared to work with the municipalities and the individuals where emergency situations arise. But I think the Leader of the Opposition is raising a much bigger picture, which is the enforcement of drainage by-laws, whether it is a by-law that the municipality is enacting or whether it is under the various water acts within the province. I have indicated publicly several times that the province and the municipalities must work together to deal in an organized and planned manner with this or there will be downstream flooding that will become uncontrollable. There are many examples of where that co-operation has been excellent, but there are situations that we are well aware of where the drainage acts are being challenged in the courts.

* (1350)

Mr. Doer: Madam Speaker, I was referring specifically to Recommendation 37 in the Water Commission report dealing with the flooding in the Red River Valley two years ago and the conditions under which the province would assume responsibility for emergency management from the local municipality dealing with drainage. I was wondering, after that report had been tabled, what action the government had taken in this regard and its application to the flooded areas now that we have raised.

A further report, Recommendation 35 and Recommendation 21 in the interim report from the Water Commission, recommends that reimbursement levels should be specified at the time the forecast is issued at a required level based on a formula. Given the Minister of Agriculture's (Mr. Enns) response and the statement today from the Minister of Natural Resources, I would ask the Premier (Mr. Filmon): has there been any implementation of that recommendation by the government so that people would know more specifically what the reimbursement levels will be?

Mr. Cummings: Madam Speaker, there are a number of initiatives that we have undertaken as a result of the Water Commission report. In remembering the recommendation that the

Leader of the Opposition references, it seems to me that we have always moved prudently in terms of any infrastructure that has been involved. We have always acted in a co-operative manner with the municipalities in order to deal with the issues as they arise. When disaster or near disaster situations arise, that open line of communication and effort to work co-operatively with the affected areas I think adequately demonstrates the willingness of this administration to assist in any way possible. Frankly, some of the damages that occur and are occurring currently in the southwestern part of the province are of an unprecedented nature in terms of overland flooding, as opposed to any works that may have been established on behalf of the municipality or the province. So we continue to offer them daily assistance in any way we can.

Flood Conditions Compensation—Farmers

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): Madam Speaker, the farming situation in southwestern Manitoba is certainly very serious given that a large portion of land will not be seeded this year. Many farmers did not qualify for AIDA, many have taken out provincial recovery loans and many are covering huge debts. Without a crop this year, many will be out of business. The heavy rains are also affecting other parts of the province but not quite so seriously.

I would like to ask the Minister of Agriculture what steps his government is taking to address this situation given that there is no current plan or program in place to compensate farmers.

Hon. Harry Enns (Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, I want to be very careful how I answer this question because memories are still very much with us that just about this time just a few short years ago, large acreages of our prime agricultural land in the Red River Valley were still under water, and, yet, in that tremendous entrepreneurial spirit that our farmers exhibit, at the end of the seeding season fully 97 percent, 98 percent of that land was in fact seeded. This is a different situation, and I understand that. I have every empathy for the situation that the farmers in southwestern Manitoba face. But to

answer specifically these kinds of questions at this point in time when there are still three, four, four and a half, perhaps five weeks, weather permitting, for seeding operations to commence is premature. That is not avoiding the question; that is simply having the experience of a number of flooding situations in this province. We have to be able to assess the damage before governments can be in a position to respond.

Ms. Wowchuk: We certainly recognize that the situation in the southwest part of the province is different from the Red River Valley. But I would like to ask the minister: given that the government eliminated the penalty on the extended crop insurance program during the Red River flood, recognizing that they needed extended periods of time to seed, will the government consider waiving that penalty in this situation as well so that people are not penalized when they have to seed into the extended period after the deadlines?

* (1355)

Mr. Enns: As I already indicated, both the chairman of Manitoba Crop Insurance and the general manager, Mr. Neil Hamilton, were in the area over the weekend, on Friday, and these and other suggestions that were discussed by the farmers will be given very serious consideration. There are a number of things that the corporation can do in response to the current situation and will do. Let me also add that I am informed, and it pleases me to know, that farmers from areas not as badly stricken, for instance the Red River Valley, are indicating to the Department of Agriculture their willingness to help with equipment, time and experience to help seed that crop should the weather make that possible later on in the season.

Ms. Wowchuk: We appreciate the help that other people are prepared to offer. We know that Manitobans are very considerate about other people in disastrous situations. But, Madam Speaker, this is a disaster that will put many people out of business if they do not get some assistance.

I would like to ask the minister whether he will consider the fact that we have to extend that crop insurance and we have to look at the areas

that will still be under water where farmers will get no crop off, crop insurance will not help them, and there have to be some plans being made now. Are you making plans to help these people out?

Mr. Enns: My government has shown unprecedented levels of support for not just farmers but people in need, whether it is small businesses, homeowners in the Red River Valley or wherever that may occur. I have every confidence that that kind of consideration and support will be forthcoming under these circumstances.

Health Care System Government Polls/Surveys

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): Madam Speaker, several years ago when the province was in the midst of a major crisis of waiting lists, the New Democratic opposition set up a help line; we wrote hundreds of letters; we did everything we could to try to educate the government that there was a problem in health care. The government, when they finally realized there was a problem, what has the government done? They have taken polls at public taxpayers' expense, and they have had an ad campaign at public taxpayers' expense. When one looks at the polls that were taken by the government, it is clear they were politically motivated, designed more to try to improve the health care of the Tory party rather than the health care of Manitobans. I would like to ask the minister if that is not the case.

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Health): Well, Madam Speaker, the member for Kildonan is wrong with most of what he puts on the record. He and I discussed this issue during Estimates over the course of the last week. At least I have his agreement that there is a time when government should be providing information, and I think he basically agreed through the Estimates process that it is important to provide information to Manitobans on our health care system. He disagrees I believe with the approach of doing that. I have found time and time again, whether it is out meeting with people, whether it is through surveys or polls or anything that is being done, that the people of Manitoba want to know information about their

health care system. It is incumbent upon the government to provide that information. That is why we produced a brochure that went into every home right across Manitoba, to provide information on what is happening in the health care system, what some of the next steps are. So, again, I think it is very important that Manitobans receive quality, accurate information on what is happening in their health care system.

Mr. Chomiak: Madam Speaker, in light of the minister's response, can he explain to the House why a question on the government Conservative poll that said people who attack the Manitoba health care system are more concerned with their own agenda than with improving the level of health care, what has that got to do with the minister's education campaign and improving the lot of health care of Manitobans?

Mr. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to go through that poll question by question with the member for Kildonan. Again, it provides an awful lot of information about a number of issues relative to our health care system that is very important in terms of the kind of information that should be provided to Manitobans and in terms of helping us determine the priorities of Manitobans, both in terms of their perceptions and their needs. So, again, the member basically agreed last week that there is a need to provide information, and we will agree to disagree in terms of how to provide that information, but it is very important that Manitobans get information on their health care system to know why it is changing, how it is changing and what the impacts are on them. We believe in providing information, and we will continue to do that.

* (1400)

Mr. Chomiak: Madam Speaker, my question is to the First Minister, who had the distinction of polling last on the government poll for credibility in health care. But notwithstanding that, given that the Premier has talked about a new ethical standard for this government and it is about time that it starts, I wonder if the Premier will indicate to this House that the Conservative Party will reimburse the province for the cost of these political polls and for the cost of these political ads, because what they did

was more inclined to try to help the health of the Tory party than the health of the province of Manitoba.

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Madam Speaker, the hypocrisy of the members opposite knows no bounds. This is the group that wrote the book on government advertising. They spent \$2 million advertising the Jobs Fund that does not have one job still in this province today. They spent a half million dollars advertising the benefits of Limestone. Major benefits were simply to get their government re-elected. They hired dozens and dozens of communicators on the public trough just to try and polish their image.

Point of Order

Mr. Chomiak: Madam Speaker, Beauchesne's 417 indicates the Premier does not have to answer the question, but he should very much address the issue raised. I specifically asked the Premier if the Conservative Party would reimburse the government for the political advertising that has been undertaken by the Department of Health, and the Premier, who is apt to do, is living back in the 1980s, which is his new policy, is not answering the question, is not prepared to deal with the question, and I ask you to call him to order, either deal with the question or let us get on with other questions in Question Period.

Madam Speaker: The honourable First Minister, on the same point of order.

Mr. Filmon: Madam Speaker, on the same point of order. I know that the members opposite are very reluctant to have anyone talk about their record in government because it was such a dreadful record, which is why they continue to stay on the opposite side. Of course I did not see any of them rush to have the fees paid for the settlement that the people of Manitoba have to pay for one John Bucklaschuk, one of their cabinet ministers who cost us \$2 million because of his political actions in the lead-up to the election campaign of 1986.

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Thompson, on the same point of order.

Mr. Steve Ashton (Opposition House Leader): On the same point of order, Madam Speaker, this is getting to be an increasing pattern. Those of us who remember the Premier as the Leader of the Opposition, I wonder if he is not rehearsing for that role again. But the question was related specifically to the actions of his government. I think the people of Manitoba would like to hear answers from this Premier, while he still is in that office, on important matters of public record. So I would like to ask you to bring him to order.

Madam Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable member for Kildonan, I would remind the honourable First Minister to respond to the question asked.

* * *

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

Mr. Filmon: Madam Speaker, in view of the fact that the New Democrats, when they were in government, did not reimburse the people of Manitoba for any of their political advertising, this is sheer hypocrisy. That is what I accept it as, and that is what the people of Manitoba recognize it as.

Athena Educational Partners Minister's Review

Ms. Jean Friesen (Wolseley): My question is for the Minister of Education. Athena corporation of Montreal is currently negotiating with Manitoba school divisions to bring a daily taping of selected news items combined with commercial advertising into Manitoba classrooms.

I wanted to ask the Minister of Education whether or not he has had the opportunity yet, taken the time, to review any of the sample tapings that are going to be broadcast to Manitoba schools.

Hon. James McCrae (Minister of Education and Training): I think that the honourable member, through her Leader, has raised this issue before in an attempt to usurp the powers and responsibilities of school divisions. I think

that we need honourable members opposite to be clear, whether they want us to act within our sphere of responsibility or to take over school divisions and all the implications of that.

Ms. Friesen: Would the minister undertake now to review those tapes and to confirm that, although each tape runs 12 minutes, no teacher uses such material without either debate or reinforcement of ideas, so that what school divisions in fact are saying yes to is not 12 minutes but, conservatively speaking, 20 to 30 minutes a day? Will the minister undertake to review that?

Mr. McCrae: I have discussed this matter on a number of occasions, and I am sure I will continue to do so as long as this matter is current and that school divisions are discussing it. I take an interest in all the things that are going on, but I have not made it my habit to make decisions at this level which ought to be made at local levels. That is why we have school divisions—I think the honourable member understands that—to reflect local concerns and to reflect local issues in local areas.

Now some school divisions are looking at the Athena proposal; some are not. That demonstrates the fact that the present system is working.

Ms. Friesen: Would the minister, who is still responsible for curriculum and for hours of schooling in Manitoba, tell the House which areas of curriculum are to be reduced to accommodate the daily half hour of selected, single-source news and commercial advertising?

Mr. McCrae: Unlike the honourable member and her party, I do not presume to tell school divisions how they are to organize their school year. We do have certain requirements from the provincial level, and we want to see that those requirements are met so that the whole system of meeting standards and that the tests that flow from that reflect the fact that the work is being done in our schools so that our children can be prepared for the kinds of opportunities that are being made available through the actions of the government of Manitoba for the past 11 years, multiplying many times over the number of job opportunities requiring skills.

Manitobans are going to be well placed because of new directions, because of parental involvement, because of setting standards and because of testing to those standards, and the school divisions are required to ensure that those directions are met. What they do with the rest of the time that is available to the schools is for them to discuss with their teachers, to discuss with their parent councils and with their school trustees and make decisions based on those discussions.

Paramedics Mediation

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): My question is for the Minister of Labour. We in the Liberal Party see the benefits of trying to get both sides working together, seeing the benefits of working with our health care workers. My question for the Minister of Labour is: is the Minister of Labour, given the government is prepared to get involved by bringing in essential services legislation, prepared to talk to both sides and see if in fact they would be prepared to accept a mediator in order to resolve this situation in a positive way in which all sides and particularly Manitobans can win?

Hon. Mike Radcliffe (Minister of Labour): Madam Speaker, I thank my honourable colleague for the question opposite, because it gives me an opportunity to stand up in this Chamber and to tell my honourable colleague that we have been very pleased to appoint Mr. Wally Fox-Decent as a mediator in the current labour dispute with CUPE. We look forward to his report, which, as a preliminary suggestion or request, will be forthcoming on or about the 8th of June. So we can only hope that he will have the positive benefits that he had with the nurses collective bargaining.

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, the minister comments on my preamble but does not answer the question.

The question to the Minister of Labour: is the minister prepared to do what he has done for other health care professionals, recognizing that the city is asking the province to get directly involved? Is the Minister of Labour prepared to talk to the city, to talk to the union to see if in

fact they would be prepared to accept mediation? We are talking about the paramedics.

Mr. Radcliffe: Madam Speaker, I am glad that my honourable colleague opposite elucidated his question, because it gives me an opportunity to explain that in fact the role of the Minister of Labour in government is the keeper of the process. In fact, the government itself does not become involved in issues of substance, but rather when there is a collective bargaining dispute, calls upon different individuals who are a resource to our government on a conciliation basis or on a mediation basis or ultimately on an arbitration basis.

We do believe at the present time that the paramedics are in conciliation and that very good attempts in good faith are being made to solve this issue, and we look forward to a satisfactory completion.

* (1410)

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, my final supplementary then to the Minister of Health, keeping in mind what the Minister of Labour has just said, the keeper of the process.

My question to the Minister of Health is: because the Minister of Health is responding to one side, how does that make it the keeper of the process? Does the Minister of Health recognize, as we do, the benefits of seeing if both sides would entertain having mediation, the paramedics and the city?

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, surely the member for Inkster understands the collective bargaining process, that right now there is a conciliation officer who has been appointed to work with the two parties. There are still a number of options available to both of the parties, the City of Winnipeg as the employer and the paramedics and the ambulance attendants. They can both request a mediator be appointed, and if that were the case I am sure a mediator would be appointed. They can both request binding arbitration, again, and jointly go forward to binding arbitration. There are a number of processes available to ultimately resolve the collective bargaining process.

We introduced an amendment last week to deal with the very important issue of essential services, the protection of the public when it comes to the important issue of health care services, particularly ambulance services here in the city of Winnipeg. So you have an essential services amendment to deal with the protection of that essential service. At the same time, you have a collective bargaining process underway that still has a number of avenues available to reach a collective agreement through the collective bargaining process.

Manitou, Manitoba Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Stan Struthers (Dauphin): Madam Speaker, again people in Manitou are worried about their ambulance services. Their concerns are that it could take up to half an hour or more in response time. When the minister met with his associate deputy minister, Sue Hicks, to receive the interim report of the Emergency Medical Services working group, did they discuss this problem in Manitou, and if so, what solutions can he report to the House coming out of this interim report?

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Health): Well, Madam Speaker, I am not sure what the member for Dauphin is referring to in terms of an interim report. I indicated to him that we do have a working group of Emergency Medical Services with representation from the regional health authorities, from municipal organizations and from the Department of Health working on a report as it relates to ambulance and emergency services throughout all of Manitoba outside of Winnipeg.

I indicated in this House that I was expecting at the minimum an interim report or a final report sometime very shortly, and I am told that I can expect the final report by around the end of June. Through all of this time, I am well aware that the regional health authorities continue to focus on providing the ambulance services to all of the communities, and they also continue to focus on the importance of the volunteer system within our ambulance system, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Struthers: Madam Speaker, that does not give the level of support to people in Manitou

that they would like to hear. If this minister then has not received this interim report, can he indicate to the House when he will receive that report or when he is expecting a final report? Can he clear up some of this confusion?

Mr. Stefanson: Madam Speaker, I am not sure the member was listening to my first response, but currently the distribution of emergency medical services throughout Manitoba under the RHAs has not changed. There are currently some 88 licensed EMS delivery sites outside of the city of Winnipeg, and they continue to focus on providing that very important service. As I indicated to the member for Dauphin, there is a committee that has been struck to provide recommendations on the provision of emergency medical services outside of Winnipeg, and I am now expecting their full report by the end of June.

Mr. Struthers: Madam Speaker, then why will this minister not indicate to regional health authorities that he will not approve plans to amalgamate and reduce emergency medical services to the community of Manitou at least until he hears from this Emergency Medical Services working group whenever it is going to report?

Mr. Stefanson: Again, Madam Speaker, as I have indicated to the member for Dauphin, RHAs, the regional health authorities, are represented on the Emergency Medical Services working group along with municipal organizations, and they continue to focus on providing ambulance services until that final report is submitted and until we determine what those recommendations are and how to deal with this very important issue on a go-forward basis. As we have said in this House on many occasions, maintaining the strong volunteer commitment and volunteer base we have throughout all of Manitoba is a very important part of any changes that will be put in place on a go-forward basis for our ambulance services.

Public Accounts Committee Reforms

Mr. Tim Sale (Crescentwood): Madam Speaker, in the March 31, '97, report of the Provincial Auditor and the March '98 report of

the same Auditor, the Auditor made strong recommendations about the absolutely dismal state of Manitoba's Public Accounts committee. He said it complies the least of all provinces in Canada with the guidelines, and he recommended strongly that action be taken to reform this committee.

Can the Minister of Finance indicate why absolutely nothing has been done on two successive reports of the Provincial Auditor to have this committee's function strengthened and brought in line with other provinces?

Hon. Harold Gilleshammer (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, the member for Crescentwood is factually incorrect in his assertions. We have attempted to have work done at the committee level with the members of the opposition, and they have yet to show any interest in developing some plans regarding the Provincial Auditor's report.

Mr. Sale: Madam Speaker, can the minister explain why the previous minister made a commitment to get this process going more than a year ago? He has broken that commitment. Will this Finance minister do the same thing and break any commitment he makes in regard to the Public Accounts committee?

Mr. Gilleshammer: I am assured that our House leader has communicated with the opposition an interest in developing some proposals, and we have yet to hear back from them.

Mr. Sale: Will the minister, who knows that this side of the House offered co-operation two years ago, last year, last February, finally take some action, call a committee meeting, set up the committee to modernize the accounts? Will he be accountable for a change, Madam Speaker?

Mr. Gilleshammer: Madam Speaker, as I indicated in my first answer, the member for Crescentwood is factually incorrect, and we have made some attempts to have this committee called and have yet to hear from the House leader of the official opposition.

Versatile Farm Equipment Impact of Case Corporation Sale

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, New Holland owned by Fiat has bought Case Corporation. Case operates a heavy-duty tractor plant in North Dakota with similar operations to the Versatile plant here in Manitoba. This purchase represents both an opportunity, we believe, or a potential risk to the workers in the plant here in Manitoba.

Has the Premier been in touch with the owners of Versatile to explore the positive opportunities for Manitoba and deal with the potential risk for this new takeover?

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): I have, during the past few days, obviously been involved in the Western Premiers' Conference and have not been at my desk since the announcement was made. Having said that, we have over the years established an excellent relationship with New Holland. I have met with their principals, including their CEO, at their head office in London on several occasions. We have maintained, through that process, such a good relationship that they closed down a factory in Gent, Belgium, and moved their two-wheel-drive tractor plant here to Manitoba. Other measures were made in recognition of the high quality and the work done here as well as the competitiveness of our economy.

So we will continue to follow up on that matter using the good relationship that we have built with them to ensure that we do everything possible to turn this into an even better opportunity for the Manitoba plant.

* (1420)

Mr. Doer: We look forward to the job level of that plant returning to the 1,100 jobs hopefully in the future with these potential opportunities. Over a hundred Manitoba firms supply materials to the Versatile plant in this province. Again, the workers at the plant are very concerned. They are optimistic about the opportunities; they are also concerned about the risk with the situation of plants in the United States owned by Case and possible impact on their jobs.

Has the Premier met with the union representatives, the worker representatives also, to deal with some of their concerns and their ideas of how Manitoba can best put our case forward to ensure a continued employment at the plant and expanded employment at the plant in the future?

Mr. Filmon: I am sure that our government would be interested in hearing the views of the union representatives. We know that major companies such as Monarch Industries, Vansco Electronics and others have a very significant stake in the future of the Versatile Ford New Holland plant. I certainly believe that we will be following up on those opportunities.

Mr. Doer: Would the Premier meet directly with the employee representatives, with the auto workers organization, who have a number of ideas of how we can deal with the creative opportunities for Manitoba in the Versatile plant given the situation with the North Dakota plant which they are investigating? Would the Premier be willing to meet with the employee representatives to again have both the approach to management, which the Premier is willing to undertake which we would appreciate, and work with the employee representatives as well?

Mr. Filmon: Given the pressures on my time, I am not certain that I would, but I would say that the Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism (Mr. Tweed) or other representatives of government would be happy to do so.

Public Housing Income Limits

Ms. Marianne Cerilli (Radisson): I have raised a number of times with the Minister of Housing the fact that working families living in Manitoba Housing are paying at times more than market rent for their rental apartments. Based on information he gave to me from the devolution agreement which says, and I quote from Schedule D: in urban areas, housing income limits will be developed at least for one-, two- and three-bedroom units for residential accommodation, I want to ask the minister: what is the income limit for a three-bedroom unit in Manitoba Housing, and can he tell us if the commitments under the schedule have been kept?

Hon. Jack Reimer (Minister of Housing): Madam Speaker, in the calculation of rental that is charged by Manitoba Housing in our public housing units, it is all based upon the individual's income. The rent is calculated as a percentage of the income. If it is a bachelor unit, it is 25 percent; if it is a family unit, it is 27 percent. So, whether it is a three bedroom or a four bedroom, it is based upon that individual's income. If it is a family unit, like I mentioned before, it would be 27 percent of that individual's income.

Ms. Cerilli: Madam Speaker, it is unclear if the minister does not answer the question because he does not understand it—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Would the honourable member please pose a supplementary question.

Ms. Cerilli: I am asking the minister about the requirements through CMHC for housing income limits. I have written him a letter of a family that lives in St. Vital that is paying \$713 for rent. Can the Minister of Housing explain why the rent for this family in public housing is more than \$200 more for a three-bedroom apartment than what they could rent in the market? What is the limit?

Mr. Reimer: Madam Speaker, as I mentioned in my first answer, the rental is based upon a percentage of the income. If a person makes more money, they are naturally going to be paying more rent. You know, it is based on their income. The amount that the member has mentioned is relative to the income that this couple is paying. The market rent that might be available in the area may be less or more, but the rent from Manitoba Housing is based on a percentage. As I mentioned, if the person is making more money or his income is relatively high, the rent that they will pay will be 27 percent of that income.

Ms. Cerilli: I want to ask the minister if he has read the latest copy of West Central Street's magazine which says that Manitoba Housing is like Hotel California. You can check out, but you can never leave.

Madam Speaker, I want to ask the minister if he does not understand the problem that

people who enter Manitoba Housing, who are on social allowance, then they find a job, their income goes up, but because they are paying 27 percent of their rent geared to income, they cannot move. What program is in place by this government to address that problem where now tenants are paying more to Manitoba Housing than they would in the private market?

Mr. Reimer: Madam Speaker, in Winnipeg there are various areas where there are rental accommodations available for people. If people feel that the rent that is being charged is out of line with what they are wanting to pay because of the percentage that we charge and because of the formula rent, there are private accommodations, there are other accommodations that can be sought out in other areas. But the idea of the percentage rate is a rate that we charge on our rental accommodations, and that is the rate that we have been charging and we will continue to charge.

Public Accounts Committee Reforms

Mr. Tim Sale (Crescentwood): Madam Speaker, the Minister of Finance knows full well that it is he who calls the Public Accounts committee. The Minister of Finance tried to give the House information that there had been approaches made asking for such meeting. That is fundamentally untrue. Will the Minister of Finance explain why he and his predecessor have broken commitments to reform the Public Accounts committee? Will he explain why this Public Accounts committee is the worst in Canada and has not met for more than a year? Will he get on his feet and explain the failure of his government in this regard?

Hon. Harold Gillehammer (Minister of Finance): Madam Speaker, contrary to what the member has indicated, these arrangements are worked out between the House leaders, and I know that approaches have been made to the House leader for the official opposition. My understanding is a significant response has not come back.

Mr. Sale: Madam Speaker, we have been asking for a reform process for more than two years for this accounts committee. What is the

government afraid of? Why will it not let Public Accounts function like a standard Public Accounts committee? What is the minister afraid of?

Mr. Gillehammer: Madam Speaker, the honourable member has never been a great fan of process, and these arrangements are made between the House leaders. My understanding is that the House leader has indicated to the House leader of the official opposition that we are willing to meet and he has not responded at this time.

Madam Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

* (1430)

Speaker's Rulings

Madam Speaker: I have two rulings for the House.

The honourable member for The Maples (Mr. Kowalski) on May 10, 1999, raised a point of order concerning comments made by the honourable member for Transcona (Mr. Reid). It was alleged that the comments imputed unworthy motives to the honourable member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux). What the honourable member for Transcona had said was: "I am not quite clear why the member for Inkster is so sensitive, but perhaps he has an ulterior political motive in mind by taking the steps that he has just done."

I am ruling that there was no point of order. After perusing Hansard, in my opinion, the honourable member for Transcona did not impute unworthy motives.

On May 13, 1999, I took under advisement a point of order raised by the honourable Leader of the official opposition (Mr. Doer).

I had cautioned the honourable Leader of the official opposition about words he had used in Question Period just prior to his raising a point of order. I had cautioned the member only and had not specifically requested that the words be withdrawn. Therefore, the honourable Leader of the official opposition did not have a point of order.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Mennonite University

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): Madam Speaker, recently it was announced that the former Manitoba School for the Deaf facility will become the home of Manitoba's new Mennonite university, with the signing of a \$3.5-million deal between the province and the Mennonite College Federation. Three existing colleges, Menno Simons, the Canadian Mennonite Bible College and Concord College will combine to create the new university. The establishment of a single Mennonite university has been greatly anticipated by the Mennonite community in Manitoba, and this announcement ensures that plans are moving ahead as scheduled.

The Mennonite university will offer degrees, diplomas, certificates, in a wide range of subject areas including religious studies, music, conflict resolution, Third World economic development and social sciences. The establishment of the Mennonite university is a very positive development for Manitoba's post-secondary education system. Combining the three existing colleges will give students more options in higher-quality programs, while allowing them the choice to study at a facility that emphasizes Mennonite values and heritage.

Post-secondary education is increasingly important in today's competitive job market, and I have no doubt that this development will encourage more students to pursue post-secondary studies in Manitoba.

Economic Growth

Mr. Leonard Evans (Brandon East): Madam Speaker, I rise to make a few comments on the serious economic situation we are being faced with in this province today. In spite of the propaganda from the government, the economic figures that we now have show Manitoba to be below the Canadian average in 10 out of 13 indicators. We have 13 basic indicators; 10 of them show Manitoba below average, two show us at average, and only one is above the average. The one above the average is unemployment; the other two that are at average is housing starts and weekly earnings. But even there, the level

of housing starts is only a pittance compared to the level of the housing starts that occurred in the 1980s under the previous NDP government. It is only about a quarter of the level that we experienced at that time.

Similarly, with average weekly earnings, we are below the Canadian average. We have sunk below the Canadian average during most of the years of this government. Then, when we look at the 10 indicators below the Canadian average, we find that we are below on a rate of real growth. We are below on the average in the retail trade. These are figures, the latest that we have as of May 14, 1999, the year to date for this year compared to last year. We are below on manufacturing shipments. We are certainly below on population growth. We are below on employment growth. We are eight out of 10 provinces in the growth of jobs in this country. That is not a record to be satisfied with. In terms of building permits, we are eight out of 10 provinces. Capital investment, we are second from the bottom, eight out of 10—pardon me, capital investment, we are nine out of 10. We are the second worst situation in the country, and likewise with construction work.

So, Madam Speaker, my message to the government is that they should not delude themselves with their propaganda. They should look at the economic facts and face the situation that this province is now faced with, and bring forward some policies that are going to improve the standard of living of Manitobans. Thank you.

International Missing Children's Day

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Madam Speaker, I would like to speak about an important event which is taking place today. May 25 is recognized as International Missing Children's Day, a day to remember children like Michael Dunahee, Jacob Wetterling, Kristen French and our own Sarah Kelly.

Today, all members of this Chamber were given green ribbons of hope to wear in support of International Missing Children's Day. The green ribbon is a symbol of hope for the return of all missing children. More than 62,000 children were reported missing in Canada in

1998. More than 3,700 of those children were from Manitoba. Of the children missing in Manitoba, more than 3,200 ran away from home, three were abducted by strangers and 11 children were abducted by a parent during or after a divorce proceeding.

Organizations such as Child Find Manitoba are dedicated to reuniting missing children with their families and to preventing situations like this from occurring. In 1998, over 150 volunteers donated some 8,438 volunteer hours to Child Find Manitoba. This is amazing, and their efforts are to be commended for there are many times when dealing with these situations that it is extremely challenging. It is my hope that in the future we see a great reduction or better yet a total elimination in the number of our missing children, whether it is in Manitoba, in Canada or throughout the world. Please join me in finding ways to bring our children home. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

* (1440)

Wolseley School Festival of the Arts

Ms. Jean Friesen (Wolseley): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask all members of the Legislature to join with me in congratulating the principal, staff, students and parents of Wolseley School on the success of the first festival of the arts held last week. Over 700 works of art were on display for the community, ranging from literature, theatre, music, sculpture to poetry, water colours, landscapes, still life, portraits and much more.

I particularly enjoyed Ben's poem on Blankie, Sarah's sculpture self-portrait, the river maps in clay, the 16th Century ship, Caitlyn's flowers, water colours and the fantasy animals of Room 1 and the colour dictionary of Room 6. The exhibit reflected all aspects of the curriculum: science, history, language, music and mathematics. It showed us an educational community with curiosity, with research skills, with the ability to co-operate and to reflect on and draw upon its strengths.

This has been a year-long effort of the whole school. The staff clearly worked together and invested much effort in their own professional

development. The self-confidence and pride of the students and the genuine delight and interest of parents and community were a tribute to the hard work of all.

March Against Racism

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Speaker, I too wanted to just pay tribute to a special group of people today. We had 200-plus youth that took the walk from Maples Collegiate to the Legislature, and some in fact ran. But what it is about is Maples Collegiate has a unity committee, March Against Racism, which has now gone some four years. I know the member for The Maples (Mr. Kowalski) has been very supportive of this group. In fact, he was one of the individuals who was running from the front to the back making sure everyone was kept in line and the line continued on.

There is just a phenomenal effort that is put on by the unity committee, and I applaud all of their actions and the actions of the 200-plus students who took the time to be able to heighten the awareness of racial attitudes. For those individuals who did not participate in the unity march, they are still made aware of it. The long-term impacts are very positive when we see so many young people getting involved in such a positive way. I know individuals, whether it is the students or the support staff, individuals like Cindy Blicq and others, that the day is well worthwhile, and I think a very positive message is sent.

I just applaud all the actions of those who got involved and made the unity march possible. I congratulate them.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. Darren Praznik (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, first of all, I understand that there may be a willingness of the House to waive private members' hour today.

Madam Speaker: Is there unanimous consent of the House to waive private members' hour? [agreed]

Mr. Praznik: Madam Speaker, it would be my intention to call, with leave, I believe it is Bill

27, which is the amendment to The Essential Services Act, but I understand that there is not leave of the House to do that.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Does the honourable government House leader wish to have it established on record or not?

Mr. Praznik: No, I do not think that is necessary, Madam Speaker; I just wanted to flag that there was not leave of the House, but it was our intention to call it.

I would ask if the Speaker could call for second readings Bills 14, 24 and 25. Following that, I will be moving the motion to go into Committee of Supply.

SECOND READINGS

Bill 14—The Amusements Amendment Act

Hon. Rosemary Vodrey (Minister of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship): I move, seconded by the Minister of Environment (Mrs. McIntosh), that Bill 14, The Amusements Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur les divertissements, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mrs. Vodrey: Madam Speaker, this is a very short bill, but it will give our Manitoba Film Classification Board important powers to enable it to fulfill its responsibilities to Manitobans. The purpose of Bill 14 is to broaden the scope of The Amusements Act to encompass all current and future electronic formats. In the next few years, it is expected that digital video disks or DVDs will replace videos as the predominant home video format. When the current act was brought into force, there was no way to anticipate the extent or the speed of the development of video technology. The Film Classification Board can and does classify films exhibited in theatres and retail video stores sold or rented for home use; however, it does not currently classify DVDs or video and computer games.

The DVD format is the next generation of optical disk storage technology and can hold

video, audio and computer data. DVD is expected to supply home entertainment, computer and business information with a single-disk format. It is anticipated that it will eventually replace audio CD, video tape, laser disk, CD-ROM and perhaps even video game cartridges. With these amendments, the board will be able to classify DVDs and video games. However, this time it is our intent not to introduce a board rating system for video games. Instead, we will be promoting the voluntary use of the entertainment software rating board system or ESRB for classifying video and computer games.

This industry rating system is widely used in North America and appears to be very effective in outlining the contents of games. The government intends to conduct a public information campaign to make parents more aware of the ESRB system and how it can help them determine what is suitable for their children. We will make information on the system available in participating stores throughout the province. This bill is a proactive measure that we believe will enable the Film Classification Board to address the classification of all new forms of video entertainment. It is intended to anticipate entertainment technology developments that could arise in the future and provides the potential for government ratings of video games, if necessary, further down the road. This bill will allow our classification system to respond to fast-evolving technology and enable us to support Manitoba parents in monitoring what their children view.

Madam Speaker, if there are any questions, I am pleased to answer them. Otherwise, we are pleased to support this bill, and we look forward to moving it on to the committee stage. Thank you.

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): I move, seconded by the member for Broadway (Mr. Santos), that debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

Bill 24—The Municipal Amendment Act

Hon. Leonard Derkach (Minister of Rural Development): Madam Speaker, I move,

seconded by the Minister of Health (Mr. Stefanson) that Bill 24, The Municipal Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur les municipalités, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of the House.

Motion presented.

* (1450)

Mr. Derkach: Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce for second reading Bill 24, The Municipal Amendment Act. As members of this House know or will recall, our government had the pleasure of heralding in a new municipal act in 1997. Since then, the new act has served municipal governments very well. However, when legislative acts are completely rewritten, as was The Municipal Act in 1996, there will be a need to amend and clarify certain parts from time to time. This ensures that the act continues to serve the needs of Manitobans, and this is the intent, of course, of Bill 24.

For example, some of the amendments will accommodate local initiatives by some communities to restructure. Two communities that immediately come to mind are Pine Falls and Ninette. These communities have examined or are in the process of examining and changing the fundamental structure of their communities to enhance their viability and sustainability for the long term. An amendment is also being proposed to enable Cranberry Portage, a remote community located in the R.M. of Kelsey north of The Pas, the opportunity for self-sufficiency. This amendment would allow more flexibility to the legislation so that it would recognize and adapt to the unique characteristics of that community.

In other areas, we are proposing some housekeeping amendments, such as extending the leave-of-absence period for municipal employees elected to council. This would coincide with last year's amendment changing the term of office from three years to four years.

We are also proposing a number of amendments related to the municipal tax sale process. These amendments will clarify the process leading up to and regarding when and how tax sales proceed. In addition, they will balance the interests of property owners who may be at risk of losing their properties with the

interests of municipalities that rely on the timely payment of property taxes to fund the delivery of municipal services to residents and property owners. For example, we have strengthened considerably the existing requirements to notify owners of the tax sale. Under the proposed amendments, tax sales must also be locally advertised and additional notices are required to be posted in the municipality and/or near the property. In addition, it will be required that the first notice of the impending sale be personally delivered to the property owner, with the new requirement for a second notice to go out to the property owner. This will ensure that property owners are given every opportunity to understand and be aware of the serious consequences for them if the proceedings were to continue to the point of a tax sale.

Madam Speaker, the amendments we are proposing would also allow for greater flexibility in the way municipalities and property owners might arrange payment of taxes. Our intent is to ensure that the tax sale option is truly a measure of last resort. Part of the flexibility would be to ensure that properties that have only nominal taxes in arrears be excluded from tax sales. Amendments also are being introduced that will place restrictions on who can purchase properties at tax sale auctions. This would not only ensure objectivity, openness and fairness in the tax sale process, it would, more importantly, assure the public that the process is objective, open and fair.

The amendments I am introducing today will result in continued improvements to The Municipal Act. The amendments will also ensure that municipalities and local governments are able to meet the changing needs of Manitobans. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): I move, seconded by the member for Brandon East (Mr. L. Evans), that debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

**Bill 25—The Municipal Assessment
Amendment Act**

Hon. Leonard Derkach (Minister of Rural Development): I move, seconded by the

Minister of Highways and Transportation (Mr. Praznik), that The Municipal Assessment Amendment Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'évaluation municipale, be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of the House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Derkach: Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce for second reading Bill 25, The Municipal Assessment Amendment Act. The Municipal Assessment Act was rewritten in 1990. Since then a number of amendments have been made to streamline the assessment process.

A number of amendments that have been proposed will enable us to make some additional changes which are of a housekeeping nature. For example, we propose to amend the definition of mobile home to bring it into line with recent amendments in The Municipal Act. Similarly, to be consistent with the definition contained in The Municipal Act, we propose to amend the definition of municipal administrator.

Other amendments are being proposed which are somewhat more significant. These are amendments which are in reaction to recent court interpretations of the statute. The Court of Appeal has heard and ruled on a number of important issues over the past year. The court's decisions were not in accordance with what the act had originally intended. Therefore it is being proposed in Bill 25 that the appeal provisions of the act be amended. This will serve to clarify the authority of the Board of Revision and the municipal board to allow them to increase an assessment on appeal, authority that this Legislature had approved in the past.

Madam Speaker, the proposed amendment aims to clarify for the courts that the municipal board has the ultimate authority to revise an assessment to any amount necessary in correctly determining value.

The amendments I am introducing today to The Municipal Assessment Act will do a number of things. First, they will result in continued improvements to the act. Secondly, they will restore the authority of the municipal board to decide on an assessment appeal as it deems proper.

There are two additional issues which have arisen since our legislative proposals were submitted in August of 1998. The first issue deals with the tax status of the Elmwood Cemetery in Winnipeg. Currently, private and profit cemeteries are subject to taxation on lands and buildings, with the exception of where internment exists. Meanwhile, cemeteries owned and operated by a municipality or a religious denomination are exempt from taxation under The Municipal Assessment Act.

A group known as the friends of Elmwood Cemetery incorporated recently acquired ownership of the property and has requested exemption from municipal and school taxes. The Elmwood Cemetery has been in financial difficulty for some time. The previous owner set aside \$1.3 million to serve as a perpetual care fund to maintain the property. Since the money falls short of what is required, friends of Elmwood Cemetery hope to raise \$5 million for the perpetual care fund.

Madam Speaker, the loss of municipal and school taxes by exempting the cemetery from paying taxes is somewhat minimal. Therefore, this bill also seeks tax exemptions for the Elmwood Cemetery as well as for cemeteries owned or operated by nonprofit corporations.

The second issue that has arisen relates to the assessment of small craft harbours in the province. The federal government is currently in the process of divesting itself of responsibilities for operating and maintaining recreational harbours and plan to lease their fishing harbours to local harbour authorities. Manitoba has 21 recreational and 38 fishing harbours operated by the federal government.

Under the current provisions, the federal government has made payments in lieu of taxes on land and buildings associated with harbours but has not paid taxes on wharves and docks. However, with groups taking over these harbours from the federal government, they become taxable.

In the case of one harbour in particular, the revenue generated from the harbour is not even sufficient enough to cover the annual tax bill. The implications of exempting small craft

harbours are minor, since the total payable on all harbours in Manitoba is less than \$12,000. It is therefore proposed that The Municipal Assessment Act be amended to allow for an exemption of the real property used as a harbour by a harbour authority.

Madam Speaker, I seek the thoughtful consideration of all members of this House in moving forward with Bill 25, The Municipal Assessment Act. Thank you.

* (1500)

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): I move, seconded by the member for Osborne (Ms. McGifford), that debate be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

Hon. Darren Praznik (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, I would move, seconded by the honourable Minister of Rural Development (Mr. Derkach), that this House do now resolve itself into a committee to consider of the Supply to be granted to Her Majesty.

Motion agreed to.

* (1510)

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Mr. Chairperson (Gerry McAlpine): 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 Education and Training. When the committee last sat, it was considering item 16.2. School Programs (c) Assessment and Evaluation (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits, on page 47 of the Estimates book. Shall the item pass?

Ms. Jean Friesen (Wolseley): The minister is aware of a number of concerns about the prospect of local marking this year, and I wondered if the minister had any response to the concerns that have been raised. One of the ones I think that perhaps is the most significant is the

possibility of different standards being applied. Certainly there has been some training done from the department, but how is the minister ensuring that a similar standard is being applied?

Hon. James McCrae (Minister of Education and Training): Local marking was initiated partly in response to concerns that had been raised about the central marking process. That was one of the reasons for doing that. We are concerned about any suggestion that different standards might be applied to this effort. That is why training sessions are made available for local markers. There is a 20 percent audit of local marking, so that the department can compare that to the standards applied by the department, and I think that we need to gain some experience in local marking, having brought it in in response to concerns raised and, I guess, displeasure raised with the idea of doing it centrally.

These questions, by the way, were questions raised by the honourable member for St. James (Ms. Mihychuk) when last we met and we talked about these matters.

Ms. Friesen: Can the minister tell me what the process will be after the audit? The audit will presumably attempt to evaluate whether similar standards have been applied across the board. In the event that similar standards have not been applied, what is the next step?

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairman, as I said, because there is training that goes along with the marking work, we would not expect to see a deviation of an extent that would cause concern, recognizing that the people involved are professional people, that they are of a high calibre. They are members of the Manitoba teaching profession for whom we have a great deal of respect. So we simply do not expect to see the kinds of results that are being discussed here.

I suppose if it turned out that we were wrong about that, we would have to re-evaluate the situation at that point, but knowing the high level of professionalism that exists with Manitoba teachers and knowing that we are attempting through training to have consistent results, we hope that this question is hypothetical.

Ms. Friesen: Can the minister tell me the extent of training that teachers are receiving in local marking, and can he also tell me what avenues of appeal there are for students at the end of this process of local marking?

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairman, co-ordinators from the various divisions are given two days of training respecting the marking of locally marked tests. They return to their divisions and provide a half day of training for the teachers involved in the local marking.

With respect to appeals, which is simply another marking procedure, tests marked at the local level are appealable at the local level; tests marked at the central level are appealable at the central level.

* (1520)

Ms. Friesen: Does the minister have a standard set of regulations for local appeals, for example, the time that must elapse, the price of an appeal, the usual regulations that surround an appeal, or is each division to be developing their own?

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairman, for centrally marked tests, there is a two-week appeal period, and when it is turned over for local marking, divisions are made aware of the policy that we use and they are at liberty to choose whatever policy they deem to be appropriate.

As to what it costs at the local level, that, too, is in the hands of school divisions. For centrally marked exams, there is a \$35 administrative fee for a re-mark, and that includes administration costs and the costs directly for the re-marking process.

Ms. Friesen: Is the minister requiring divisions to submit information on their policy? Are we going to have a central record of what these policies are across the province? It would seem to me that it would be desirable to have some comparability between these or amongst these.

Mr. McCrae: This is the first year that local marking has been in effect. At this point, an overall policy is not indicated in my view, although I think we should keep our minds open to that for the reasons stated by the honourable

member, that being consistency and comparability.

We are still trying to ascertain, and we will be using the Advisory Committee on Implementation in this regard, what are the weaknesses and strengths of the two systems and whether we should continue with the local marking. We have learned from the field that those involved in central marking certainly have spoken very highly of the professional development experience and opportunity it is for teachers. One of the reasons for moving to local marking is to extend the benefits of that, extend it to the school division level, so that we can see more of the benefits of the professional development opportunity.

I know that officially the Manitoba Teachers' Society has made certain positions known, has taken certain positions. I am not sure always whether the society—well, obviously no organization speaks for 100 percent of its membership and I can understand that, but I do know that teachers involved in the process have made extremely positive comments about what they have learned and what value it has been to them in participating in this way.

So it is not clear to me, having moved to local marking in response to concerns, whether we have adequately met those concerns. If not, as I say, our minds are open about this, but I would not like to take teachers out of the equation because they have demonstrated and made known the value of that process. Again, I am quick to add, I know that is not 100 percent, because certainly the Teachers' Society represents the views of lots of teachers in Manitoba. They have taken positions; that is their job to do so.

So I think we will be in a better position to be more definitive about the local marking experience and rules that might flow from that should we opt to continue along that path. If there should be rules that flow from that in order to protect consistency and comparability, that is something that can be considered in the future.

Ms. Friesen: Can the minister tell me whether teachers who are to be involved in the local marking are making a commitment of one year

or two years? Does this whole process have to be done over again with another group of teachers next year, and what are the criteria the department has suggested for the teachers who are to be involved? Are they ones who must have taught that particular year? Are they ones who must not have taught that particular year? What criteria and what comparability is there across the province in the level of experience, particularly immediate experience of the teachers?

The minister may be mindful of some of the criticisms that were made of some of the central marking in the early years, and that was that some of the teachers who were involved might have been retired teachers, had not taught the course itself, may not have been involved in it most recently. I do not know whether that is still the case or not. It is not a criticism I heard last year, but what I am looking for is who is going to be marking this, and has the department got some criteria that it is offering to the co-ordinators for the choice or volunteering of teachers?

Mr. McCrae: It is not the position of the department that it would restrict teachers should, in a subsequent year—now it would not be next year because there are different subject matters that will be marked locally and centrally every second year. So it is the divisions that we ask to choose the teachers to come in for co-ordinator training and then they return to the divisions. I do not think we have a concern with someone marking on more than one occasion, or for that matter for being trained on more than one occasion depending on who the divisions choose for these functions.

* (1530)

Ms. Friesen: Could the minister tell me about the half day of training that teachers receive, are there guidelines for that, or is that individually developed by each of the co-ordinators?

Mr. McCrae: The two-day training that is undertaken for the co-ordinator markers who come to the government for that training and then return to their teachers locally, to provide them with a half day of training, are provided with manuals, something we can share with the

honourable member although we cannot do it today. If the honourable member wants that, we can make that available to her. That manual is used then to train local teachers and that manual is available to those local teachers. After all again I point out these are teachers who are trained and educated in imparting curricula to their students and to testing them themselves. So here we have them working with the department in an assessment process which includes, as I said, the production of a manual in the given subject that is being tested. As I say, I can volunteer to make those manuals available to the honourable member.

Ms. Friesen: Yes, I would be interested in seeing the manuals. I would like to ask the minister about the earlier years of the Grade 12 tests. There is, I think on average, about a 78 to 80 percent pass rate in English at the moment, but the pass rate in mathematics is much lower. But in both cases that is not the issue I want to deal with at the moment, but I am interesting in knowing how the government has tracked those who did not pass; how many are taking it a second time; how many are not appearing again on the records for the examination; what are the results for those who are taking it for a second time; do we have people who are taking it for a third time, for example, in the English which will have been there long enough for people to have taken it a third time.

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairman, the answer is soon but not yet. Perhaps by the end of our next testing session we will be in a better position. That is a year from now. By that time we will have four years, I guess, of data to begin building the kind of database that the honourable member is talking about so that we can put the results of our assessment program to better use throughout the system. So I think the kind of information she is asking for is being gathered, but we are not in a position yet to rely on it because it is still rather new.

Ms. Friesen: Well, I am obviously interested in building the database, but four years seems to me time enough to have some understanding of the impact on students of the testing. The minister is aware, I think, that there are concerns in some cases that the testing may simply be something which pushes a child out of school.

I would have thought the government would have been interested in developing the data, finding the material that gave evidence to that one way or another. Now has it done that? You can certainly tell that after two years. You have four testings. I mean, you have two tests a year, so it is not just the year. You have two opportunities to do that. There have also been, I think, implications of difficulties with certain kinds of time tabling and the testing. Again, has the government looked at any of those and prepared any response on that for its own purposes or for the public purposes on the impacts of that on school timetabling and also curriculum issues?

For example, has the government also looked at the difference in pass rates? Obviously, you have set the bar very high in one area, and you have set it at a level in another area where 80 percent of the children can succeed. Why has that difference occurred? What kind of survey is the government doing? What kind of discussion is it entering into with the curriculum designers, with the teachers, with the professional development trainers, to look at these issues?

Four years seems to me long enough to have developed some principles and some means of response on that.

Mr. McCrae: I would have to take issue with the suggestion that the testing regime would have the effect of pushing a child out of school. Teachers are involved in developing the assessment process, and it is very simplistic to suggest that a test would put a child out of school. In fact, it is too simplistic and defies credibility.

An Honourable Member: Prove it.

*(1540)

Mr. McCrae: Well, I think it is up to—

An Honourable Member: That is why I am asking for the evidence because there is that argument.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. We will have to maintain decorum in the committee so that the

information can be recorded. I would ask the honourable minister to continue with your response.

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairman, the honourable member suggests, says that I should prove what I have said, and I guess it goes the other way around. There was testing long before the government came along with any testing. To say that the province-wide testing scheme that is designed to show we have quality in our curriculum and designed to show that the curriculum is being passed on to the students, that that somehow is a bad thing, is simply not meeting with approval. The people want to see that. If they are going to spend \$781 million for an education program for their children, I would think that most people would be and are quite supportive of the concept and the reality of testing against the standards we are setting to ensure that we are meeting them.

I am as sensitive as the honourable member or anyone else with respect to children who have difficulties. To say, all of a sudden, that Johnny is having a bad time at school and it is all because of tests, well, you know, tests were here long before the New Directions came forward. One might want to dig a little bit deeper and find out just what is the problem with Johnny rather than simply because a certain group which I support is opposed, so I therefore have to be opposed and so that everything that goes on in the system is now going to be the fault of that which I and my friends are opposing. It is too simple; it defies credibility. Little Johnny has something else going on because the vast majority of children taking these tests are quite okay with them in the sense that it is not going to push them out of school.

I think it borders on irresponsible to suggest that a level of accountability in the system which helps us to identify just what it is in an academic sense that is not going right for Johnny or that we can improve, that would be a more responsible approach rather than simply to say, well, my friends are against testing so I am going to be against it too. That is not applying logical thinking; it is not applying reason; it is simply not looking fairly at the situation. The idea here is, among other things, to improve the overall level of education our children are

getting. An awful lot of experts would agree that this assessment process, along with improved and updated curricula, is the way to go. If it were only Manitoba out on an adventure on its own, I guess there might be a little more there to be critical about, but when I know that other jurisdictions are doing the same thing, it is for a reason. It is because we are competing in a global marketplace.

The world of the future—leave the marketplace out of it—our human and interpersonal relationships are affected by what we are learning in school and what are we doing to make the next generation ready. We are not doing Johnny a favour simply by off the cuff suggesting that the tests are pushing him out of school so therefore we will let him go, and we will blame the government. I mean that is just not good enough. Little Johnny deserves better from us than that.

If there is something wrong with this child, let us look at the reasons for it rather than to look at one of the effects of his problem and go after that. That is the shortest term, narrow kind of thinking that I can imagine, and it is the greatest disservice to a child. I mean I am surprised that responsible members of the Legislature would be taken in by that sort of thing.

It was not that long ago I had a meeting with a group of parents, and one of the moms was telling us of the trouble that her child was having, and she was attributing the troubles to the tests. Well, I think it turned out, after some discussion, that it was fairly apparent that there were more things to be looking at in this child's life than simply the fact that we are trying to establish standards and tests to see that we are achieving those standards.

Yes, we recognize there are children who have circumstances that require some special attention or special handling, and that is why there are children who are exempt from these tests because we know that not all children are the same, but most children, is what we need to keep in mind, most so-called normal children in today's society are not unable to take in what the curriculum implies and not unable to be tested.

I mean I have children too and I was a child and went through testing as well, and I remember thinking, my goodness, would school not be a lot better if we did not have to do these tests. Well, now in hindsight I think back and think it would have been a lot better for me, it would have been easier, not better. We are not doing anybody any favour by excusing them of the responsibility of having to achieve in order to achieve their school education because we can just excuse them, those who do not want to or those who are encouraged to rebel against a system that is designed to get them properly educated and excuse them and excuse them and excuse them, but who is going to look after them when they are 30? Who is going to look after them when they are 40 and when they are 50 and they need to be looking after themselves?

We can say, I guess, well, because of them, we should abandon the whole system, and you know, just leave it all up to people who do not see the need to measure up to any standards. But that will not only put our children individually into a disadvantageous position as they get out into the world, but it will place our province at a less competitive position in the scheme of things in our country and more and more internationally. I mean if you just look at the people in this world that we are doing business with and, yes, competing with, we have to keep up or we will be lost economically and in a social context as well. Our children deserve a break. They deserve a responsible system that will allow them to achieve in those days when they are finished their formal education.

So I really do take issue with the comment about pushing a child out of school. If there are any circumstances where there are children who are simply not able, for health reasons, to handle the work, that is another matter, but to make a blanket statement like that simply suggests there is no support on the part of the honourable member or her party for New Directions which imply good curricula and imply good teaching and imply testing and imply the changes we need to make as a result of the things we learn from that testing.

The honourable member suggests that we should be moving faster than tomorrow. When somebody complains we are moving too fast,

then we should slow down, and then we should speed up, and then we should slow down. I think the department has a big job on its hands. The leadership of the past few years has asked the department to do a lot of things, and the department has been doing a lot of things and attempting to be responsive to the field. The field has on occasion made a good case that we are moving too fast or we are testing too early in the year, too late in the year, whatever it happens to be, we are not getting materials out quick enough. All of those things, some of them have turned out to catch the attention of the department, and rightly so, and adjustments have been made. That is a reasonable thing to do. I think it would be unfair to the children, certainly unfair to the teachers, to be moving along in such a way that we are not listening to them at all, that we are not consulting them.

* (1550)

The reason we can promote what it is we are doing is because we do have so much partnership with the field. That is something that I am sure I know my predecessors have asked happen, and I certainly would continue in that tradition to keep consulting people in the field. I guess one has to be careful about consultation because you never get the same answer, I guess, from any one individual, and you have to listen to all of the answers and try to build the best consensus that you can based on the principles you want to achieve. I think there initially was general agreement about the principles we want to achieve.

That being said, it becomes politically quite easy to agree with the principles but pick apart the implementation. I have seen it happen in a number of things in the past. It is just really easy from a political standpoint, which means that without being unduly unfair with anybody, look at where people are coming from and try to figure that out. If consistently they put the kids first, then they should have the ear of decision makers, they should have the ear of implementers. It is when we start veering off and putting some other agenda ahead of our children that we get off the track. I think we do a disservice to the children every time we do that. There are all kinds of excellent, excellent people out there who simply are there, and I

have met lots of them. They are simply there because they want to see success achieved over and over again in the lives of these young people. I respect that very much. Those are the first people I am going to listen to.

Those who represent some political organization or some other kind of interest organization, well, I will listen to them, and so I should, but we have to remember from where people come. When it is a very simple concept that the children are the ones whose interests are being put above all other considerations, those people, they are simply credible, very credible, and deserve to have their point of view listened to. So when I know a teacher, for example, for most of the years of my life who simply makes the point that, you know, you are heading in the right direction, sometimes I think you are moving a little too fast, and, if we can identify where that is happening, slow it down a little bit, then we should do that. If there are other adjustments that need to be made, then we should do that and not hold fast simply because we are stubborn or because we have made a decision and that if we change it people will think that we are faltering along the route. Well, we are not faltering along the route. We have New Directions. We have the right directions. Sometimes we implement just a little bit wrong and need to make corrections. That has been happening. I think it is a sign of good will and a sign of co-operation with the field that we are prepared to do that.

The central marking business was one of the areas that I understand did not meet with everybody's approval. The department, in an attempt to work with the people in the field of education, made that adjustment to the local marking. Then the next thing you know some people are not happy with that too. So what it is that some people want? Well, I happen to know. Some people simply want to criticize the government. That is okay. That is what they are paid to do, and so that is what they do. They are earning their money. The fact is everybody should take a good, hard look at what their objectives are. Is their objective simply to replace the government? Well, that is one. Is their objective to get rid of the government in favour of one that they think is more favourable to them? That is another thing. It does not

always turn out that way, I have found in the past. Is the objective the best we can do for all the children of Manitoba? Well, bingo, that is the people that we should be listening the hardest to, and when they point out the error of our ways, be big enough to admit that we have moved too fast or gone too far or too quickly or whatever it happens to be.

Sometimes it is that we have not done enough, that we have not moved fast enough. That is fair too—but in a general sense just to make the point that this whole business of testing is wrong, that it is not meeting with approval with the vast majority of Manitobans who know darn well that everywhere else you go in the world people have to be accountable and people are reaching for higher and higher levels of technology and excellence, and Manitobans have proved in the past that they are able to run with that bunch and we are not about to let them get ahead of us in the future, so that means that from time to time, we have to look at what we are doing in our education system.

That is precisely what has been happening. We have been implementing over the past five years or so and making some genuine improvements. Ask the teachers; they will tell you. That is exactly what we are doing, but when it comes to all of the data that we need to form certain conclusions, the honourable member may make the point that we should be further along in that area. We are listening to that, but I think that given the magnitude of the tasks that the department and the teaching profession and the division people have been undertaking, it might be worthy to say that we have come a long distance and we have made significant improvements in our education system, and with a few more hurdles to get over, we will be in a position, I guess a position to evaluate more definitively and in more categorical ways how we are doing with New Directions.

Anybody who has any common sense I think would have to admit that we have made some significant improvements. You do not put all that effort into something that everybody agrees on and call for the efforts of many thousands of others and get that kind of support and effort without some kind of positive benefit. We know that is there, but I guess there are some

people who are just simply going to hold on to some ideas that are a little old now, a little bit out of step with the realities of the modern day society. That is okay. Everybody is entitled to his opinion, even opinions which ultimately it turns out are totally unsustainable. We do owe people the courtesy of listening to those opinions and working them into the equation as we continue to build a stronger and stronger system.

I think that is all I have to say about that.

Ms. Friesen: Well, the question dealt with evaluation of a government program. It asked for information and evidence about issues which clearly are concerning people, who I understand have already spoken to the minister as well.

What I had anticipated from the minister, I was asking for some evaluation after four years and in some cases eight exams, of the impact of these exams on students who for a variety of reasons are at the weaker end of the scale. It may be English as a second language; it may be the nature of their progress generally in school; it might have to do with other family responsibilities or other issues. What I had anticipated from the minister was an answer that said, yes, I have heard that criticism; we have looked at this, and we have found that the dropout rate at the Grade 12 level after the mathematics or after the English exam is 2 percent, 1 percent, 10 percent. If it is at the low end of the scale, we are looking at it; if it is at the higher end of the scale, we are assisting divisions to meet the challenge that comes with that.

The 50 percent failure rate in mathematics, I would have anticipated the government would have done some analysis on that that looked at whether this is an issue of the nature of a particular school; is it an issue of the nature of the test; is it an issue of the way in which the test was introduced or the kind of training that teachers have had? What are the reasons for this and what steps has the government taken to move these numbers up? The government might also have responded with, well, yes, when we first introduced the test, 50 percent of people did fail in math, but we followed this up, and we now know that another 10 percent take it and pass the second year, that a further 10 percent take it the third year.

* (1600)

So that is what I was asking for, some sense of responsible evaluation of a system which is relatively new for Manitoba families. It is difficult to make generalizations. Well, in fact, one should not make generalizations after one event, but the government has had a fair experience now with some of these exams, and what I was looking for from the minister was information and evidence that will enable us to judge and to evaluate what the impact has been, fairly, across Manitoba of these exams.

The minister is aware of the criticism. I do not need to repeat that, but what I am asking for from the department is some response to that, some evidence-based response that will enable us as a thinking public to have some sensible discussion about that. At the moment, as the minister knows, much of this is in the realm of speculation from individual schools, from the experience of particular areas of the province.

So, again, I am asking the minister for evidence. I am asking for information. I do not know that the minister really understood the question.

Mr. McCrae: We are getting good feedback, lots of it, from the teachers and the markers in terms of building a good, strong system by which we can achieve the things that the honourable member is talking about, that, what did she call it, responsible evaluation of the students and of the system itself. We have to get the mechanisms in their place, and we have to get the feedback from the people assisting us in doing that.

I think what the honourable member is trying to do is to jump a little bit ahead of where we are, or perhaps to suggest we should be ahead of where we are, which is a fair comment. I am not saying it is true, but I am saying it is a fair comment. I do not know if she realizes how massive the change to New Directions is. I mean, she should talk to some teachers about this, and they can sort of fill her in on the magnitude of the changes, the magnitude of the curriculum changes that have been undertaken. In fact, this is an area where there have been some concessions made when it comes to the

amount of new curriculum that teachers have had to address and work with. So it has been a very good learning experience for education generally in Manitoba, and not just the students but the parents, the educators, the people in the department who have been trying to administer an improved education system.

I certainly do understand what the honourable member is saying, and I think that we will be in a position of course to make more concrete use of the lessons we are learning, not that we have not made some pretty concrete use of it already, but I think what I am getting is simply that the honourable member is suggesting we should be further along. I think given the magnitude of the task, I guess I could say that I do not think that is a very fair criticism, but I mean it is one that the honourable member is free to make. I think she might find that there are an awful lot of people who might disagree with her that we have not moved fast enough. There are people in the field who have been feeling under a lot of pressure, and I think we have to have a little more regard for them, i.e., the teachers in the system, than the questions suggest that we should have. When it comes to evidence that the honourable member is talking about, that evidence is being made available through each passing year and will be in a better position to make use of it as we proceed down the road that we have been using.

The point is, I get back to the point that I believe is being made here, we have people who are coming and talking about test-free Tuesday or something like that, that tests are bad and that implies that a lot of other things are bad about New Directions. Really there is far more good than there is bad in New Directions. I do not think there is anything that you could identify as being bad except that there are things that we could do better. Everybody acknowledges that, and we have been doing that. We have been making adjustments to ensure that we are not asking more of people than their ability would allow them to deliver.

But simply, I cannot get out of my mind what was said earlier because it just takes this discussion from one of building on something that is strong to engaging in arguments that do not make any sense, like the business about

pushing a child out of school and using that as a basis for scrapping the system of New Directions. It is too simple. Anybody can say something like that. It does not mean it is true, but anybody can say it with a view to sensationalizing an issue which is really intended to create a higher quality of education for our children and take an argument like that and really work against all of the improvements that they are trying to bring about. I know the honourable member is interested in education, and she would like to see improvements. Improvements are happening right in front of her, and because it is not she that is driving it, I guess, she has problems with it. Well, she is a politician and so am I, and I understand how these things come about.

Again, I go back to what I think I said last week about using the kids as sort of innocent pawns in this debate really does the opposite to what is intended. I think if it is intended to bring forward reasoned criticism of a system, then do it. But, to bring in outrageous comments like that one as a basis for scrapping New Directions, I simply am not able to go along with that kind of thinking because the whole—I mean, why would anybody engage in improving education if it was not because it was felt that we needed to do that for good and proper reasons, those reasons being the most precious resource we have, our children, and to ensure for them a chance to achieve all they can be, which, I think, is what parents generally want in their children?

Most parents that I know simply do not want to see any limits placed on the opportunities before their children, and I do not want an education system that did not keep up to be one of the reasons, especially when I was here and had an opportunity to support something that would indeed give those kids a much better chance. To use those same kids in such a way does them more of a disservice. There are kids for whom a school of any kind is a big challenge, because the children have special debilities and need specialized education. Well, we are working to address that, but simply to make a broad statement like that is just out of line.

* (1610)

So we are able to draw conclusions from information that comes forward as a result of the testing of all of the people, all of the students in the province. The indicators of our system are being developed. That is when we are using this kind of data for that purpose, and we will keep the pressure on in that regard. When we have the opportunity to tell the honourable member more about what we are achieving with regard to those results, we will be making that known.

Ms. Friesen: Can the minister tell me how many students who have failed the Grade 12 math exam have taken it a second time and what their result has been?

Mr. McCrae: By September when we are enrolling students, we will be able to answer that question.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, can the minister tell me whether students who took it—it has been offered twice now as a standard exam. I am trying to move away from the pilots. There have been pilots and there have been ones which have counted. I think we are in our second—this is the second year or third year of this.

Mr. McCrae: Will you ask me the question one more time? Sorry.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, yes. What I do not want to do is to get involved in the pilot testing. Those are pilots; those are experimental. That is different. So I am looking at the introduction of the Grade 12 mathematics test on a—I am not sure of the word to use—formal basis. [interjection] "For real," that is right, in quotes. I want to know how many times that has been taken, because my understanding is at least twice because we have two per year, and what the results of those have been. For example, did people take it the first time, fail, take it a second time, do better? Do you have those kinds of results?

Mr. McCrae: I think I am understanding the honourable member's question, and I can only repeat what I said: that kind of name- and student number-driven information, that kind of system will be in place by September of this year so that I would be able to answer that question in the affirmative by then, but I cannot yet.

Ms. Friesen: Does that mean, Mr. Chairman, that the government will not have information for those people who have already taken the tests, that actually the collecting of data based on the name, the number and the examination will begin this September?

Mr. McCrae: As I said, the information will not be available in a uniform way across the province until this coming school year. It is not available in that form yet, but it will be by next year, i.e., if a child or a person takes the exam a second time, then at that time it will be known what the previous history is of that particular student.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, are there instances of students taking an exam the second time to improve their mark?

Mr. McCrae: I guess the best way for me to answer that is to say that if the honourable member or if a parent or somebody was seeking information about a student, at this point, the school division would have that information. It is not necessarily available to the department at this point, but at this time next year we expect that would be the case; the department would have that information on all the students.

It needs to be added to what I have said that the only way you can get to take the test again is if you take the course again, so it is not simply a question of having a rewrite a year later or a month later or something like that. In order to take the test, you have to have taken the course.

Ms. Friesen: Can the minister tell me what kind of evaluation he will be doing of the testing in the years up to this September? If the beginning of collecting of this data does not begin until this September, then what kind of evaluation, what is the nature of the evaluation, what kind of information is the minister using for the evaluation presumably that is in place now?

* (1620)

Mr. McCrae: I think I have some information that may give a better overall response to these questions than I have been to this point. It is about interpreting results from tests and examinations. The honourable member will

remember New Directions, The Action Plan. That was the provincial program. It states in there that New Directions seeks to ensure that effective educational strategies are used consistently and appropriately across the system. Well, that makes sense. It seems to me that is what we are trying to achieve here.

The purpose of the program is to provide clear, accurate information about each student's skills and abilities in relation to the objectives or the expected learning outcomes set out in the provincial curricula. The results of examinations and standards tests can provide schools and divisions and districts with benchmarks to review student learning, local student assessment and evaluation practices and student achievement relative to educational standards. This will contribute to a better understanding of student achievement across the province. I think this is what the honourable member is attempting to get at with her questions here: what is the student achievement across the province, how do we measure it, and what are results?

The testing program supports the implementation of curricula by developing test instruments that are curriculum congruent because the constraints of large scale testing, for the measurability of some outcomes and the duration of tests, it is not possible to assess the entire range of student learning outcomes. Therefore, standards tests and provincial exams need to be complemented at the school level by a variety of assessment methods such as teacher observations. These were always there. Writing samples, demonstrations, portfolio assessments or exhibitions. Provincial examinations and tests assess the performance of individual students, not the performance of the system; that is, the results of standards tests alone do not indicate how well curricula have been implemented. In order to assess the system, a much broader base of information is needed.

The Assessment and Evaluation Branch of the Department of Education and Training distributes provincial test and examination results in a variety of reports to schools, school divisions and districts and the community. Student profiles provide detailed information on each student's performance in the specific areas tested. Schools are required to share this

detailed information with individual students and their parents. This is an important statement. Schools are required to share this detailed information with individual students and their parents. Teachers are encouraged to use this information in conjunction with their own classroom assessment results to enhance classroom instruction. That has been an important question for me.

Information about results are shared with schools and school divisions. That sharing is done for a purpose so that we can achieve something with our program. I have heard from a number of parents that while we do not know anything about what has happened with the results of our child's provincial test, that is in fact the folks who are talking about having a test-free Tuesday. They say that the only information you receive about your child's test results is a number. Neither your child's teacher, your child, nor you will see the marked test unless you fill out a form.

Well, that is what I have been a little bit troubled by, and this is one area I have discussed with my deputy minister because this is troubling me. We expect that part of New Directions is that parents are a key part of a child's education. I have even heard of stories where teachers themselves were not aware of what the test results were. Makes you wonder. I would be the first one as a parent to say, well, why do you have tests then if you are not sharing the information? I do not know all the reasons for this. Any reasons that relate to anything but some mistake in communication or something, I would not want anybody's strong feelings about or against New Directions to be the reason for information not being shared. There is no point having information if it is just going to sit on a shelf, because the information is designed to be used to bring about better educational opportunities and better results in the case of each and every child about whom these results are made available by the Department of Education and Training.

Mr. Peter Dyck, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

I really have a problem with this group that says the only information you will receive about

your child's test results is a number. It is not true. That is simply not true. A detailed profile is sent back on each student. In too many instances in my opinion that I have heard about so far, this detailed information is not getting to parents. Why is what I have to ask and what I have asked my deputy minister to inquire into and see what we can do about that, because, as I say, it would be hard for me as a parent to want to support any kind of system if I am left out of it. Now, I do not know if it is on purpose or if it is not. I hope it is not on purpose because that says something else that is a very serious matter. These reports are sent. Student profiles are sent to each school. Divisional overviews are sent to each division. There are school summaries, division summaries, provincial summaries, and also division and school-by-school information is all made available. Information is power and all of this information, if it is used well, can result in some extremely excellent possibilities, not only for our school systems, but for each of the kids involved.

One of the other things the test-free-Tuesday people are saying is that there is no diagnostic value to tests because they occur too late in the school year. Any suggestion of a lack of diagnostic value relates again to the fact that the available information perhaps is not being shared sufficiently with parents. I do not think the real point here is when testing occurs. I think the point is what use is made of the test results. I mean the people in the Department of Education and Training are not the ones who work day in and day out with the kids. The ones who work day in and day out with the kids are the teachers and the moms and the dads, and to be told that that information is not getting to the teachers or, just as bad, to the moms and dads caused me some serious concern. I passed that along and I am sure that some efforts will be made to try to rectify that situation.

* (1630)

The other one, one of the favourites that I hear by opponents of New Directions, is that the classroom teachers are encouraged to change their teaching practices to teach to the test even if that is not in the best interest of the children. Well, that is not what this is about either. All of our communications and policy documents have

stressed that the best preparation is to teach the full curriculum. What a concept, but there it is. That is what this is about. If you teach the curriculum and the children are learning it, then the tests will not be a big deal for them at all.

Stress has also been laid on the importance of using a balanced assortment of assessment instruments and tools throughout the year and that standards tests are only one component of the overall assessment of a student. Any teacher who does focus on just teaching to the test, in the opinion of some people, would be acting unprofessionally, contrary to government directives and communications and even against the best interests of the child.

So when I hear that teachers are teaching to the test, I mean I am not a teacher, obviously, but I have a very high opinion of them and any suggestion that there would be people acting in an unprofessional way, teachers most of all, would be a real problem for me because I have, as I said, a high opinion of the professionalism of teachers. So maybe that is why I do not hear about it that often. I have heard it from parents, mind you, and from people who simply have their mind made up that New Directions is the wrong way, so they come up with this argument that teachers are teaching to the test. They must have got it from somewhere. I hope it was not from the honourable member, because I am told that that would be an unprofessional thing to do, so I hope that is not happening.

There is talk about this expenditure of money for standards tests. Of course, those who use the figure of \$15 million are distorting that situation to some extent. I think that once everything is in place that could well be what it will cost down the road, but it has certainly not reached that kind of level to this point. So, you know, some of these things really cause me to be concerned in my job as Minister of Education. I mean to come out against New Directions and then to give a bunch of reasons for that that cannot be substantiated tends to stand in the way, really, of moving forward with the education of our kids, and that is when I draw the line. I simply cannot get along with the idea of making political pawns out of our children. I am just not geared for that sort of thing.

The branch, as I said, distributes tests and results in a variety of reports to the schools, the school divisions and to the community. Detailed summary reports provide schools and school divisions with a statistical information base by which administrators and teachers can address concerns regarding achievement levels and build upon strengths and improve areas of weakness. That is what I see as being one of the reasons for proceeding in the way that we are so that divisions and schools can have this type of statistical data. It is the kind that I think the honourable member was talking about too.

Province-wide school-by-school results are released annually to division offices and schools and educational organizations and the general public. This is another area of some concern with some people. I guess when we are dealing with public money, we should not be choosy about this. Public money is public money, and there is an accountability factor here that ought not to be ignored because you cannot decide that accountability is good in this area of public expenditure but not in that area of public expenditure. That is just too simple, again. The province releases test results with the hope that parents and schools and the community use these results in a constructive way to support the ongoing improvement in the areas of instruction, learning and curriculum development.

I would hate to think that those opposed to the release of this type of information are opposed because they want to protect a status quo which maybe is not as good as what we can develop. In other words, sometimes I think information supports change, usually change for the better, and those who resist this type of information being made available to the public, again you want to look at what their real agenda is. Again I say: is their agenda that of putting the interests of the children ahead of all other matters?

I do not know but why do we need to be so worried about releasing information to the public? I guess it is easy for me or for the honourable member to say, well, it is not that big a deal because sometimes they get it wrong; sometimes they get it right. The fact is whatever spin you put on the information is one thing; the information itself is another.

I guess it is hard to control what goes out in the public media. We can put out information. I have said to my deputy minister, maybe it is the narrative that surrounds the information that gets people off on the wrong track, and is there anything we can do about that? Frankly, I do not know. The answer is I do not know because you cannot write the newspapers for the newspaper people. They will think that you have a motive that is different from theirs and they will not go along with that.

So I am still kind of struggling with that. I believe that public information is public information, but, I, too, would not like people jumping to the wrong conclusions as a result of information that is made available. But that does not mean that I am God or that I should therefore then say, okay, we should be withholding this information which is produced through the expenditure of public money. The general public wants this information because they pay for it. They pay for all of the work that goes into the creation of that information. The Province of Manitoba will use the information to identify areas that require curriculum changes or the development of further support materials or in-services. I think that sometimes we take personally things that we ought not to. If professional development in a certain area is indicated by the information that comes out of a testing scenario, what is wrong with that? There is not a thing wrong with that. So I think that we simply need to use the information in a way that is appropriate, but who is to define what that is?

* (1640)

I think, though, it has been argued that because of certain negative standing vis-a-vis other schools or other divisions respecting a certain school, it has been argued that teachers, if it is in math, then they will spend all the time on math and then they will not have time for anything else. Well, that, again, smacks of somebody suggesting that teachers are pretty unprofessional if they would do that. I would hope that anybody suggesting that is wrong. The vast majority of our teachers are certainly not unprofessional. They are quite the reverse. I have one sitting right beside me, two of them, on each side, so I better be careful about this. I know that that one, too, only talks about those

people who are teaching who maybe ought not to be teaching because they are misunderstanding the role that they play and the role that this information plays in the building of a better education system.

With respect to Grade 3 mathematics in 1998, 13,657 students wrote the Grade 3 mathématiques standards test. Test results remained relatively stable in 1998 compared with 1997. A decrease in test score variability was detected for all programs from 1997 to 1998. This might be explained by the fact that the number of nonresponses to test questions was lower than in 1997. The 1997 students tended to achieve the highest scores in the curricular unit, patterns and relations. In 1998, students performed best in statistics and probability.

Feedback from markers indicated that students tended to demonstrate stronger problem-solving skills in 1998 compared to 1997. Though the open-response questions presented more challenging situations, students performed as well or better in 1998. In addition, markers indicated that students' ability to develop contexts or stories for mathematical procedures improved. That is very encouraging, I think, because it demonstrates a clearer understanding. Finally, students' ability to read and interpret graphical information showed improvement in 1998. These are encouraging things. I mean, I do not think everything that comes out is as encouraging as that, but this is certainly encouraging.

With respect to Senior 4 mathematics, since 1997, over 10,000 students have been writing the Senior 4 mathematics/mathématique provincial examinations each year, with more students writing in semester 2 than in semester 1. The results on the mathematics/mathématique provincial examinations have remained relatively stable across administrations within each program.

On Senior 4 English language arts, each year over 11,000 students write the Senior 4 English language arts provincial examinations. More students write the exam in semester 1 than in semester 2. The provincial means and pass rates have been fairly consistent since the

examinations began in 1996, ranging from 62 percent to 68 percent. The overall means and pass rates have tended to be higher in semester 1 than in semester 2 by 3 percent to 4 percent, and students generally score higher on reading than process writing. Student performance on the process writing component has been consistent over the years. The average marks are between 61 percent and 65 percent, with students scoring higher on the mechanics of writing like spelling, grammar, sentence construction, et cetera, than on the content, style or organization of the writing. Students do equally well on the latter three elements of writing. Improvements to the format, content and administration of the examination have been made based on feedback from the field and the Program Development Branch.

It is dangerous to make a comparison one year over the other or one school over the other in a short space of time, just like the questions asked by the honourable member. I mean, it may be that we could be further along in terms of all of the uses we can make of information, but it is always a good idea to be cautious too. It is like labour statistics, I guess. I know the member for Brandon East (Mr. L. Evans), there are labour statistics that come out every month, and, you know, if the unemployment rate climbs one-quarter of a percent in one month, you will not hear a word from the honourable member for Brandon East. If it stays the same for 12 months, you will not hear a word, but if it should drop one-eighth of a percent one month out of 12, you will hear from the honourable member for Brandon East that this is all the fault of the government.

So you have to be careful with statistics, as you know what they say about statistics. But here we do need to be cautious about comparisons from one administration of a test to another one because maybe that does not demonstrate a trend. It just demonstrates maybe little and local differences in a short space of time. Differences in the format of the instrument, differences in the populations being assessed, as well as a variety of other external factors, may influence overall performances across examinations. When looking at the results at the individual school or classroom level, factors such as the experience level of the

teacher, the time allocation for instruction, student attitudes towards education and attendance rate can also have an impact on student performance. The standards tests and provincial examinations have been designed to measure individual student performance. The test results are only one piece of information about the student and must be interpreted along with a variety of classroom assessment results. As well, these tests and examinations by themselves should not be used to assess teachers, schools or the school system.

There are other ways besides simply provincial examination to assess teachers, schools or the school system, certainly on a short-term basis. Teachers involved in developing and marking the Grade 3 mathematics standards test view their experiences as valuable professional development. Departmental consultants have indicated that, in their in-services across the province, they notice a dramatic change in teachers' attitudes towards the tests since the administration and marking of 1998. The number of concerns, complaints and negative comments has decreased while the frequency of positive comments has increased. I think that is what you can expect if you have a good quality product. You need a little bit of experience for that product to become better known and somewhat better appreciated, work the little wrinkles out of your product—if it is in this case a Grade 3 test, work those wrinkles out, listen to the users of the product, and make those adjustments that result in a better test. As I say, you will get negative comments decreasing and positive ones increasing. I think that must be somewhat gratifying to the people in the department and those in the field who have assisted the department in putting this together. I know it is hard when you are faced with a barrage of criticism and that sort of thing which very often happens when you do something new or different. Feedback from principals, classroom teachers and markers at the Senior 4 level continues to indicate that the examinations are fair and consistent with the curriculum. Markers are also very satisfied with the process used to mark the provincial exams.

The direct involvement of S4 mathematics, mathématiques, and English language arts teachers in the examination development

process, as well as in the marking of the examination papers, continues to provide valuable opportunities for professional development. This is a valuable opportunity for teachers, but it is a valuable opportunity for the department as well. So we are all learning and expanding our understanding, and we are doing it together.

* (1650)

Ms. Friesen: Well, the response dealt with the process and the purpose of examinations, and the minister certainly filled his 30 minutes of response time to the minute. The question, of course, dealt with evaluation and dealt with the government's role and process of evaluation. I understand the answer to that is that much of the kind of information that I was talking about, which is not all of assessment, it is some of it, will not be being collected until this September and that the government does intend at some point to produce some evaluation of the whole process of examinations at the Grade 12 level.

Let me ask a policy question. There is clearly a difference in the pass rate at the Grade 12 math and the Grade 12 English, and I wondered what the government's analysis of that has been, what they think the reasons are, whether they are satisfied with that and how they think that that might change over the next few years. For example, have there been changes to the curriculum? Have there been specific changes in professional development that would address some of those issues?

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairman, notwithstanding that we do not yet this year have a thorough statistical base from which to draw a conclusion or multiple conclusions, all of our information to date, including our discussions with teachers, markers, principals, the minister's advisory committee on implementing education change, all those people tell us that testing is not causing students to drop out of school or to move to other provinces. To the contrary, we are hearing that our tests are fair, that they match the curriculum and they have been structured at the right standard, albeit sometimes challenging. Well, I have written challenging tests before. I have passed some and I have not passed some. But the field supports what we are doing, and I

believe they know that we must have solid standards.

If you want to see a positive person, go and talk to a Grade 12 math teacher. I do not know how many of you have done so. I have. Talk about positive people. These people are downright excited about the curriculum. When you are that excited about the curriculum, I do not think the testing on that amounts to a really big problem. When you see that kind of enthusiasm, you just know, and I do not say this is everywhere. There are obviously going to be dissenters, but certainly the ones I have spoken to have very, very positive comments to make about the curriculum itself.

It would be only too easy for us and for the system to scrap tests or, even worse, to make the curriculum and the tests that go with them a whole lot easier. If we do not challenge young people at a time when they are best able to accept challenge and turn it into opportunity, we are missing the boat as a society. It is a pretty simple truth that I think is evident to most fair-minded people. We are dealing with people at the time of their lives when they are able to take in more information, I suggest, than at any other time in their lives unless it is when they are tinier. The tinier you are, the faster you seem to learn and pick things up.

I have not even been tempted to scrap the system that we have been putting into place because I have been advised that it is challenging, and I am advised that it should be challenging and that those who are not as able to meet the challenge, then you look at their individual situations. That is what special education is about. I know of people who have not been challenged enough in the past, and I know how disappointed they have been for the rest of their lives. What kind of favour are we doing our kids by saying, oh, well, we know it is hard so we better just back off on all of this, this is too hard for you, so we will just scrap all the plans for excellence that we have for Manitoba.

Well that is one—I call it delusions of adequacy that some people suffer. I prefer the delusions of grandeur that others suffer. It is a better kind of delusion, I suppose. If you are going to achieve anything, you might as well go

for the grandeur rather than the adequacy. But delusions of adequacy simply are not good enough for Manitobans, not good enough for my kids, not good enough for the kids of my neighbours and friends in Brandon or anywhere else in Manitoba. It would be very easy just to say, okay, well, uncle, I give up, this is too hard, cannot take the criticism, so we are going to forsake the future of our kids because we do not like to be criticized. Well, those who do nothing sometimes do not get noticed very much, but they do not accomplish or contribute very much either. So we want to base what we are doing, however, on a fair assessment of what is the right thing to do. I am not simply wanting to be stubborn about this, and I think we have demonstrated that we are not simply just stubborn about this. We are trying to do the right thing not only by the children in our schools but also those we entrust our children with to ensure that they get a good education.

You know, if we just scrapped everything or if we made the tests easier and the curriculum easier, we could really ensure that all students found the tests not very challenging. Then you would be worried about drop-out rates and students leaving. I mean, people of that age need to be challenged, not just left to try to find their way through their lives without meeting any of their own expectations, let alone the expectations of anybody else. So what would it do? It would give us all a wrong sense of achievement of our students, which really is a huge disservice.

The honourable member asks about differences between test results between Senior 4 math, and I can say that generally speaking they are a little lower than what the department might have hoped for. We can say that, not only looking at the mean scores over the last few years but also the results on student achievement indicators, they show that Manitoba can do better.

* (1700)

In English language, on the other hand, scored provincially and nationally, it shows that Manitoba students achieve at a very high level. This reflects my own experience, by the way, and maybe a lot of other people. Some of us simply are not, or seem not, to be inclined

mathematically. I never was, and that showed in my performance at school. But I know that my Canadian contemporaries and I, attending school in Los Angeles, outperformed our American counterparts on a consistent basis on anything related to English or grammar or spelling, any of those things. We outperformed them, and I was fairly pleased with myself. I think that a number of other people find this same problem, that they perform better in English than math. But in any event, our students, when compared with other students across the country—this is the good-news part of the language arts part—they achieved at a very high level.

We can do better in math. That is why we are bringing in new curriculum with a significant increase in standards and rigour and an emphasis on problem solving. I mean, we want our math to relate to something, so if we can use what we know about math to problem solve, then that is good. We need to see significant increases in inservicing for teachers in math, and we are doing that. We not only give teachers new curricula, but we also provide them with excellent support documents called Foundations for Implementation. Again, from my travels, that is what I am hearing. I am not just making this up and neither is my deputy. This is what I am hearing from teachers, and when you get that kind of enthusiasm, you want to respond to it in a positive way.

So, as I say, I think we are trying to do that. We do not see criticism always in a negative light. Sometimes it is meant that way. Even then, there is no point responding unduly negatively. We are on the strong side of this debate, in my view. As a parent, I can say that I want my children and my grandchildren to benefit from an education system that realizes that we are part of a larger world, that we are not just living here in some delirious isolation where nothing else matters and can we not all just be brothers kind of thinking, to some thinking that is realistic and suggests and says that we live in a real world, and our children need to be able to not only survive but to flourish in that real world. That is precisely what we have in mind as we develop New Directions.

But I just want to hasten to say again that I try not to take criticism in the wrong way. I

think that essentially people who are critical think they are being constructively critical, and if you can view people in that way, then you can make the best of criticism that does not always necessarily come from the highest and best foundation, but I am interested in improvements.

I am about to suggest that since we are going to six o'clock that some people around this table might appreciate a five-minute break.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Dyck): Is it the will of the committee to have a five-minute break? [agreed]

The committee recessed at 5:03 p.m.

After Recess

The committee resumed at 5:10 p.m.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Dyck): The committee will come back to order.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, my question dealt with the differential pass rates between the English and mathematics exams and to what the government attributed this. The minister I think spoke for 15 minutes, and I do not think I heard an answer. I asked also what specific steps the government had taken in terms of professional development to deal with the issues in the mathematics exam. The minister's response was we have a curriculum, we have resources, and we do professional development.

So I wonder if the minister could be more specific on that. What areas of the curriculum has the minister identified as needing attention in mathematics, and how has the professional development in the past year attended to those issues?

Mr. McCrae: I thought I had answered the question fairly succinctly and in a direct way, but I will try again and see if I can improve on that. Some of your comments, Mr. Chairman, off the record, actually helped point me in that direction as well. So it is certainly not simply the honourable member for Wolseley who feels that perhaps I was not as directly responsive as expectations might have suggested I should have been.

When we talk about this differential pass rate respecting language arts and math—and math being the one where it appears a little more work is indicated—I think we identified through results that the area of problem solving was the area that we are concerned with at this point. The honourable member has to understand—I think she does—that professional development is an ongoing effort. It happens year in and year out. In addition, I am advised that individual school divisions can identify areas of need and request that in-servicing focus on those areas of need or those areas indicated by the testing that need additional attention, so that on request arrangements can be made and are made for in-servicing with respect to particular issues. That is one of the things that I think is a useful product of this system we have in place. We knew—I think everybody knew—that there were areas in Manitoba, areas of our geography where we were going to come up a little shorter than other areas. We learned that this problem-solving area of mathematics was one. We do have resources in place to address the specific issues that come forward, either through our ongoing professional development activities or, as I pointed out, in response to requests made by school divisions.

Ms. Friesen: Could the minister tell me how many school divisions made requests for specific professional development and problem solving?

Mr. McCrae: I do not think I have information as detailed as that for the honourable member, but I know that, with respect to mathematics, there have been 26 sessions with teachers and principals in the southeast and Interlake regions dealing with mathematics. Now at any of those sessions I assume—in fact I do not have to assume, I know—that in all of those workshops, problem solving either was or became the focus of those sessions. That is 26 of them. There were five sessions with teachers and principals in mathematics in the south-central region. Now that would be the region represented by yourself, Mr. Chairman, part of your region. So we know there were five sessions there. You did not attend any of those?

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Dyck): I cannot recall.

Mr. McCrae: Cannot recall.

In the north region, there were eight sessions of teachers and principals in mathematics. There were four sessions in the Parkland and Westman regions involving teachers and principals, and 20 sessions involving Winnipeg teachers and principals, all of these sessions dealing with mathematics.

Again, I underline for this committee that problem solving is or becomes the focus of those sessions.

Ms. Friesen: So what would be the outcomes and the expected results of this emphasis in professional development on problem solving? Does the minister have a goal for the results of next year and the year after? Let us take it over a two-year period.

* (1720)

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairman, when you identify a need, and you conduct workshop sessions dealing with the matter identified, I think it is safe to say you are looking for some improvement in those areas. The school divisions know where they want to improve, because they can look at national averages and provincial averages and that sort of thing, and determine, well, there is an area here where we can do a little better than we have been. How much better? I guess it depends on a lot of players. It certainly depends on what it is the division wants to achieve.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

I would think they want to achieve higher levels of achievement simply by enrolling their teachers in these sessions on mathematics, or by the teachers themselves in wanting to attend those sessions, because if there is one thing I have learned very clearly it is this burning desire on the part of teachers to bring out the best in the students under their direction. So in problem solving we would like to see, by the time the new curricula are fully in place, that the tests that come after that will show significant improvement over what we are seeing today, which means that, as with so many other things, education is a continual striving for being the best that we can be and bringing that about for the students as well.

So I guess, very simply, the answer to the question is that we want to see improvement in identified areas, where work towards improvement would be indicated. We would like to see teachers gain increasing competency in respect of their own understanding of the role of problem solving in each of the strands within the mathematics curriculum.

We and I think they would like to have a higher and higher understanding of the mathematical knowledge and skills required of students and their integral connection to the students' ability to problem solve. We also want to see feedback from schools that will indicate that students in the future will succeed better than they are now. It does not mean they are not succeeding well; it just means that there is always room for improvement.

We use national statistics to give ourselves an impression of how we are doing relative to students in the rest of the country. As we address mathematics marks as we know them now, we do it with a view to improving and to placing ourselves well in regard to other jurisdictions in Canada, which is I think a supportable thing to do, but I do not think we can say that we have a target that we want, an X number increase in the average mathematics mark.

We are at or below the national level in math, and there, again, I do not have delusions of adequacy. I would like to have delusions of grandeur or excellence, so we like to aim higher and higher. So if we can be the best in the country, I would prefer that to being at or below the national average. Best is not a bad thing to aim for.

I have some more information that I think the honourable member—it is very specific to the kinds of things she is asking here. An example of a workshop in Westman region mathematics, the K to 8 one, participants in that workshop from the eight Westman school divisions, those being Beautiful Plains No. 31, Birdtail River No. 38, Rolling River No. 39, Brandon No. 40, Port le Bois No. 41, Souris Valley No. 42, Antler River No. 43 and Turtle Mountain No. 44, this mathematics K to 8 institute is a project to provide training for two teacher leaders or

facilitators per school division on the implementation of the new mathematics curriculum, Grades K to 8.

The role of each trained teacher leader/facilitator is to deliver math implementation workshops in his or her respective school division and to provide support for classroom teachers in the implementation of the mathematics curriculum. Manitoba Education and Training provides training for the teacher leaders, as well as administrative support in the operation of the institute. The current status is as follows: the training succession began with a two-day summer workshop in Brandon, August 24 and 25 of last year. Follow-up training sessions continued in Brandon on November 3 and 4 of last year and on December 3 of last year.

Twenty-one teachers are participating in this institute. A total of \$5,570 has been allocated to this project for the current fiscal year. A continuing training session was held on February 5 of this year in Brandon, and each school division's administrative team meets with their teacher leaders and facilitators to plan for the ongoing implementation of the K to 8 mathematics curriculum within their respective division. A needs survey will be conducted to determine the focus of the training sessions for the fiscal year.

I mean, the teachers know probably better than anybody what the focus of these sessions ought to be. They know now what their curriculum is and what is expected of them, and if they are having any problems getting that curriculum implemented, they know where those problems are. They know what test results look like. These results are something that are made known. Here, again, going back to a discussion earlier on about the sharing of results and making them available, I mean it is pretty important that that happen. For anybody to suggest it is not happening is simply drawing attention to the fact that some people maybe are not sharing these results, and that is very important that they be shared. That is the thing that I have spoken to my deputy minister about. We want to ensure that happens.

Well, now we have an institute in the Parkland Region for mathematics. That is the 5

to 8 institute. The divisions involved here are Turtle River, No. 32; Dauphin Ochre, No. 33; Duck Mountain, No. 34; Swan Valley, No. 35; Intermountain, No. 36; and Pelly Trail, No. 37. This is a project, this institute, to train a minimum of four teacher leaders and facilitators in each of the six divisions on implementing the new Grades 5 to 8 mathematics curriculum. Each of the teacher leaders and facilitators will work with classroom teachers in their division to ensure the successful implementation of the curriculum. The project is in response to a needs assessment conducted by the Parkland Education Council which identified this as a primary need in the region.

Manitoba Education and Training will provide training for the teacher leaders as well as administrative support in the operation of the institute. The overall goal of the project is to provide assistance in areas of instructional strategies and teaching materials, assessment strategies. For the current fiscal year, a total of \$8,500 has been allocated to the project. That was for last fiscal year. I think, with respect to the other institute, when I gave that figure, that would have been for last fiscal year as well.

Each division administration will meet with their teacher leaders and facilitators to plan for the ongoing implementation of the Grades 5 to 8 mathematics curriculum within their respective divisions. The teacher leaders who are being trained will provide Manitoba Education and Training with a group of trained teacher leader facilitators within the region, and the institute will move into year two this year.

You see, these divisions know that mathematics is an area where they need to do some more work. They know that, and that is why these institutes are at work. We know from national averages, and we know from testing results. This is one of the reasons that you have these New Directions so that you are able to identify where you need to put some emphasis. Then you are able to build curriculum and build implementation tools and get teachers positioned so that they are strong. I have heard that math teachers are in demand. This is something that, if we have these kinds of supports available, makes being a math teacher a more attractive prospect for a person because they know that

they can move forward. They can move forward with some confidence that the appropriate supports will be there so they can do their jobs well.

*(1730)

Our regional managers meet with superintendents to identify priorities for in-servicing on curriculum implementation. As I said, it is an ongoing challenge, an ongoing relationship between the department and its partners to have the in-servicing that is needed so that teachers can be kept up to date on curriculum and up to date on the latest in tools for implementation of curriculum and these various professionals getting together to talk about problems they are facing and how best to deal with those problems and put those problems behind them. Those are useful things, and I am pleased that my department is involved in that.

We then work with the staff that the superintendents have identified as their key people to develop plans and activities for their region or for their division. School divisions have not identified raising scores as the object of the exercise. I think that everybody knows, though, if they address areas where they think they are not as strong as they would like to be, and they make some improvement, I think it is pretty clear that scores will come up correspondingly. I guess it is one tool that we have. I mean why do they have other tests in schools that are not government tests. They have them so the teacher knows if his or her class is taking in the lessons that are being taught. The school divisions realize that more professional development for teachers to support implementation of curriculum will lead to improved scores.

This year's budget, the budget that everybody but the honourable member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), everybody in the House supported, has another \$900,000 in it for professional development to be added to the 10-or-so million dollars that is there for professional development already. That is there, and it allows for priority setting at a local or regional level through the process I just set out for the committee. This can even influence hiring. For example, southeast, Interlake and the northern

regions have placed a priority on math, and we responded as a department by adding another math consultant to add to the two regional teams that I just spoke about.

So I think that there is one positive thing that can be said about knowing what the trends are, knowing what the statistical information tells us about how we are doing. It is important to know that. It is important also to remember that rather than just dealing with numbers, there are real life human results of knowing how to deal with the statistical information. I guess sometimes when you are a bureaucrat or a politician or something, your interest is getting those numbers up where they should be. I know that is important, but if you can remember when you are doing that the human element of that by getting numbers up or by an overall improvement right across the province in student performance, let us say in Grade 6 math or Grade 9 math or Grade 12 math, if you know that you are getting that, you know that you are adding by whatever measure to the ability of that person to have a better life, and that goes all the way not only from the economic side of things and the ability to make a living, but all the way to one's well-being and one's happiness which is what I thought it was all about.

So I hope that answers the honourable member's question.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, well, the issue at the Grade 12 level is that 40 percent of them are not passing, and I had asked for information whether they were taking it a second time and passing, and the government does not have that, although it may have it in some future years.

I am interested that the government has pinpointed problem solving, at least this year, as one of the issues, but I did not hear any specific references to professional development that dealt with that. There are lots of professional development that dealt with K to 8 or 5 to 8. Other mathematics professional development seemed very general, and the minister did not have any examples of ones that dealt specifically with the Grade 12 issue and the problem solving that the government had identified as their concern. So we can leave that at that.

It seems that the government has general answers but not specific answers. I had hoped that there would be a greater connection, a more tight connection between the development of curriculum, of resources, of performance on tests and the professional development that followed from that. I do not get that sense that that is there yet in the Grade 12 mathematics, and I am wondering if that is not one of the issues that is behind the differential rates, pass rates in the Grade 12 English and Grade 12 mathematics tests.

* (1740)

I have a couple of other questions on testing which the minister, I think, has a number of additional staff here who may be able to answer these. One deals with home schooling. This is one of the groups—it is not the only group; band school students would be another one—but students who are home schooled in Manitoba do not take the tests, the standard tests. I wondered if the minister had given any consideration to this and whether in fact there were any plans to enable home schooled students to be part of the province-wide testing system.

Mr. McCrae: Well, maybe it is my way of dealing with the questions. I am not sure, but the honourable member, if I heard her right, has dismissed everything I just got finished saying about professional development and in-servicing opportunities, the fact that we have got—I do not always remember the titles of people, but these various consultants that are available to school divisions to organize: facilitator, trainer, teacher, people to bring about improvements in the teaching of math, in problem solving in particular, in various divisions, the \$900,000 added in this year's budget, which the honourable member stood up and supported, in addition to the millions of dollars already in the budget annually for continuing the professional development of the province's teachers. So a lot of work is done. A lot of teaching tools are made available to Manitoba teachers to assist them with implementing the curriculum. All math professional development deals with problem solving. It is the central focus of all math professional development.

So, I do not know, I guess the honourable member has stated her feeling that this does not

amount to much, but I think that if we asked the teacher about it who just finished attending these institute workshops and then went back to the division of their schools and helped other teachers pass on this information to the students and this ability to pass on this curriculum, you might get a different view of it.

Nonetheless, the honourable member also asked about home schoolers and the fact that they do not write our tests. That is not necessarily so. Home schoolers can indeed write the province-wide tests. We do get requests from parents for that. Nothing bars home schoolers from writing the tests. They can go to any local school and register to write tests. Having said that, we do encourage them to take the tests, and we are discussing issues of assessment with the Manitoba home schooling associations, those being the Manitoba Association of Christian Home Schools and the Manitoba Association for Schooling at Home. I think we do need to encourage them to take those tests because there can be a benefit for those youngsters, those students, in terms of the assessment, the diagnostic value of it for the home schooling experience. So we continue to work towards achieving the objective of greater participation of home schoolers in the provincial assessment program.

Ms. Friesen: Could the minister tell me how many home school students there are and how many have taken the tests?

Mr. McCrae: The vast majority of home schoolers are home schoolers for religious reasons. The number is 1,185 that are home schoolers, and three have taken provincial exams, which tells you I think the feeling that home schoolers have about the public system. We do not want to offend against any religious reasoning they may have for not enrolling their kids for the provincial testing. However, I think that we have a job to do to show them that the purpose of the testing has nothing to do with offending against their religious beliefs. I am advised that for various reasons, religious ones included, home schoolers, many of them just feel they do not want the government or the public system to be interfering with the lives of their youngsters. It is a pretty hard case for the government to make when people have those

feelings, especially when the government does not want to offend people's religious rights.

On the other hand, if we can show them, and we are attempting to do that through our dealings with the Manitoba Association of Christian Home Schools and the Manitoba Association for Schooling at Home, we are attempting to show them that indeed there is no offence here, in our view at least, to their religious beliefs and indeed could provide quite a benefit to their children who are taking their lessons at home.

So I agree with the honourable member that there is plenty of convincing to do here, but I am not about to venture into territory where I am going to be in danger of offending against somebody's religious principles because I believe in the constitutional right of freedom of religion. That being said, I would hope that there would be some openness to looking at these provincial exams, and maybe that is what these meetings will be about, is to show them by way of reference to past exams or whatever way that that can be done, that we would like to see greater participation of home schooled children in the provincial assessment program.

* (1750)

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, the minister suggested I made a statement on this. I am actually asking for information at this stage, and I did not make any statement one way or the other. I am wondering how many students in the home school program are at the Senior 1 to 4 level. My impression is that many of them are at the elementary school level, but I do not have that information. Are there any at the Grade 12 level, for example?

I have a couple of other questions on home schooling that maybe I will just add at the time being. One of the issues in home schooling has been that the numbers have been growing but that the departmental support in terms of personnel does not seem to have been growing. I wondered if this year there had been any increase in departmental support. For a long time even when the numbers were increasing at sort of 10 percent a year, the departmental support had actually gone from one person to 50

percent of a person, or .5, and I am wondering where that stands at the moment because obviously the numbers have gone up again.

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairman, with respect to the number of home schooled students in 9 to 12, I will see if I can round up that number for next day.

With respect to the second part of the question about the departmental support for home schooled kids, this is a difficult one. By the way, there is one staff year designated for home schooled students. I want to be careful about seeing a large bureaucracy develop around home schooling simply because I want, as much as possible within the bounds of respect for people's rights, religious and otherwise, to see a strong and healthy public school system in our province. So the one staff person that I referred to acts as a liaison between the department and the home school community, which, as the honourable member knows, is spread throughout the province. There are pockets of larger numbers of home schoolers, but generally in one area or another. Generally speaking, you will find home schooling going on in most of the areas of the province. So, with respect to the number of S1 to S4 home schooling, if that information is available, I will make that available tomorrow.

There was some information last week that I told the honourable member I would be bringing forward. I am trying to keep up with my undertakings here and not let too many get away on us--do not want any to get away on us.

Question: How many more staff do I project to hire in the Assessment Branch? We expect to hire seven more in the year 2000-2001, and after that, no more.

The enrollment at the Manitoba School for the Deaf for the last three years is as follows: 1996-97, 74 students; 1997-98, 81 students; '98-99, 89 students. The department employs six consultants for the deaf and hard of hearing who work with approximately 210 deaf and hard-of-hearing students in school programs throughout rural and northern Manitoba. These are outside the actual School for the Deaf. Seventy-nine of these students in rural and northern areas are

supported by Level II and Level III low-incidence grants from the province. Urban school divisions provide their own programs for deaf and hard-of-hearing children. The province supports 86 urban deaf and hard-of-hearing children with Level II and Level III grants. The summary of all these programs in 1998-99 is that Manitoba Education and Training provides support to approximately 385 students who are deaf and hard of hearing in this province, including the 89 at the School for the Deaf.

The other question: How many students will be enrolled with Morris-Macdonald School Division via its partnership with Anokiiwin Training Institute? The answer: The total "head count" will be about 200 as of September 30, 1999, but many students will take less than a normal full complement of subjects, which is usually judged as six courses in Senior 4. Hence the full time equivalent student count, although unknown at this time, will be somewhat less than 200. For adults in public schools, the department pays on full-time equivalent count, not on head count. I hope that is clear. It is not really clear to me, but it means that there will be 200 people but not that many enrolled in full time, and we will have a better count for you later in the year, of course, as well.

I have a document here to table. The first document is a Foundation Document for the Western Canadian Protocol for collaboration in basic education, The Common Curriculum Framework, the Foundation Document for the development of The Common Curriculum Framework for Social Studies, Kindergarten to Grade 12. It is a draft dated April 8, 1999. Then, each member of the protocol has a website, and with respect to the first document I have filed just now, there is a Review and Response Form on our website, and that is available in print or on-line, and this is the Review and Response Form that I am tabling now.

* (1800)

Ms. Friesen: The minister mentioned in the speaking of his approach to dealing with home school parents and the standard exams, the issue of making more public the exams so that parents would understand them and see the potential

value of them. I wondered if the minister would be prepared to table the Grade 3 exams that have taken place so far, or the Grade 12. In fact, all exams, is he prepared to make those exams public?

Mr. McCrae: Hold that question until tomorrow?

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. The hour being 6 p.m., committee rise.

HOUSING

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 Housing. When the committee last sat, it had been considering item 1.(b)(1) on page 98 of the Estimates book.

Ms. Marianne Cerilli (Radisson): Mr. Chairperson, when we were last together, the minister was discussing Manitoba Housing Authority's negotiations with some tenant associations through a tenant management. I think that is where I am going to pick up for continuity sake.

I was running downstairs because I wanted to make sure I had my copy of a document I passed on to the minister which I got from Ontario, which is the process and the agreement that Ontario Housing Authority is using in their transfer. Again, it is a pilot project. They are transferring one of their large complexes, it is called Alexander Park, over to a co-op management. The tenant association is involved in taking over the management of the 410 units there. The purpose, I think, is similar to the intended purpose in Manitoba where the tenants have more of a say, where they are more involved in local decision making, but it is using a co-op model rather than what has been used here, which is a not-for-profit-model.

I want to ask the minister some questions about that because I think he has said in the past that Gilbert Park in Manitoba will become operated as if it was a nonprofit. I want to figure out how that is going to work if they are going to

have to form a new incorporated body that is going to have a mandate and a specific structure so that they will be then the property manager under this new tenant management model. That is my first question.

My other question following from the document that I have provided the member for Niakwa (Mr. Reimer) is: have you had a chance to look at the very specific description in that conversion to co-op housing of Alexander Park, the process that was used? Because I am concerned that in Manitoba, there does not seem to be as clear a process. In Ontario, they worked very hard to come up with a business plan and agreed upon process. All the tenants participated. They had quite an extensive community consultation. There was a petition. There was then a referendum vote on moving forward with the final decision. There was 79 percent in favour, which is very high, a strong mandate then to move forward and, as we know, that did not happen in Gilbert Park. There have been a few bumps in the road.

So I guess that is my second question. Have you reconsidered, just based on your own experience, and are you now going to come up with something similar that is going to specify clearly so everyone knows what the process is going to be?

Hon. Jack Reimer (Minister of Housing):

This is, indeed, a very interesting topic and area of discussion, because I think that it leads into some very exciting prospects for different types of management and different types of direction in regard to public housing and public housing management.

I think that I am repeating myself, and I know the member has heard this before, that I strongly believe in tenants associations and, in fact, the idea of tenants associations taking on even more responsibility for the management of their complexes and their associations. That is one of the reasons why it is very important to work with an established tenants association that has a bit of a track record, a bit of stability and some leadership involved with the members who are on the tenants association.

The Gilbert Park Tenants Association has shown that type of leadership in initially coming forth with the suggestion of more tenant-

managed responsibility in their particular complex, and I was very receptive to the idea. But one of the things that became quite evident right off the very top was the fact that the association themselves were very cautious in the amount of authority and the amount of ability to make decisions they undertook by themselves. They were very cognizant of the fact of trying to work slowly to understand, to comprehend and to have assurances and confidence in what they were doing. They were able to do it with the ability of satisfaction that was not only for themselves but in working with Manitoba Housing.

The member asked who would be the people whom we would be dealing with. We would be dealing with setting up an agreement between Manitoba Housing and the Gilbert Park Tenants Association so that they would become the managers, just like a private nonprofit association. While I am not saying that it would be a private operation, we would be looking at that type of model in the management facility of Gilbert Park. It is a different type of approach in the sense that the rules and the guidelines, you cannot blueprint an exact model over top of Gilbert Park and say that this is the way it is going to devolve, because I think it needs an awful lot of working together with the tenants association, and that is one of the reasons why we work very, very closely with them. We have started to devolve some of the authorities down to them in decision making. I would have to get more information from staff as to exactly what various functions are now being involved, and maybe as I am speaking staff could maybe just give me a bit of a list of what they are involved with right now in regard to decision making.

The member is right. There has been a change of the tenants association. I believe that they did have an election of new tenant officers or executive there. There have been some changes there, but I think that the basic desire to still proceed is still there. We have had no indication at all that they do not want to proceed. If anything, I think that they want to proceed a little bit more aggressively in trying to accomplish their objectives in setting out the changeover.

* (1510)

We do have a tentative target date for turnover to the Gilbert Park residents association. That is April 1 of next year, which is April 1 of 2000, and we are working towards that date. I think it is very important that we have an objective so that we can both try to come to some resolve by the time that comes about.

The report that the member mentioned regarding Alexander Park in Ontario, I have to admit that I had just a brief look at it, very cursory, and then I sent it in to the department for analysis and a briefing to come back to me. To date, I have not seen that. So I cannot really comment too much in depth regarding Alexander Park in Ontario, other than I can mention that, if it has been transferred to a co-op type of model, those are the types of things that we can consider. But, as I say, we have not done a closer analysis of Ontario.

Just going back to Gilbert Park again, as I mentioned, some of the things that have been transferring down to them for their supervision and involvement, we are looking at snow clearing, the grounds care in and around the buildings, the garbage pickup in and around the area. They are involved with the application process of people who are coming in for making applications for residency in the complex, and there is some commercial leasing involvement for input in regard to the centre that is used on a commercial basis like the literacy centre and the Four Feathers centre, I believe it is called. Also, what we are looking at are some of the other functions in regard to renting out of the units. So those are some of the things that we have transferred to the Gilbert Park Tenants Association, but, as I mentioned, it is all within the parameters of working very, very closely with the tenants association with my department in trying to come to the eventual turnover of Gilbert Park to the association.

Ms. Cerilli: So, in answer to my question then, the process that you are using is sort of, I would gather from your answer anyway, an incremental one where you have done these contracts for grounds, for cleaning of the units, for those types of things, and that incremental basis is the process that you are using.

Mr. Reimer: Yes, we are going slow, but, with each one of these devolutions I think there is a confidence building that comes about with the association. It is from there that we are building more responsibility.

Ms. Cerilli: I am also taking from your answer that you chose Gilbert Park because they were the ones asking for more local input, and I know some of the tenants associations, we both know, have no interest in this, but Gilbert Park did. So you are working with an established tenants association. Would you agree, though, that it seems like you have left the responsibility for communication with the tenants entirely with the tenants association? You just said as well that you were working closely with them, but maybe you would agree then that there have been some problems there.

Mr. Reimer: I am not too sure whether there have been problems per se with Gilbert Park. I think that what it is is that a lot of times there is a bit of uncertainty or an unknown quantity that they are dealing with, and we try to work with them very closely. When I say "we," I mean staff and the people who are involved with Gilbert Park. In fact, what we do, we even offer training to some of the staff there with our MHA staff so that they become aware of some of the administrative responsibilities.

Ms. Cerilli: Well, one of the minister's staff who is here today was at the same community meeting that I was at, and if the minister had been there, he maybe would have a bit of a different answer because there was a fairly heated debate. We have had an exchange of correspondence and petitions by different tenants. I think, as I would define it, the problem is not that people do not want to have some form of tenant input or tenant management, but the issue is with the way that tenants are going to actually have that input and be involved and feel like they are part of the decision making. One of the comments at that meeting was people do not want to find out what is happening to their housing by reading the paper. The majority of the tenants who were there did not know that the tenants association was taking a trip with the minister down to Washington.

What I am wanting to get at in terms of the process that the department is using to move towards this is that there be some kind of policy that requires the groups that are going to be involved with the tenants to make sure they are following a democratic process where people are informed and where they can participate in meetings. Even though perhaps everyone involved with the tenants association is well intentioned, the people who were calling me, that is not how they felt.

I am wondering, and I am back to my initial question, did you learn from this? Did you learn from reading the model that I sent to you and the steps that they went through to ensure that if you are going to have tenant management, you first have tenant support and input and ensure that the tenants are going to feel like their tenant association is representing them and their interests?

People at the meeting were raising really significant and legitimate questions. I asked some of those questions in the correspondence to the minister, and I have yet to receive some answers for those folks. So is there going to now be some kind of process for how pending decisions are communicated to tenants and so that people have input? Is any of that going to change?

Mr. Reimer: Mr. Chairperson, I think with anything that comes about in any type of new direction or new initiative, one of the most important parts is communication, not only letting the people know but letting the people be part of what the reasoning is behind changes being instituted.

There may have been some instances where the individuals in this particular complex were not brought up to speed, if you want to call it, or involved or knowledgeable of what was happening in regard to the various initiatives that the tenants association was undertaking. I think that is maybe where we as a department have to talk to the tenants association and make them aware that communications and the transmission of information that is happening is done in an orderly and consistent manner.

Maybe that is something that we should be talking to them about or setting up some sort of

process of communication within the tenants association, especially in this particular area, so that the tenants are made aware, whether it is a monthly newsletter or a newsletter every two months or something like that, so that they are brought up to speed and have an awareness on a continual basis.

*(1520)

Maybe that is something that we should be talking to the Gilbert Park Tenants Association about because we certainly have people who are available in our staff who can help them set up a newsletter or a communication vehicle within the building.

It is easy enough to institute, just having a drop through all the mailboxes, like I say, every six weeks or whatever they feel is necessary. But I think that that is something that maybe we have to do a little closer monitoring about, getting a consistent communication vehicle or notice to the tenants as to what is happening.

Ms. Cerilli: I appreciate the minister accepting that recommendation, and I am concerned that was not what occurred in the first place because you are saying that the staff have been working very closely with the tenants association. I guess the way this is handled reflects on the way that the department generally works with tenants associations and the fact that it does seem to be sort of ad hoc. For example, the tenants groups do not have a very high quality manual. The manual that I have, which was developed for seniors housing, does not even have page numbers on it. It looks like it was photocopied and just sort of passed around. This whole area needs work, especially if you are going to start handing over the management for a complex with a multimillion-dollar budget without ensuring that basic things are in place.

I appreciate what the minister has said about starting to have a newsletter. That recommendation was made at the community meeting that I was at. There was talk there about having meetings and workshops as well to inform tenants, but that should happen prior to some kind of a vote of the board, or I would even think to have the minister—and maybe the minister can tell me how much money was spent

on the trip to Washington, to have that kind of excursion without having sort of the local input from the majority of the people that live there.

So I am wondering if the minister would endeavour to answer those questions and clarify then that there is going to be a more transparent and open process that people are aware of as this goes forward and that we are not going to have to have hastily called tenant elections as a way for the tenants there who feel excluded to feel like they have got some kind of influence over what is happening with their housing.

Mr. Reimer: I take the member's suggestions to heart. I think that it is like anything. As I say, communications should be consistent, and they should be there before the people make decisions and mechanisms should be looked at and try to make sure that there is a vehicle, whether it is a newsletter or some sort of public postings or a combination of both, so that people are aware that not only are there meetings coming up but possibly what some of the topics of discussion are going to be put forth.

In regard to the costs of the trip that was down to Washington, the only costs that were associated with Manitoba Housing was myself and two staff that went down to Washington. The people who went down from Gilbert Park and from Lord Selkirk Park—and I think there was a total of eight, maybe nine people; I forget the exact number—that was paid by a grant from CEDA, the Winnipeg Foundation, and I believe one of the banks or credit unions came up with some money. So our cost was only the two additional staff plus myself.

Ms. Cerilli: So what was the grand total?

Mr. Reimer: I would have to check, but I think the airfare and the hotels would be the only cost in regard to our government.

Ms. Cerilli: I appreciate the minister getting me that information. Yes, I was aware that there was some community input in terms of financing for the tenants associations' representatives. So, getting back to my main point, though, are there going to be, as I referenced in the letter I sent to you on this, clear guidelines for the hiring of local people under the tenant management,

including bulletining of positions and contracting out of work? Will there be a clear conflict of interest guidelines for the board members and the staff? What will be the security provisions around screening of tenants, having access to pass keys, all those other questions related to safety, when you are now going to have people who I guess are going to be hired through the board. There are some just based on the questions and the calls that I get.

It sounds like there are some long-standing issues involving tenant relations in this complex, and I have recommended that the tenant association representatives may consider having mediation. I know that there is supposed to be some kind of a pilot project involving mediation services, a community dispute centre I believe it is, and Manitoba Housing. So far the recommendations that I have been made—I can see the minister's staff are making questioning gestures so we will get to that issue. All of these kind of things may be warranted, because this is a very serious matter where people feel like they are now giving access to their homes and their property and to their families, to people who they want to ensure are going to be following specific procedures and guidelines.

So how is the department going to deal with that? Do you have policies for all those things I have mentioned developed, or are you in the process of developing that with the tenant association board? Will you make any drafts that you have available public to us?

Mr. Reimer: Mr. Chairperson, I have been informed that there actually has been a fair amount of work done in regard to what the member is talking about in setting up some of the guidelines and the policy issues and looking at the direction that we are planning with the tenants associations. What it is, is it is looking at not only what the member mentioned in regard to the co-op agreements, but also the property management agreements that we have with the R and H units.

We have the ability to get some extra resource because of the takeover of some of the CMHC staff that has come to us because of the devolution. They do have experience in looking at agreements from across Canada, so we are

using them as a resource in setting up the conflict-of-interest guidelines, the confidentiality guidelines, the hiring guidelines. So we are working on that type of structure, and I am informed that there is a fair amount of work being done on that right now.

Ms. Cerilli: Is that new policy or is what the minister saying is that these are just going to be the same guidelines that would apply to any nonprofit, not necessarily one that is involved in this tenant management or these are new guidelines and procedures?

Mr. Reimer: Yes, they would be new because of the uniqueness of working with the public housing tenant associations. These would be new guidelines and new setups of procedures.

Ms. Cerilli: Sorry, I was listening to my colleague. I wonder if the minister could repeat that comment.

* (1530)

Mr. Reimer: I was just saying that the guidelines are new. The agreements would be new, that we are not just using, like I say, the existing ones. It would be a new set of agreements that would be set up with the tenants associations.

Ms. Cerilli: I think that is important, because there have been expectations raised here now, that tenants feel that they are going to have more input. I am wondering if the policies would also include then new guidelines or approaches for marketing and filling of vacancies and screening and maintenance. Is that all being sort of tailored to tenant management?

Mr. Reimer: Yes.

Ms. Cerilli: Further from that then, is there a specific role for the MMF involved in this project with Gilbert Park, either with the MMF itself or with their housing corporation?

Mr. Reimer: No, there are no relations with the MMF with this one, with Gilbert Park.

Ms. Cerilli: Is the minister aware then if the tenants association is just on their own to hire

the staff where they will, wherever they want, and if what is actually happening is that the staff that are actually being hired are from the MMF's housing portfolio?

Mr. Reimer: To the best of my knowledge we have no relationship with the MMF with Gilbert Park. There is maybe an indirect relationship, because one of the fellows that is working with the Gilbert Park Tenants Association did at one time work with the MMF, but I believe that he was let go or he quit and he just happened to come on with the Gilbert Park Tenants Association, but I think that is, to the best of my knowledge, the only association with the MMF or any connection with MMF at Gilbert Park.

Ms. Cerilli: So the minister is saying that his department does not have any relationship with them but perhaps the tenants association board does or the members of the board, but I also thought that the staff that are being hired there have a history of working for the MMF housing corporation.

Mr. Reimer: To the best of my knowledge there has only been one person. That is Mr. Gordon Smith, who at one time worked for the MMF. Whether there were other people that worked for the MMF, I really do not know.

Ms. Cerilli: Well, this has been an issue that has again been raised. I think the minister has received the same correspondence as I did. Some of the tenants were concerned that there were these kinds of organizations that were involved with the development of this agreement. What is the minister's take on that?

Mr. Reimer: No, they have no input at all into the agreement that we have with Gilbert Park or the one that we are negotiating in regard to the tenants association.

Ms. Cerilli: One of the comments that is often made in referencing a movement towards tenant management is that it is going to save money, that there are going to be efficiencies found. That is often the phrase that gets used with these devolution agreements. I am wondering if the minister can identify which areas there will be cost savings in.

Hon. Linda McIntosh (Minister of Environment): Am I permitted to ask questions also, or is it just only opposition?

Mr. Chairperson: Any member of the committee may ask questions, but how I have run my committees in the past is simply that the member of the opposition or the opposition critic gets the floor, and I really do not relinquish it to anybody else unless there is some point of order or something of that nature.

Mrs. McIntosh: I just have a question on the same topic.

Mr. Chairperson: Okay, perhaps the member can. When she is done, I will pass it on to the Minister of Environment (Mrs. McIntosh) before we finish.

Ms. Cerilli: We will see how long it takes.

Mr. Reimer: I am sorry, I temporarily could not remember what the question was. Now I can remember. The member asked me about the cost savings.

I guess where we look at cost savings is that one of the biggest ways to run the complex more efficiently is with more occupancy and more people in the units. Because of a strong tenants association and their involvement, I think what happens is that you get a sense of ownership within the complex and vacancies go down in it, and it has shown itself in the Gilbert Park complex. So that is one of the areas where there is cost savings.

I guess where there is possibly other cost savings is the fact that if there are more tenants in the units for a longer period, there is not that turnover, and there is not that need for possibly more renovations or possibly for repairs of units when there is a high turnover and there is a high possibility of abuse within the complex. Those are ways that we can save money in regard to the complex.

So I think good, solid management will show that there is a savings, which are intangible in the sense of trying to pinpoint exactly a specific dollar amount on it, but it is mainly because of the fact that there is stability and

there is a sense of caring within the complex, and it becomes more efficient in its dollars.

Ms. Cerilli: I guess I can accept that answer in the sense that that is what is hoped for in the future, but I understand that the experience so far in Gilbert Park over the last couple of months is that a number of people actually applied for transfer when this whole issue came up, and the pending vote for a new tenant association. I am not sure how the department has dealt with all those requests for transfer, but, again, this is just going from some of the tenants contacting me, that there were a number of requests to move.

So maybe the minister can deal with that. Has this been one of the areas where there has actually been problems with the way it has been handled so far? How are you going to deal with requests for moves or transfer, and can you tell me how many there were?

Mr. Reimer: I think that initially there was possibly a bit of apprehension in some of the tenants as to what may or may not have transpired, because sometimes, again, what we go back to, which we originally started the conversation with, is the communications and the lack of clarity as to exactly what was happening. Some of the tenants may have reacted in a way of thinking that they had to move or they did not want to be part of it, but I am told that some of the applications have now cancelled the request for movement. There is more a willingness to stay within the complex.

I guess, like anything, if people are wanting to move, we try to accommodate them in their transfer request and it goes through a normal procedure of evaluation and location in trying to move them, but I have been told that the requests have died right down, so it is not a big concern as it once was initially when people were a little apprehensive as to what they perceived to be a change there.

Ms. Cerilli: So does the minister know how many people have requested transfer and how many have cancelled?

Mr. Reimer: We do not have that figure right at hand, but I am sure we can find that for the member.

Ms. Cerilli: I may want to come back to this issue when I have my copy of the document from Ontario, the proposal for the co-op there. I used to have that—being photocopied again. I will move on to another area.

Mr. Chairperson: If you are going to move on to another area, might I entertain a question from the honourable Minister of Environment?

*(1540)

Ms. Cerilli: Briefly, sure.

Mrs. McIntosh: I appreciate that all committee members can ask questions, and I am grateful to have that acknowledged. It has been a while since I have been involved. As Minister of Housing, I was the minister who was there when the Gilbert Park Tenants Association first came to lobby hard for the right to have the tenants association assume some of the property management. They had come and asked if, over a period of five years, they could take over the property management, and they had asked that because they had an extremely high vacancy rate, something like 77 percent vacancy rate or some horrendous figure. They were having problems with severe vandalism. Teenagers had been setting fires in the units, and so on, smashed windows, just all kinds of problems. They felt in their presentation to me, when they asked if they could have this devolved to the tenants association, that if somehow they could develop a sense of ownership for the area, that increased pride would lead to decreased vandalism, higher occupancy rates, et cetera. They were supported in this strongly by Kevin Lamoureux, who was their MLA, who accompanied them on their presentation to me and subsequently several meetings out at Gilbert Park with the tenants association as they laid out their plans as to how they would accomplish this.

We did then ultimately agree to allow it, not to save money, but to try to salvage the community there. My understanding was at about the time I left the Department of Housing, which was about four and a half years ago, that indeed the vacancy rate had changed. They now had a waiting list. The vandalism had substantially decreased. The tenants association

was doing a credible, acceptable job. In fact, last year the tenants association sent both me and Kevin Lamoureux beautiful paintings and pottery as a thank you for giving them the authority to show some ownership.

Having that as background then and being out of touch with what is currently happening, could the minister let me know, has that—I am intrigued by the questions, the implication by the member for Radisson—been taken over by the MMF, which was never the intent and never the request and never the thought. This is the first I have heard it, if that has been an issue raised to the minister, fear of control by an outside organization rather than the tenants, if that has become an issue. Secondly, if in fact the situation, the improved statistics that were coming out of Gilbert Park have now begun to reverse, if so, what would the minister think would be the reason? I am intrigued by the cost. Cost was never the issue. The issue was saving the community, but I am interested as well in whether that is costing increased dollars to accede to that kind of request for social reasons. Is acceding to tenants' wishes costing government money?

Mr. Reimer: The member is right. I followed in the footsteps of her work in regard to the tenants association at Gilbert Park. As I alluded to earlier, sometimes it takes a long time to get some changes done there, but it has been very, very worthwhile in the responsibilities and the whole appearance of Gilbert Park.

Vandalism has gone down. The stability has come back into the complex where there is not that much of a turnover anymore. I think the grounds are looking very well. There is a sense of ownership in and around the yards. There are flowers. The grass is cut. There is no more, well, I should not say there is no more, but there is not as much glass or broken bottles or things like that around anymore. I think that there is a strong sense of ownership within the complex.

The vacancy rate has gone down significantly. As of right now, there are 34 units available out of 254, but I should point out that some of those units are used for activities. So I would think out of those 34 vacancies, there is block of at least eight, I think, units that we use

for various community activities in the complex. So the vacancy rate would be possibly less than 10 percent in that particular complex, so it has come down dramatically. So there has been a degree of stability put back into that community.

We alluded earlier to the MMF. We have had no type of indication that the MMF is looking at any type of management position, and we are certainly not going to be turning over any type of management of this complex to the MMF. We feel that the local tenants themselves would be the managing partners with Manitoba Housing, and not the MMF, so that has not entered into the picture at all. There have been no discussions in that area at all.

As I mentioned earlier, and actually because of a person's background, we are certainly not going to say that the person could not belong to the MMF or be an officer with the MMF, but I think that is a decision that the tenants association has to make as to whom they allow on their board. We certainly do not have any input as to the selection of the board. We do monitor the board, though, in a sense of setting up the election process to make sure that it is adhered to. We will do a residents' list check when the vote is taken.

I believe that was happening in the last election, which happened maybe a month to six weeks ago, where the residents were notified of a vote. They were given or asked to bring a sign of identification to the voting place to show that they were residents of Gilbert Park, and that was all monitored by Manitoba Housing. We are more concerned about the process and not the people that are running for office.

Ms. Cerilli: I want to ask the minister some questions about the information that he has provided me with. I have been waiting for some time to get the schedules attachments for the devolution agreement. Out of the possible 12 attachments, I do not have the information for five of them. So I am wondering why.

It seems to me that all the attachments that I do not have are the ones that are actually dealing with money matters. I know that when I first got the draft agreement sent to me, it did not include anything, and there were sections blocked out of

it. At that time the minister had said that anything related to the financial component of it that was related to negotiations was not available at that time and would sort of jeopardize the negotiations. I accepted that.

But now I think that, especially as we are in this process of Estimates where exactly what we are dealing with is the budget Estimates and the Public Accounts of the provincial government that now has to manage all of the money in this devolution agreement that really there is no explanation for why I do not have all of the schedule attachments. The minister may or may not know that in other departments where there have been devolution agreements that all of the information has been provided to the opposition. I am thinking of agreements in immigration or Education and Training. So I am wondering if the minister has some other explanation for me.

Mr. Reimer: I have been informed that it is protected because of federal legislation. That is what we have been told by CMHC, that it is not for release.

Ms. Cerilli: Which federal legislation is protecting the money that is coming from the federal government under CMHC to the Province of Manitoba to manage social housing? Is it another privacy legislation argument or what?

Mr. Reimer: I have been told that it is a federal legislation and that we just cannot give it out. From what I am told, if you went to the federal government and CMHC, the member would get the same answer.

Ms. Cerilli: Well, the minister has to know what the legislation is that is meaning that they cannot divulge the funding information. If I was the federal member of Parliament involved in the federal estimates for housing with CMHC and you were the minister sitting here responsible for CMHC, are you meaning to tell me that that minister cannot talk about the budget for CMHC with the opposition critics?

* (1550)

I mean, this is all public money. I do not understand. Is this housing legislation? Is this

privacy legislation? What kind of agreement has the minister signed giving away the public of Manitoba's right to know how much money is being spent on social housing in our province?

Mr. Reimer: I have been told that the funding allocation can be released. In regard to some of the other areas, there is a privacy factor that comes into account that controls other aspects. But the funding can be released.

Ms. Cerilli: Okay, we will go item by item then, because the first one that I do not have under the schedules, I have Schedule A, which is existing federal provincial program agreements, and then I do not have Schedule B, which is the CMHC unilateral programs and properties in those programs. I actually think I have that document from somewhere else. So that is a list of all the properties. I think one of my federal M.P. colleagues retrieved that one from CMHC so that we could know the portfolio of properties involved in this devolution agreement for Manitoba.

The ones that we are really interested in is Schedule E, Annual Funding by CMHC. Is the minister saying that that one is available, and he can provide it to me?

Mr. Reimer: As for Schedule E, I have been informed that we can give the funding amount, but we cannot give the expiry date or the drop-off date when that funding comes to an end. I am told that we can do that for Schedule E.

Schedule F, I think that was another one possibly, and (f)(1) I believe is also the member is asking me about. What comes into play with those is an ownership and a financial arrangement in privacy, a privacy disclosure on those two that the federal government will not let us release. [interjection] The list of all the loans, yes. There is a privacy factor involved with those two. What was the last one?

Ms. Cerilli: I said I was going to go item by item. So far, we have dealt with No. E, which you said that you will provide me with. I am not sure if you have that here now. What I am planning on doing is going program by program based on the other schedule information I have. What you have told me about Schedule E is that

you are not prepared to tell me when the mortgages are paid, which would be the date when the funding from CMHC per year funding is going to be completed and then we are on our own in terms of these properties. Is that correct, that you cannot tell me how many more years are left on the mortgage which would be the termination date for that funding? And why not?

Mr. Reimer: In regard to the funding, I have been told that it is approximately \$75 million now, and it will slowly be decreasing to zero by the year 2032.

Ms. Cerilli: Excuse me, Mr. Minister. I read that in your news release over two years ago. Are you telling me now in Estimates, after this many years we are operating under this agreement, that is all the information you have for me? It is ridiculous.

Mr. Reimer: I am not too sure what the member is asking. I am telling you that the amount of money we have been allocated, we will be getting from CMHC is \$75 million this year. It is on a decreasing scale, goes down each year until it reaches 2032, and it will be zero then.

Ms. Cerilli: I am telling the minister that that is not an acceptable answer; that I am going to go program by program and ask for specific information on how that \$75 million is broken down under each program, whether it is public housing that is cost-shared 75-25, whether it is the co-op program or whether it is the non-profits. We are going to go through that exercise because I think this is really important.

We have been waiting a long time to find out how this devolution agreement works. I am interested then in pursuing information related to the interest payments on the loans as well, but right now I am going to focus on the annual funding. So we are getting \$75 million, approximately, this year. I think from looking in the Estimates books, it is a little bit more than that, but I want to go through them.

What I had planned to do was to go through the Schedule C, portfolio programs and get the amount for each portfolio and the number of either units or the complexes that are under that

portfolio. Now, I am sure that this is all information the department deals with on a regular basis. You must have all this at your fingertips or certainly at the fingertips of whoever is operating the computer, so I do not think that this is, you know, unwieldy. I think this is the kind of accountability that is why we have these type of Estimates.

* (1600)

We just went through at least, what was it, three years of negotiations with the federal government to deal with what is billions and billions of dollars of an asset of the social housing and public housing in our province, and I do not think I can sort of accept that all you are going to tell me is we are getting \$75 million this year, and by the year 2031 we are going to have nothing. We have got to go through this exercise a little bit more carefully.

With that said, I am going to start off with the programs. Public housing programs, Section 79.(f)(p) is the name of the program. How many units, or however you calculate the numbers, and the total for that program.

Mr. Reimer: If the member would like to give us those numbers and what it is they refer to, we can get the department to try to get those figures for you. Would the member repeat it so that we can make sure we have got it down properly?

Ms. Cerilli: I will make it easier for the minister and his staff then. Basically, what I want to look at is take Schedule C of the portfolio programs, and under each program the amount of money for that program and either the number of units would be the most logical way to deal with it, or the number of complex apartments, whatever you want to call them. I think that going by units makes the most sense.

I am just looking here. There are 15 different programs, and this is what the minister often refers to when he is answering my questions is that there are all these different programs in the portfolio. They all have different mortgage periods. They all have different formulas for calculating cost-sharing. I understand that, and I am not going to go into that much detail. All that I want right now is the

total amount of dollars under each program and the number of units that is going to service.

I have some specific questions about some of the programs, but let us deal with this issue first.

Mr. Reimer: Sure, we can get the department to look at those requests.

Ms. Cerilli: Will I have that by Thursday morning?

Mr. Reimer: Yes.

Ms. Cerilli: Okay, good. Thanks.

One of the other issues I want to ask about is related to the rent supplement program, which is No. 3 on the schedule of programs, in (h)(a) Section 82, Rent Supplement Programs. I just want to make sure that I am understanding this correctly. The rent supplement programs for the whole portfolio, do they come under this schedule or under this program, or do the rent supplements for each of the other, let us say, the public housing? They have rent supplements that are attached to that program, so what the federal government is giving us in terms of the financing for that program is a sum that would address the capital needs, the maintenance, the mortgage payments and then on top of that there would also be some funds in that same program for rent supplement or subsidizing the rental fee of the units.

Mr. David Faurschou, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Reimer: In regard to the section that the member has referred to, No. 3, rent supplement program there, any monies that are funnelled through that particular area go strictly to the private market that is giving rent supplement. The other area—I maybe try to anticipate the next question—in regard to the rent supplement program in No. 4, funding that flows through that section can go to the Co-op Housing program, ILM program, and also to the private sector. Number three is for private sector supplement.

Ms. Cerilli: Okay, then, answering the other part of my question, that means that all the other

programs in the document include the rent subsidy as part of the money that is being transferred from the federal government for that program. These programs, then, they are different from SAFER and SAFFR, which I understood were completely financed from provincial government revenues.

Can the minister explain to me which programs, specifically No. 3, rent supplement programs, we are dealing with in the private sector?

Mr. Reimer: I think it really only pertains to the private sector. That rent supplement program in No. 3 is only for private sector. I think maybe I will ask the member to ask me the next question.

Ms. Cerilli: I am wanting to know which program in the private sector. I mean, I am aware that there are some rent supplement programs for people with disabilities. Are these programs like RRAP, which is money that goes to private homeowners? These are completely different programs. I wanted some explanation of the kind of programs that this is financing. Are they private, nonprofits? That is what I meant to ask.

Mr. Reimer: There are agreements made with private sector landlords where there are units, maybe a certain amount of units in a certain complex or a certain block of complex identified that get the rent supplement. That is where the agreement is with the landlord. These people, some of them, may be on disability or just in situations where they qualify for a rent supplement. That is the way the program is administered, really.

Ms. Cerilli: This is one of the reasons I am spending some time on this, because these are not programs that I am that familiar with. I am more familiar with some of the other ones. As I have talked with groups in the community, particularly with groups that represent people with disabilities, people with mental health problems, these are the kinds of programs or this program or these units I think are the ones they talk about, this whole idea that it, if I am understanding this correctly, the subsidy is going to a private, for-profit landlord. These are not nonprofits. Is that right?

Mr. Reimer: In most instances, it is with private operations.

* (1610)

Ms. Cerilli: I know that you have said that you are going to get me the more detailed information on all of these programs, but I am wondering if specifically you have more information on this one in terms of the number of units in Manitoba that are serviced by this program and if you can also tell me what the rent supplement is and how it works.

I am reading in the description here: Fully targeted applicants for housing assistance under this program will be selected on the basis of being financially unable to obtain affordable and suitable and adequate housing on the private market as determined by Manitoba Housing Renewal Corporation and qualified within the housing income limits established by Canada Mortgage and Housing.

So what does that actually mean in terms of dollars?

Mr. Reimer: We can get that figure for the member and the numbers of units that have rent supplement and the dollar amount.

Ms. Cerilli: I was waiting for the minister to tell me—

Mr. Reimer: Yes, we can get the figures for you.

Ms. Cerilli: But are you going to explain how the program works, in terms of dollars? I thought I heard your staff say it was rent geared to income. I am wondering if those have been subject to the same changes in the rent geared to income as other programs have.

Mr. Reimer: Yes, I think that I have got some information for the member here. In regard to the rent supplement units, it is designed to assist low- and moderate-income family and elderly households to obtain suitable housing in the private rental sector and in the nonprofit housing projects. The provincial government has entered into agreements with owner-operators of private rental stock wherever the province subsidizes the

difference between the approved market rate charged by the landlord and the rent geared to income paid by the qualifying tenant. The program is administered by the Manitoba Housing Authority and subsidies costs are shared by the federal and provincial government on a 50-50, 50 percent federal, 50 percent provincial, basis for units committed prior, pre-1986, and on a 75 percent federal and 25 percent provincial basis for units committed post-1985.

In Winnipeg, all districts, there are 1,755 units. In District 3, which is Selkirk, in Inwood there are eight; in Selkirk there are 13; in Stonewall there are 10; in Teulon there are 15; and for Woodlawn there are four, for a total of 50 in the Selkirk District, which is District 3. In District 4, which is Altona, there are four in Landmark, four units in Morden, seven units in Rosenort, 20 units in Altona, for a total of 36 for District 4, which is Altona. In Portage la Prairie, which is District 5, there are three in Carman, one in Fannystelle, two in Gladstone, 37 in Portage la Prairie; in Swan Lake there are two, for a total of 45 in District 5. In District 6, which is Brandon, in Brandon itself there are 86 units; in Carberry there are 13; in Deloraine there are 12; in Miniota there are six; in Newdale, there are two; and in Souris there are six for a total of 125. In District 7, which is Dauphin, there are 30 units in Dauphin; there are four units in Gilbert Plains, for a total of 34. In District 8, which is Roblin, there is zero; there are no rent supplement units. In The Pas, which is District 9, there were 13 in Flin Flon, 35 in The Pas, and 13 in Thompson, for a total of 61. In District 10, which is Churchill, there are no rent supplementary units. So in the total of all districts there are 2,106 units for rent supplement units. I have been informed too that this is a snapshot, so it can vary.

Ms. Cerilli: I just want to clarify, is the minister reading that from an annual report? That is from the annual report? From which year is that one?

Mr. Reimer: Mr. Chairperson, 1997-98.

Ms. Cerilli: Okay, well, I will take a look at that, but I am interested then in knowing, and I am assuming this information is not in the annual report, the apartment locations for where those units are. If he could provide me with that

list, like the property owners that have those units subsidized in their apartments.

Mr. Reimer: I have been told that we can give those numbers, but we cannot give the exact locations because of the confidentiality of the tenants that are on rent supplement.

* (1620)

Ms. Cerilli: This is a new thing I am running into when I am calling your department, and I am assuming that this is the privacy thing again. When I talked last time with your department, it was making requests about the number of elderly and infirm person housing units that have received a licence, and I was told that the department is reviewing if the privacy legislation as it is newly enacted would affect that. Has that decision been complete? Are you now telling me that these ones are also under that umbrella and you cannot tell me where the public money is going in terms of who is receiving the rent supplement because that would be identifying those tenants as low income?

Mr. Reimer: That is correct.

Ms. Cerilli: I want to have the minister then give me some kind of written recommendation, or legal opinion, I guess, from his department with respect to this, because this is something new as it relates—and it does not seem very consistent, because when we are dealing with public housing, there is information that is made public on a regular basis about where those units are. So, when it comes to elderly and infirm persons licences, and now when it comes to the list for private apartments under the rent supplement, I am not getting the addresses. On the other hand, there is lots of information made public that identifies Manitobans as receiving assistance and thereby implying that they are low income.

Mr. Reimer: Yes, I have been told that there is a written legal opinion on this disclosure, and we have to abide by the directive that has been put forward to us, that these are not available.

Ms. Cerilli: So is the minister saying that he is going to give me the legal opinion so that I can sort of see what it says and what the—okay, we will start with that.

Mr. Reimer: We can provide that.

Ms. Cerilli: Before we leave the whole issue of the rent supplement program, though, I have a few more questions. Let us go back to the rate rent. It is rent geared to income? What percent is it at, and are they subject to the same sort of guidelines or criteria to social housing?

Mr. Reimer: Yes, it is 27 percent, and they are the same regulations.

Ms. Cerilli: So is there a policy in place that determines which units are going to get the program, because one of the other answers the minister gave is that this is continually in flux, that units may lose the rent supplement or additional units may be added on. I am interested, though, in the criteria for how it is determined which properties are going to get the rent supplement.

Mr. Reimer: The number that I referred to the member, when I say that it is in flux, I think what I was referring to is that that is the maximum number that is available. They may not all be prescribed to at that particular time. So this is what I mean. It may not be as if it is a constant. That is what I was referring to when I say that it is a snapshot in time.

Ms. Cerilli: The minister has a habit of doing this. He never completely answers the previous question, so I have to go back again. So my question was how do you determine that? How was it determined which apartments would get the rent supplement? What are those guidelines? What is the policy?

Mr. Reimer: I guess we have to look back to a little bit of history in the development of the rent supplement programs. They were in conjunction with the federal government because the federal government was a funding partner in regard to rental supplements. So they were negotiated back in I guess the '60s, '70s and '80s in regard to the numbers. They have remained the same because the federal government has pulled themselves out as a funding partner, so that the numbers remain static as to what was agreed upon.

So there has been no change in the partnership we have had with the federal government in

regard to the numbers of rent supplement units, but it was arrived at back when public housing was quite evident in regard to expansion with the federal, provincial and municipal governments.

Ms. Cerilli: The minister still has not answered my question. I want to know how it was decided that a certain apartment would get a certain percentage of their units designated as receiving the rent supplement. What is the criteria? How did you pick the 2,106 units that exists with the rent supplement, why those 2,000 units and not some other ones? There are all sorts of questions that flow from that. Obviously, especially in the current climate, property owners and landlords are clamoring for some kind of assistance in the rental market. I have read recently articles in different publications that are promoting this kind of rent supplement program. So I think it is a really important question. What is the criteria for determining which apartments? If there are no criteria, then explain how was it determined which apartments were going to get the supplement?

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

* (1630)

Mr. Reimer: I have been informed that since a lot of these numbers came about under previous times and under previous staffing, we would have to look back into our records as to how it came about with the numbers. But from what I understand, they were done a lot of times through tenders and proposal calls for the supply of these units and were tied to the agreements with the landlords, too, in regard to the allocation of the specific numbers in specific buildings. So it is a matter of doing the research back into our files and our agreements with the various landlords. We do not have that type of information here with us.

Ms. Cerilli: But you are going to get me then the criteria that were used, even if it was back in the '60s and '80s. It is quite interesting that these same apartments have had a supplement for those many years going back as far as the 1960s, that there has been an agreement in place that some landlords are getting rent subsidies. The reason I am wanting to spend time on this is because as I have talked with community

groups, this is an issue that they have been raising. Both landlords and tenants are talking about these programs out there.

It would be interesting if we looked at some of these apartments, how they would compare in terms of repair and maintenance. Are there requirements if tenants are living in a rental supplement unit that the landlord has in terms of reporting maintenance to either CMHC or now Manitoba Housing Renewal Corporation? I remember when I first became the critic, I was surprised; it was SAFER and SAFFR. There is not inspection component at all. We always hear about the amount of rent money that is going to substandard housing. What kind of requirements are there on the part of the landlord that goes along with these programs?

Mr. Reimer: I was just talking to staff and they were mentioning that some of these things go back into the '70s and that. But the agreement should be they that they would be able to search them and find out the criteria at that time, and I believe that is what the member is looking for, some of the criteria for selection at that time. We can certainly try to accommodate that.

Ms. Cerilli: Okay. One of the other things that is interesting with this program is requests that are being made from the community. I do not know if the minister has met with some of the same groups that I have, that are the tenants in these units, but one of the things that they are calling for is for the supplement to move with the tenant rather than to have it fixed with the unit. I am wondering if the minister and his department have heard that request, and if they are considering that at all.

Some of the groups that I have met with, the AIDS Shelter Coalition, a variety of groups that deal with Manitobans with disabilities, those kinds of groups, I guess, are the ones that benefit from this program or their clients benefit from this program. I am wondering if the minister is dealing with that at all.

Mr. Reimer: I had alluded to it a little earlier in the discussion regarding the rental supplement program, that the agreements are not tied to the tenants. They are tied to the units and to the landlords. It would take a different type of

approach to tie it with the tenant. I know that the one program that is tied to the tenants, that they can so-call shop around with it is the SAFER and SAFFR program. A person can choose where he or she may want to live with that program, but under the rent supplement program, it is agreements with the landlords and it stays with that particular complex. It does not travel with the tenant.

Ms. Cerilli: I am of aware that, Mr. Chairperson. To the minister, that is the question I am asking, though. I am aware that is the way the program exists. My question is: have you been approached by community groups to change that, and is that being considered at all? Perhaps it would be a new program, but this is what community groups are asking for, that they have a program for people specifically with disabilities or illnesses where they can have more flexibility in choosing where they are going to live, that they would have a rent supplement that would travel with them and not be attached to a specific unit.

Mr. Reimer: I have not been lobbied by any groups along those lines. In regard to those types of suggestions, as to the change of it, it is something that is relatively new, only brought forth through discussions right now as to the possibility of looking at the changes. As I say, I have not had that type of overtures by any individuals or groups of individuals.

To the best of my knowledge, overtures may have been made to people in the department, but it has never come to my attention.

Ms. Cerilli: Okay. Moving on then, would this specific program, the rent supplement program, Section 82, under the devolution agreement, does this program run out as well, given that it is in the private sector and it is not bound by the mortgage payments through CMHC?

Mr. Reimer: Yes, I am told they too would run out. Most of them were in around the 30- to 35-year agreements. I imagine the timing would be very similar to what I outlined a little earlier regarding the year 2032. I think that is what I alluded to earlier, about then, within that range.

Ms. Cerilli: If these were 30-year agreements that were signed in the '60s, they are going to run

out sooner than that. So I am wondering if we are even now losing some of these units. How many subsidized units are we losing per year? Has that been occurring over the last number of years? It has certainly passed 35 years since 1960.

Mr. Reimer: I have been informed that 1974 was the date, not in the '60s, approximately 1974.

Ms. Cerilli: So the program was initiated in 1974. Can you give me the time frame? We now have 2100 units across the province. Do you have sort of a rough estimate of when the last unit was declared as having a rent supplement?

Mr. Reimer: I am informed that it commenced in October of 1974 and it ceased in 1992. I am not too sure of the months.

Ms. Cerilli: That is okay, 1992 is good enough. Maybe, rather than going through these questions, the other thing I can get from the department is, of those 2100 or so units, even roughly in blocks, the number that were initiated throughout that time. Again, this is the type of program I know on the industry side you always hear landlords and property managers calling for. They do not want social housing. I hear it all the time when I meet with landlord groups. They want these kinds of rent supplement programs.

One of the other questions that flows from this is: as the government looks to developing programs as it sees fit under the devolution agreement now, is this the type of program you are considering? I know that in your opening statement you talked about an overall plan that is being developed for the larger, doubled size of the portfolio. One of the things that you have talked about is that you are going to be looking for efficiencies. That was one of the ideas of going into this devolution agreement. So I am wondering if this is a direction that you see your department going in.

* (1640)

Mr. Reimer: As was alluded to in my opening statements in regard to the devolution program,

one of the factors that was taken into consideration in looking at the devolution was the fact of the ability for the province to be the central decision maker as regards the public housing and the administration of the 37,000 units. One of the things that is quite interesting and I think represents an opportunity is to try to look at new and innovative ways of providing public housing with the same responsibilities of always having public housing available for people that are in need of it or in a disadvantaged state where there is a call for public housing. It gives us the ability to be quite innovative in our approach to supplying public housing and not necessarily mean that we are in the bricks and mortar trade. We would be in some sort of program where we can try to look at possibly expanding a rental supplement program, look at possibly looking at innovative ways of funding rental accommodations to individuals.

One of the options that is worthy of consideration is some sort of expansion of a rental supplement program. As to the characteristics of it or the working mechanisms of it, well, that is something that I think we would have to look at and work at. These are some of the things that I think the department looks at in a very challenging manner, because it gives them the opportunity to look at innovative ways to still provide public housing and public accommodations but not necessarily because of the restricted dollars that are available for bricks and mortar and for expansion, the redirection of savings that are accrued by the amalgamation and the devolution and redirecting those savings towards public housing of some component, because one of the criteria that the federal government did make very abundantly clear to us was the fact that if we do take over the devolution and the management of it, any savings that are realized have to be put back into a public housing component.

So those are some of the avenues that we feel we have an opportunity to look at redirecting funding possibly into a rental supplement program of sorts where, as the member mentioned, the supplement travels with that person and that person can maybe shop not only within the public housing sector but also within the private sector or for other avenues of

support. Those are some of the things that I think we would be looking at. The department I think is quite excited about looking at new directions.

Ms. Cerilli: I thought the minister said in his earlier answer, when I asked about the lobbying, in terms of a moving rent supplement program, that that is not something your department was considering. Maybe you are going to take that idea and run with it, but I am asking specifically: is your department looking at a rent supplement program, as this one exists, in terms of the kind that the property managers really like, the lines that are specifically tied to a certain property? That is the sense that I get. I am not sure if there have ever been conversations between some of these tenant groups and the landlords and property managers groups talking about a movable rent supplement program.

Am I to understand from the minister's answer that your approach as you are looking at new innovations and how you are going to expend all this money you are going to save from your existing portfolio that you are looking at rent supplement programs, that that is the direction you are looking at and that may now include rent supplement programs where the supplement goes with the tenant and not with the unit?

Mr. Reimer: What I alluded to when the member was asking me whether I was entertaining these, I was not entertaining them in a sense because of a group coming forward. I thought that she was asking me whether groups had approached me on this, and no group has approached me on this. What I am saying is, I have directed my department to look at ways of possibly looking at a program or something like that and look for models or look for innovative ways of how rental supplement can possibly be transportable, as the member has mentioned, with the individuals and looking at the various options. That would certainly be one of them.

It is not a situation that I dismiss and say that we would not do. I am saying that we would have to look at ways to do that and to initiate it and to, as mentioned, maybe even expand the existing program. So it is certainly not off the drawing board. It would be part of

the option package that we would bring forth or we would look at. So I have not been lobbied that way by any groups, as I mentioned, and maybe I misinterpreted the question, but that is something that we as a department would look at possibly expanding.

Ms. Cerilli: Mr. Chairperson, I was left with the distinct impression from that question that you were not looking at any kind of a supplement that would be a movable supplement. I think I asked that. I was just suggesting that this is where it has come from in terms of my consultations.

I am sure the minister has problems listening to two people at once, as most of us do, so I will just wait. Are you okay now?

So, just to clarify, this muddled situation we are in is that the government is looking at policy directions toward rent supplement programs. That would be one of the ways that they would use any of the monies found in efficiencies from their existing portfolio. It would be redirected into rent supplements, and that would be either a unit rent supplement or, perhaps, even looking at tenant rent supplement programs. Okay. I see the minister is nodding yes. He wants to add more.

Mr. Reimer: Mr. Chairperson, I believe the member is right. That is my indication. Yes, certainly, we would look at all options, and that, certainly, would be one of them.

Ms. Cerilli: One of the big questions, then, is: how are you going to identify these cost savings or efficiencies in your management of your some 37,000 units that you now manage, in managing your existing 2,100-or-so rent supplement units, just under that one program? How are you going to identify cost savings?

Mr. Reimer: I think one of the things that has come about fairly fast in the devolution is the fact if we looked at the total numbers of people that were involved with the federal government in their administration of their complex here in Manitoba—I do not know the exact number of people that were involved with that office originally, but I think that what we have been able to do is that we have been able to

amalgamate that number of units into our portfolio. I think we have added two dozen, about eighteen and a half staff years to part of the complement. So that right there shows a significant amount of savings that is realized by the amalgamation of the two departments.

I think what it has also brought forth is it has given us an opportunity to do some redirecting of priorities within our own department. I think I can speak for the department where there is a fair amount of enthusiasm and optimism for innovative thinking in how that the department can be redirected towards the operations with the amalgamation. With anything of that nature, it gives you an opportunity to look at innovative ways to save money, to possibly look at amalgamation of various administrative areas.

* (1650)

It gives us a chance to consult with the nonprofit groups as to the savings that they may be accruing through efficiencies in management and setting up a better type of accountability. We look at ways for them to improve their management of the nonprofit associations. The comment has even come back that is easier for them to operate now because the contact and the familiarity of staff within our portfolio give them the ability to make decisions more quickly. So those are some of the ways that various monies can be saved in the administration of the two portfolios.

Ms. Cerilli: I want to try to get a little bit more specific. You gave me one specific example, and that was that you are going to have fewer staff; that you have not necessarily transferred all the staff positions from CMHC over to Manitoba Housing. I know that is referenced in the Estimates book. I was looking at that. So that means that there are going to be fewer managers dealing with the budgets and administering that nonprofit portfolio. Are there other specifics like that? I will ask the general question, then I will get into some of the things I have been hearing in the community.

Mr. Reimer: The member is asking about the specific savings. I should point out that it has only been since actually just a few months ago, March of this year, that the 18.5 people came

over into our envelope. With the increase of staff of 18.5, the ability to look at the efficiencies is just beginning. I can only point out that, from the high of around 100 or 115 people at one time with CMHC working here in Winnipeg, managing that portfolio of housing under the federal government, to take it down to, with our administration, approximately, as I say, just over 18, I would think that there is a significant amount of money that was associated with that other cost factor for housing, that we could realize a fair amount of savings that could be redirected in other areas of housing that we feel have priorities. So there is that.

In the consultations, as I mentioned earlier, with the nonprofit associations that we now can have contact with in trying to work with their budgets and their budget allocations, we feel, as I say, that these monies can be saved. We can redirect into innovative programs that I was outlining a little earlier.

Ms. Cerilli: So we still only have the one specific, then, on how you are going to save money, and that is on the staffing. That is all you have said really. I have been in contact with some of the community groups, and I guess the minister and his department would see going from over 100 staff at CMHC to 18.5 is a good thing, but perhaps some people in the community are having a bit of a different experience.

One fellow, who manages a nonprofit, described for me how he went to Manitoba Housing and actually had a \$21,000 cheque for a surplus they had. They were surprised that they did not know who their new portfolio manager was going to be. No one was there to sort of receive him. He had not been given any information about who he was now going to be dealing with, and he was surprised, because he was dealing with a large budget for managing his nonprofit and made it sound like to me that the transition at least had not gone very smoothly.

What information has gone to nonprofit managers about who they are dealing with over at Manitoba Housing? How is this going to affect people if one of the ways you are saving money is with staff? The other thing that people

are concerned about is that you are going to force nonprofits to deal with their portfolio as a whole, that you are going to expect, for example, a nonprofit corporation that is managing a number of different properties to deal with them all together and that savings from one are going to have to be used for another apartment. Is that another policy direction that you are taking? And how do you explain the fact that there was no direction given to some of the nonprofit managers as to who their portfolio administrator was going to be?

* (1700)

Mr. Reimer: Mr. Chairperson, I have been advised that we tried to keep a continuity in regard to the contact persons and once things were established, a letter went out to all of the complexes stating who their contact person was. In fact, in looking at the transference of, I mentioned earlier there were about 18.5 people, I believe it was almost eight people or so were actually assigned for continuity to be part of the contact group that people had dealt with before, so that there was not that sense of anxiety. But one of the things that we emphasized right at the very beginning was that we were looking at the status quo. We were trying to maintain a continuity of reporting, a continuity of accountability, and we tried to make sure that they were aware of who their contact person was right off at the very beginning. There may have been possibly the odd glitch in the transferring, but I would think that would be more the exception than the rule.

Ms. Cerilli: Okay, how about the other part of my question in terms of the way that you are having nonprofit corporations deal with their buildings in terms of not have a budget for each building but sort of deal with them as a lump sum and have them find their own efficiencies, as you could say, of then having them use the money that is saved on one property put into another property? Is that something that has been a policy direction that has been given to the nonprofit corporations?

Mr. Reimer: I can only reiterate that we are looking at a status quo. We are trying to maintain it the same as it was before, the way it was done in the past. That is more or less the

way we are trying to accommodate the housing, the change.

Ms. Cerilli: The minister realizes that I am not necessarily just dreaming up all these questions myself, that people in the community are approaching me with their concerns, and I am raising them here, which, I guess, is my role as the opposition person for Housing. One of the other concerns that has been raised with me is that the replacement reserves are not necessarily being paid on all the properties. This may be not only the ones that are nonprofits, but the ones that are existing Manitoba Housing portfolio that have always been Manitoba Housing, which are the public housing, that there is actually an unfunded liability in the sense that these replacement reserves have not been paid.

I am wondering if the government can make a commitment that the money that comes from both levels of government that should be going into the replacement reserves for nonprofit co-ops and all the social housing will actually be paid.

Mr. Reimer: I am informed that, with the nonprofits, we do not fund their reserve. They are responsible for the funding of their own reserve. That is part of their budget. It is not a separate type of budgeting process or allocation. They are responsible to put it in their budget. They receive an annual amount to be put into their reserve allocation fund, and it is in their operating agreement.

Ms. Cerilli: So those specified dollars for the operating reserve fund or the replacement reserves, those are being paid to the nonprofit corporations, and it is their responsibility to put them into that fund. Has that amount, then, been decreasing, the amount of money that has gone to the nonprofit housing corporations for that purpose?

Mr. Reimer: I have been informed that the amount of money that has been allocated is a percentage of the capital costs. It is six-tenths of 1 percent up to the capital cost replacement fund that is established. Once the fund amount is reached, that is it. That is their capital allocation fund. It is included in their operating Estimates each year.

Ms. Cerilli: We will pick up here when I resume in the committee, and then I will be replaced by my colleagues from Swan River and Dauphin. They are going to be asking some questions about their regions and we can pick up on some of these issues on Thursday, I guess it would be. Thanks very much.

Mr. Stan Struthers (Dauphin): Mr. Chairperson, housing in the Dauphin area is a very important issue. I am approached quite often by constituents who have different problems, not just specific problems, the case-work sort of things that come into every MLA's office but also some questions, and quite often from constituents, some advice on the broader policies.

For example, in some of the communities in the Parkland, I know I have been approached and other MLAs have been approached in terms of number of houses in the Metis communities, houses not on First Nations but other areas where there is public housing, and requests for houses to be built, requests for houses to be renovated, requests for houses to be repaired and maintained. One of the concerns that I am approached with quite often by community councils, I know in my constituency, the community council at Waterhen has approached me. A community council, I am sure the member for Swan River knows, at Duck Bay, for example, has approached me and has asked questions in terms of who gets to do the work on these houses.

* (1710)

I have been approached from the angle of we need the work in our communities. It is a good way to provide employment for people. We have people in the communities who have the skills to either build houses or repair houses or renovate houses that are in their communities. I get people approaching me from that perspective. Also, there is a feeling that these houses could be better built by local people taking into consideration local concerns and local requests by people who are eventually going to live in these homes.

So, to begin with, I would like to ask the minister, in the programs in which his

department are involved in the Parkland area: is there a policy for preferential treatment? Does a local community get first crack at the jobs that are available, or is there another process by which the houses are tendered for building? I used the words "preferential treatment," and I do not want the negative content. It is not a negative term, at least not the way that I intended. I think the minister understands that it is not preferential treatment in terms of one person over another but in terms of having local people do the work on local projects. I wonder if the minister could comment on that.

Mr. Reimer: I think that in looking at the process within our own administrative Housing portfolio, naturally we try to go to a tendering process as much as we can in regard to any type M and R projects or remodelling programs within all districts. In the particular district that the member is alluding to, I think that what we try to do there also is look to local service contractors or service providers. We would certainly welcome them to have their names put forward on our tendering package so that they are made aware of when there are programs available for remodelling, whether it is a plumbing program or an electrical program or something like that.

We would encourage the local tradespersons to have this type of contact with our Manitoba Housing through our district office in Dauphin there, to make themselves known that they are interested in being on the tendering process, and that when we do have calls for work in the particular area, that we can look on a localized basis in the tendering process. I would encourage, if the member has people who are willing to make themselves known, to have those names forwarded to our local office, and then we can look at trying to get that type of recognition when tenders are awarded.

In regard to locations where some of the repairs are done, if it is under our jurisdiction we are the ones that handle the tendering, and we are the ones that put out the calls and the proposals. There are other units that are managed by the MMF under a management contract with Manitoba Housing. They do have units in and around the particular area, I believe, that the member was mentioning, Duck Bay and

the Waterhen area. The maintenance of those units are managed by the MMF. We do not have any direct administrative control on their tendering processes, but we do encourage them to look at the same type of tendering process that we do, looking at the local tradespersons to help them.

Because it is an agreement with Manitoba Housing now that it is done on a local basis instead of on the federal basis, there is our ability to monitor things in an open way that we are made aware of. I can only suggest that if the member is made privy to certain situations and that there is an apparent problem, we would certainly want to hear about it and try to address it through our means of communications with the various people who manage our properties. The specifics we can certainly look at. Like I say, in general terms we try to abide in a very open area in tendering and encouraging local people to be involved.

Mr. Struthers: I thank the minister for that answer. The question that ran through my mind as I was listening to him was for what he said with the tendering process. Does that include building and renovating and repair and maintenance, or are there different processes for each?

Mr. Reimer: It would not apply to building, because we are not in the building of new buildings anymore, so it would apply to the tendering and the tradesperson and the supply of trades and materials in the various areas, but not to building. We do not build anymore, but we do renovations, we do upgrades, we do refits and things like that. We look at the most efficient area, and a lot of times going locally is efficient. The person is familiar with the area, has the local contacts, and it behooves us to look at ways that are the most efficient for awarding tenders.

Mr. Struthers: I am wondering, in the tendering process, is there a weighting procedure, a weighting process as part of your tendering process? Does a local firm get extra points when they put their tenders in? It would seem to me that might be one way of encouraging local entities to get involved and put some people to work in renovating and repairing these homes.

Mr. Reimer: No, we do not employ any type of weighting program in regard of that, but we do encourage, as I say, the local tradespersons to make sure that they put in a request to be on the list for tender calls and that. We do not look specifically for a certain area. We look at the best efficiencies not only for the taxpayer of Manitoba but for the local area too in a sense.

* (1720)

Mr. Struthers: I am interested too in knowing just who gets to put their bids forward in the tendering process. What types of entities or organizations would the tendering process be open to? Is it just a private firm, a contractor who would put the name forward? Could a community organize themselves into something other than a company? Could it be an association, a local community association from a community? Could it be a co-op, if that was an idea, that a local community had to form a co-op and tender on that basis? What I am hearing from constituents is that there needs to be a bit of a review on the whole concept of housing and renovations and maintenance, and I am wondering just how open the minister is to different ideas that could come forth. I would suspect that any of these groups would need to be incorporated or some form of identification like that to put their bids forward, but I am wondering how open the minister would be to other suggestions.

Mr. Reimer: I think that one of the things that we are always very concerned about when we make requests for proposals or tender calls, whether it is a refit or whatever the call is for, is that the codes and the guidelines being requested are adhered to. That would be one of our primary concerns, the fact that what we are requesting is done to the specifications and the codes that are acceptable by Manitoba Housing.

As to an individual or a group or, as the member mentioned, a co-op, I would think that as long as they had the incorporation papers and the abilities to tender as an entity, that their tender could be taken as seriously as anyone else's. If the accountability is there, the transparency of results is there, and, like I mentioned earlier, the accountability of the tax dollars is spent in a way that is prudent to the guidelines

that are outlined, if a third party or a group that is incorporated comes forth, as the member mentioned, a community group or a co-op group, and they felt that they could come forth with a tender, they are certainly open to be part of the process.

Mr. Struthers: So any new entity that would decide it wanted to get into the home repair business in these communities, would they work through your department in terms of licensing, or is that a different department?

Mr. Reimer: I think that they would have to first become incorporated, and that would be through Consumer and Corporate Affairs. They could take out a nonprofit incorporation licence. A good example that I alluded to earlier and that I had discussions with the member for Radisson (Ms. Cerilli) on was in what we are doing with the Gilbert Park Tenants Association.

They have become an incorporated group, and what we have done is we have devolved spending authorities to them. They have taken over some of the maintenance. They have taken over some of the grounds-keeping and things like that within their own complex, and they are expected to be accountable for the dollars that we allocate to them. This is a nonprofit organization, but it has to be incorporated, and that could apply to somewhere in the member's area, in the Dauphin area. If there was a group that came forth that wanted to do some management or some upgrading or maintenance programs and they comply to the tendering specifications, they certainly would be considered, yes.

Mr. Struthers: The minister made mention earlier about the Manitoba Metis Federation and their role in housing in Manitoba. Is there a protocol of some kind between the Department of Housing and the MMF to standardize tendering procedures? Is there a protocol in terms of assisting the MMF in administering its portion of housing decisions made in this province? Is there any kind of formal arrangement between your department and the Manitoba Metis Federation?

Mr. Reimer: In working with the MMF, one of the things that we took over—when I say we, I mean when this government took over the

devolution program, the MMF had a working relationship and agreements with the federal government in regard to the management of their portfolio. With the devolution, this was moved over to the provincial side of the spectrum. We now have taken over the administration of the federal portfolio, which included the agreements with the MMF.

One of the things we did from the very beginning—and I should say that the official turnover is not that long ago; in fact, I guess it is less than six months, not even that, January 1 of this year, pardon me—was take over, like I say, the responsibilities that the MMF had with their management agreement. One of the things we indicated was that we would not be changing any type of agreement, not only with the MMF but for some of the other associations that the federal government had agreements with. We took them over in their entirety. We did not want to disturb the relationship that they had with the federal government. So the MMF had an agreement with the federal government which we have taken over.

What has transpired since the take-over is our becoming more familiar with that agreement with the MMF and all its implications. We have been meeting almost on a monthly basis, looking at their operational review, their administrative review so that we become more familiar with their operation. As the agreement, because it is a year-to-year agreement, from what I understand, comes up, we will be in a more knowledgeable position to work with the MMF.

In fact, what we have done is, we have assigned a person to work specifically and solely with the MMF to get an understanding and an assessment so that we can look at not only how we can work more efficiently because of their efficiencies but how they can learn from us. Initially the agreement that we have taken over is identical to the one that the federal government had but, like I say, it has given us a chance to work more co-operatively with the MMF and find out how we can have better relationships or expand on the relationships that we have with them.

Mr. Struthers: I am quite often put in a position where I feel a lot like some of the

people who are looking for housing, feeling like a ping-pong ball sometimes from one jurisdiction to the next. I am sure I am not the only one feeling that sometimes. Maybe the minister himself feels like it sometimes in the whole area of housing.

The one thing we do know in our area and throughout the North is quite a significant lack of housing and quite a shortage that any level of government would want to move to try to alleviate. I am struggling sometimes to figure out what the role of the CMHC is, what the role of provincial Housing is, where the MMF fits in. The minister has cleared some of that up for me here so far today. The only angle that I have not asked about in terms of this, from my understanding, is the federal government's role now and what exactly it is that demarcates them from the provincial government in terms of jurisdiction? Maybe the minister can help me with that.

* (1730)

Mr. Reimer: With devolution, what has happened is that all jurisdictions that the federal government had in regard to housing in Manitoba, other than on reserve—the reserve housing still stays with the federal government—but anything that the CMHC was involved with or the federal government was involved with has been transferred over to the provincial government under our jurisdiction for the management and the administration of their portfolio.

In return for that, they transferred all their funding that went with CMHC. They transferred that to the provincial government. Now, where the opportunity comes about with us—when I say us, I mean our provincial government—are there any efficiencies that we can realize out of the administration of that portfolio? That total portfolio now, we can transfer back into some sorts of different types of housing components, because that is one of the things that was made very clear. The federal government says, okay, we are going to give you the transference of all these approximately 17,000 units. With that transference comes a lump sum of money. You administer it, you manage it. If you can find efficiencies, you can keep that extra dollar, but that dollar has to be transferred back into some housing component.

So it has given us an opportunity to look creatively at that total package now. Now do we not only have to manage our own of about 17,000, but we have inherited the federal government's other 17,000. Looking at the total picture, there are efficiencies that we feel that we can realize from that, and the monies that we save on that gives us the opportunity to look at possibly reinvesting into other housing components, whether it is a rental supplement program or some sort of home renovation program or other areas where we feel that there are more dollars, that we can get a bigger bang for our dollar.

We will have a responsibility to be involved with social housing, the ability now to make decisions on a local table is much easier for us to look at innovative ways of doing this. Some of the things maybe looking at some sort of programming for the rural areas in regard to housing or supplementing housing in that area or some sort of programming. These are some of the things that the department is looking at, and I think that this is one of the things why the department looks at fairly optimistically in trying to come to some sort of new directions with our housing programs here in Manitoba, because it gives us the ability to make decisions on a local level now.

Before decisions could not be made because we had, as one of our primary partners, the federal government, and it would take all the time and effort of trying to move up the chain in Ottawa or through the CMHC, and a lot of times it was against their policies, or the policies could not be changed, and you had to just accept that and say, no, we cannot do anything for you. We can now do localized decision making in regard to housing, and any monies that we save we have to put back into housing. That is the biggest criterion that the federal government came down to us, saying that we will transfer this, we will give you the funding, but any savings you have to put back.

That is fair. I think there is nothing wrong with that. I think that it is a good way to look at trying to utilize the best we can for housing here in Manitoba, because then it becomes a made-in-Manitoba solution for housing. So I think that there are opportunities there, and some of the

ways are looking at innovative ways, not only from the city of Winnipeg area but from all areas of Manitoba.

Mr. Struthers: Yes, and I would certainly encourage the minister to look at any ways that he can to incorporate local input and local folks into providing solutions to housing problems in rural Manitoba.

The last question I wanted to ask was: can the minister indicate how much money was transferred from the federal government to the province through this devolution?

Mr. Reimer: It is \$75 million that was transferred. It is on a diminishing scale tied into the mortgage and the paydown, and it will peter out to nothing by 2032.

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): I have a couple of questions that I want to ask as well. One of the issues that comes very often to my constituency office is people who are looking for assistance to repair homes. Now I recall back in the '80s there used to be an excellent home repair program where people could get money whether to repair their roof or to upgrade their house. If I recall correctly, a certain portion of that might have been forgiven or else it was a loan program, but there is no assistance now, and when people look for funds, whether it is repair their roofs or those kinds of things, they are told that there is no money. There is money through RRAP, but the waiting list is so long that by the time they get anything through that program they become quite frustrated.

I wonder whether the minister recognizes this is a serious problem when we see the quality of homes deteriorating and some people living in some very poor conditions and homes that should be repaired but because of low incomes people just cannot afford to do it on their own. I would like to ask the minister if he recognizes this is a problem and whether he has any suggestions that I can give to these people who are looking for assistance in home repair but nothing is available right now.

Mr. David Faurshou, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Reimer: The member is right. There are some programs available for home renovations and upgrades. The RRAP program that was mentioned has been very, very beneficial. In fact, we just announced an additional \$616,000 into the RRAP program, our provincial contribution, recognizing that there is the need for safe and well-maintained homes. It is an additional funding to the federal government, and the gross number then in Manitoba will be just about \$2.5 million in the RRAP program which will be available for these types of upgrades.

It is assistance to homeowners who occupy and own substandard housing in need of repairs. The maximum loan in southern Manitoba is \$18,000 of which \$12,000 may be forgivable, and the loan limits are slightly higher in northern Manitoba. I do not have those numbers with me, but I can get them for the member. I know southern Manitoba. Also, some of the funding is available through the RRAP program for disabled people, people who are looking to upgrade their homes who have disabilities, and even people who own rental accommodations, landlords, can get assistance, and here again it is forgivable loans up to \$18,000 per unit which are available for rental properties and up to \$12,000 per bed in rooming houses. So we made that money available. We have just announced an increase, like I say, of just over \$616,000.

* (1740)

There is another program that is available for home renovation for seniors, and that is called our HASI Program, which is Home Adaptations for Seniors' Independence program, and to that program, we have added some more funding in that area of almost \$75,000. These are small loans and assistance under the HASI Program is in the form of a forgivable loan. These are forgivable loans for expenses that are incurred by a senior adapting his or her home. The loan maximum there is \$2,500, and it is limited to one loan per household. There, the applicant must be 65 years of age and have an income of between \$17,000 to \$30,000, also depending on the location of the home.

So we do have some programs available to try to upgrade and renovate homes which we have just announced. Like I say, the RRAP here in Manitoba we will have a total of \$2.4 million, and the HASI Program will have a total of just under \$300,000 available for people to do renovations in their homes that way. So we feel that we may be of some help with those two programs.

Ms. Wowchuk: Can the minister indicate what the waiting list is for RRAP and who administers it?

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Reimer: I am informed that we do not have the numbers on the waiting list, but I have also been informed that the waiting list necessarily may not be true numbers because of the fact that sometimes the eligibility has not been established. People have made application, but their application has not been processed in a sense of eligibility, and we do not have those numbers available.

In the rural area, the MMF administer the RRAP program, so they are the people that would have possibly more accurate number lists. It was just pointed out too that we do not administer the program, but CMHC administers the whole program. We are adding additional funding to it, but the administrator is CMHC and the federal government.

Ms. Wowchuk: Mr. Chairman, if the province is contributing money to the program, but you are not administering it, surely you must be provided with the number of people that are on waiting lists. I guess the question is, well, you talked about having somebody working closer with the MMF now. Would you be able to get those figures? Because in my constituency it is a very serious problem where people are told there is really no point in applying because the waiting list is so long that you are not going to get any assistance. These are not people in many cases who can afford to be taking on the whole cost of renovating those homes themselves and eventually they will pay back the money, but it is an area where we definitely have to have something developed, so I am looking to the minister to find out where we can get some

accurate figures and asking whether perhaps the department can get those for us as to how many people are on the waiting list because if we have 1,000 or 500 people on the waiting list and the province has put in \$600,000, that is not going to mean anything.

I believe there is a much greater need than can be addressed with this amount of money, but we cannot seem to get any definite answers as to how many people are on the waiting list, what is the real need out there. So is there a way the department can get those figures and let us know what the actual number of people are that are applying and being rejected and the number of people on waiting lists, whether it is federal or provincial?

Mr. Reimer: I think that we can try to get those numbers for you, because it is true, if we have got over \$600,000 in there, I think we should know where that money is going and the accountability and the transparency of actions that are taken in regard to the Manitoba taxpayers' dollars, so we certainly can try to get numbers for the member.

I should point out too, and this is one of the reasons why, and I alluded to it a little earlier in regards to the MMF and the agreement that they have with the federal government, as I said before, we did not want to disturb the agreement that we have with the federal government that we inherited, and one of our conditions was that it would stay the same, but one of the things that we have instituted and which I have instituted, as I say, through my department is that we have now moved a person over physically into the MMF office. He is on our payroll but he is at the MMF office with the sole intention of getting involved with their operation, getting a knowledge on their operation so that we can look at the accountability and the transparency of our dollars that are going into these various programs so that we do get the best return for the taxpayers' dollars, and we get to know where the money is going and the best utilization of it.

The concerns that the member mentioned regarding the long waiting list, that has been brought to my attention quite a few times by various people in the rural areas specifically. So we are saying, if we are going to be putting this

type of \$2.4 million into this type of program, I think that we want a good accountability of those taxpayers' dollars and where the money is being spent. So those are some of the things that I think we will have a better accounting for in the next while.

Ms. Wowchuk: Then I take it when you have that information you will provide us with a copy of it.

Mr. Reimer: We will try to dig up those numbers for the member, yes.

Ms. Wowchuk: Thank you very much. I want to talk about the changes that have taken place in Housing. When the government moved to closing many of the small Housing offices in many of the communities, people were not too happy with that. We were told that there was going to be a toll-free number put in for people to call in to and that worked sometimes. We have a Parkland East and a Parkland West office.

Now, can the minister tell us whether there is a manager in both Parkland East and West, or is one manager managing both of those offices?

Mr. Reimer: I am told that there is only the one manager, and he works out of Dauphin.

* (1750)

Ms. Wowchuk: Could the minister indicate when that change was made, because when we made the switch over to having central offices it was my understanding that there was going to be a manager in the Dauphin office and in the Roblin office, one to look after each region?

Mr. Reimer: I am trying to get the proper sequence in my mind, excuse me for the time. I believe what the member was saying is we do have the office in Dauphin, and there is a manager there who looks after the districts in around there and including Roblin. We do have staff in Roblin who are also part of that management district, district office I should say. So there are still people involved with both offices.

Ms. Wowchuk: But there has been a reduction of staff in the region is the question.

Mr. Reimer: I believe there is a vacancy in that district, yes.

Ms. Wowchuk: Are there plans to fill that vacancy?

Mr. Reimer: I have been told that there is a process of bringing new computers into not only this district but I guess throughout the whole province. They are looking at the staffing requirements throughout not only that district but in other areas as to how it is going to impact the filling of these positions. So I guess more or less the way it stands right at the present time is we are waiting for the system to be brought in.

Ms. Wowchuk: I want to ask a question about a specific elderly persons' housing unit in Benito. The people in Benito that live in the elderly persons' housing unit are wanting to get mail service. We have talked to the people at the post office. They are quite prepared to do it, but we seem to be running into roadblocks as far as Manitoba Housing goes. Is there any reason why Manitoba Housing would not be interested in working along with the residents of the Benito unit who want to have mail delivery? I mean when you build units now, you put mailboxes into them. People can have their mail delivered there, and it is very convenient for these residents. We have been trying for some time now to make arrangements through Manitoba Housing and work with the manager there, but we have not been able to be successful. Is there any reason why Manitoba Housing would have difficulty with installing mailboxes for a few residents so that they could have their mail delivered to the unit?

Mr. Reimer: I am sure that we can try to accommodate that. I mean, if it is just a matter of, if there is the availability of local delivery in Benito, I am sure we can come up with mailboxes for that particular complex.

Ms. Wowchuk: I would hope that we can work through that because it is a problem that we have been trying to work through for almost two years now. The manager there says that we should not be involved in it; he is going to work it out. These people continue to want mailbox service, so if the minister would tell me who on his staff

I should get in touch with, I would very much like to see this issue resolved.

Mr. Reimer: I think that if the member, when we break 'up here in the next five to seven minutes, if she would like to spend a moment with Ron Fallis and give him the details and the particulars, we will get it fixed.

Ms. Wowchuk: On another issue, we have many elderly persons' units throughout the Parklands area and in other parts of the province, and in some of the areas we have a very high vacancy rate. We find that the units are vacant. I look at Ethelbert where there are 11 units vacant, but they are bachelor suites. Nobody seems interested in going into them. I just pick out the one off the list here because that is the one in my constituency, but there are many of those. We have heard the issue of bachelor suites discussed many times in the House, and I am sure you may have even talked about them here in Estimates. Is there any plan to look at these units and perhaps convert them in some way so that they are more comfortable? When you have 11 empty units in Ethelbert, I think that if you could convert those to maybe a smaller number of units but more comfortable, we might see the occupancy rate going up higher than it is.

Mr. Reimer: We would look at converting some of these units if it is feasible. Some of the things that have to be taken into consideration naturally are the architecture and the bearing wall situation and, you know, the stress points of the buildings. But if it is feasible where it just means putting a hole through a wall type of thing and putting a doorway through, we have done that. We have looked at various ones throughout Manitoba, and we have accomplished that in a relatively inexpensive way. I can certainly direct staff, through this meeting here today, to take a look at Ethelbert and have someone go out there and take a look at these units and see what the structure is and maybe talk to the residents and bring them into the decision making and look at possibly converting some of them. If it is feasible, we will certainly look at it because we have done it in others, and it has proven to be quite successful.

Ms. Wowchuk: I guess what I would hope that the minister would do is not just look at—I picked

Ethelbert off the list, but throughout the Parklands, whether it is in Birch River or in Swan River or Minitonas, there are many places where these bachelor suites are available but people just do not want to live. That may have been suitable years ago, but they are looking for changes. So I hope that the minister will direct his staff to do a review of the housing units throughout rural Manitoba and look at ways that could be more comfortable for the residents.

As I look at this list of where there are units, I do not see Camperville and I do not see Winnipegosis on it. I know that there is elderly persons housing particularly in Camperville, and there are units in Winnipegosis. Is there some reason why they are not included in Parklands East? Do they come under different management, or why are these units not accounted for?

Mr. Reimer: Yes, I have been told they are not managed by Manitoba Housing, they are managed by Sagemace. They are the managers of those units. They are under a separate property management agreement.

Ms. Wowchuk: Those would be the units in Camperville that would be managed by Sagemace Housing Corporation. Can the minister indicate then: is that an entity that stands on its own or, as a management unit, what kind of accountability do they have to the government? Do you give them a pool of money and they manage, or is there an annual accounting? Does somebody oversee the management of those units?

Mr. Reimer: They have to report back to us on a regular basis. The accountability has to be there, the audit has to be there, the expenditures are all accountable. They have to report back to us, yes, they do.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. Time being six o'clock, committee rise.

* (1510)

HEALTH

Mr. Chairperson (Marcel Laurendeau): Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply has

been dealing with the Estimates of the Department of Health. Would the minister's staff please enter the Chamber at this time.

Ms. Diane McGifford (Osborne): Mr. Chair, you might remember when the House adjourned on Thursday, I believe we were talking about the breast screening mobile unit. I wanted to just make sure that I have it correct and run it by the minister once again.

My understanding, then, in regard to the mobile breast screening unit is that once a woman turns 69 she can no longer receive screenings from the mobile screening unit unless she is symptomatic, and this is regardless of where the community is, whether it is way up north where there is no other medical facilities or not even a physician. Is that correct?

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Health): I think the way the member described it is correct. The way the mobile screening works is really the same as the balance of the screening program, that it is for women aged 50 to 69. If you are beyond the age of 69 and you have any symptoms whatsoever, then you would be treated through your doctor, through whatever channels your doctor has referred you to, whether or not it is a treatment that is required, whether it is ongoing diagnostic testing or whatever it might be that your doctor—so if there are any symptoms, you then would pursue that kind of ongoing treatment from appropriate doctors as a result of dealing with your own doctor.

Ms. McGifford: I was hoping the minister had had a change of heart in the weekend and that he was going to tell me something different.

Then I wonder if the minister could tell me what happens in a remote community where there are no other services and a woman is past sixty-nine. How does she get this service? I am speaking of communities, for example, where there is not a physician. Is that woman forced to leave her community and go to wherever, perhaps Thompson or Flin Flon, to have that service? If that is the case, is she required to pay for her transportation, or who does if she does not? I wonder if the minister could provide some information, please.

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, the example that the member gives would really be the same for any medical service that that individual might require in a community, although I believe most communities are either serviced by full-time medical services, doctors, or a nursing station or an itinerant physician who at least comes in there occasionally. So I think certainly the majority of communities have access to some medical service right in their community. But beyond age 69, if the woman was the slightest bit concerned, she would access her physician as she would if she had anything else she was concerned about, and then various diagnostic testing and/or treatments would be available to her.

* (1520)

The issue that we keep coming back to is this age that is covered, from 50 to 69. Again, I am told that is consistent with the rest of Canada. It is based on clinical data, clinical findings, and so on. As I offered on Thursday, I am certainly more than prepared to have that unit sit down with the member for Osborne and go through the rationale for that clinical data and clinical finding and the fact that it is 50 to 69.

Beyond age 69, it would be not unlike any other need to access medical services that that woman might have. Hopefully, they are available in her community. If not, she would have to access them in whatever way that she would access any other medical services. If there was a need to transport the individual, then I believe it would be under the Northern Patient Transportation Program, which, I believe, the individual pays \$50, a co-payment of \$50 against the total cost if for whatever reason the individual had to be transported elsewhere for appropriate care.

Ms. McGifford: I know that the initial concern that I voiced was the cutoff point at 69. I know that the minister offered last Thursday to have me meet with people from his department, and I would certainly like to do that in the summer when we are not sitting and hear what they have to say. But it seems to me when we talk about northern and remote communities, it is a different kind of problem because then we are talking about accessibility of alternate services.

That is what is bothering me here. It is not just the age cutoff point for which there may be some sound medical reasons. Far be it from me, I am sure this decision has not just been made on whim. Even in some of these communities if there is a physician, for example, there is not a mammogram machine, so these people still need to leave their community and apparently they have to pay the first—was it \$50 of the cost? I do not think that encourages preventative medicine because how many of these people have \$50 to pay once a year to leave the community and go and have this particular test, and where do they go?

So I think it is really quite complicated, and perhaps it is something that the minister might want to re-examine. I am speaking only about remote communities. I am sure there is, as I have said, it has ceased to be an issue of the age cutoff point and become an issue of accessibility.

I know there really is not a question there. I do not know if the minister wants to respond or if I should go on to another area. I leave it up to him.

Mr. Stefanson: The only reason I wanted to respond was just to outline how the mobile unit works. I am told it is in an RV unit, the objective to get as close to communities, to create as much as accessibility as possible, but, by and large, many of our rail and air accessible communities, obviously this unit cannot get directly into those communities either. So that same problem exists, but I certainly appreciate the two separate issues that the member touched on, the one we discussed at length on Thursday, the 50-to-69 age coverage, and now the issue of accessibility for northern and remote communities.

Ms. McGifford: Well, the minister has just brought up another question. With these communities that are so isolated that they can only be approached by air or rail, is there a plan to assure services for those women, or do these women need to—and regardless of age again here, even in that age where it appears to be a good idea to do regular screenings. Do they go to centres where they can access services and do they pay for them? How does it work?

Mr. Stefanson: I would almost think that the member must have overheard me when I was getting information on the previous point because I asked that very same question, so I will return with information as to what is being done. It is the whole issue of accessibility. We are now talking about women between ages 50 and 69 whom this program is there for, how readily accessible is it for people in our remote communities that can only be accessed by air or winter roads or whatever.

So I will return with more details on what steps are being taken to make it as accessible as possible for women living in those communities.

Ms. McGifford: I wanted to ask some questions about female doctors and their availability and their recruitment and the retention of female doctors. Just to begin with some information I have, apparently, according to the College of Family Physicians, as of April 20, 1999, there were only 16 family physicians in Winnipeg who were accepting new patients, and none of these 16 family physicians were female doctors. Just an aside, I know I phoned my own physician, who is a woman, last week, and I cannot get a physical until late September. So, certainly, that appears to me to be quite a lengthy wait. Now, I am a healthy person and I can wait, and, presumably, if I were ill, something could be done.

But the question that I have, and I have at least hinted at it before in the House, I think, more and more women are interested in seeing female physicians for a variety of reasons. Some women are simply more comfortable with female physicians. For some women, for cultural and religious reasons, it is almost mandatory that their medical services be delivered by a female physician. Yet, for example, for new Canadians in Manitoba, if there are not any family physicians who are female who are accepting new patients, it would be extremely hard to see a female physician.

So I would like to ask the minister if his department has a plan for the training and the retention of female physicians. Maybe we should back up and ask, first of all, if his department perceives this as a problem.

Mr. Stefanson: Maybe I will just start by sharing some statistical information. First of all, on the first question about the family physicians, we have to track that on, what, literally almost a daily basis in terms of family physicians that are accessible. Back in April, I know for a good part of April, it was running as high as 59 clinics accepting new patients. So I will return with current information. I think the member said her information was April 20. I will get the information for our next Estimates, which is probably tomorrow, as to where we are at today, how many family physicians are accepting new patients, and try to return with information of how many of those are female physicians.

Just in terms of the statistics, these things are always a little bit outdated. I am going to try and get some more current information, but it showed here that women represent approximately 24 percent of all Canadian physicians. In the province of Manitoba, they represent 25 percent. So we are just ever so slightly above Canada's. But the breakdown in Manitoba, interestingly, is 26 percent in Winnipeg, 16 percent in Brandon, and 21 percent in the rest of Manitoba.

* (1530)

Now, when I said this information is outdated, I have 1994 data which shows that 51 percent of the first-year medical students enrolled in all of Canada were women. I do not have the information on what the trend is today at the Faculty of Medicine in Manitoba. I am told that there are more and more women enrolling in the Faculty of Medicine, but I will get the more current statistics to confirm that is in fact the case.

So I believe that it is happening, and certainly the statistics seem to bear that out, but I will return with details on where the Faculty of Medicine is at. Again, I think we would agree that is a positive thing for our health care system. So it seems to be happening for a number of reasons, and, again, I will return with more current information.

Ms. McGifford: Well, I certainly do agree that if enrollments of female students are increasing in the Faculty of Medicine here and elsewhere

in Canada—and I understand as the minister has said that that is the case—that I agree that this is positive. I think the minister said in 1994, 51 percent of students enrolled here were female, but he also stated that only 25 percent of fully licensed positions are female. So I understand that no matter how great the percentage of female physicians in our medical colleges, it will take some time to balance the numbers of women with the numbers of men. I hope it does not take as long as it would take to balance numbers in universities, because I think at current trends that might be done in 2300. I may have the tape wrong, but in the very distant future. So I hope that does not apply here.

What I did ask the minister, and he did not answer, was whether he and his department see the—let me use the word—paucity of female physicians, especially in light of the fact that numbers of women want to see female physicians, whether they see it as a problem? If they do see it as a problem, do they have a plan to deal with this problem? If they do have a plan, what is the plan?

Mr. David Faurichou, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, in terms of the issue being a problem to be addressed, I think it is being addressed. Whatever is causing it, there probably are a number of factors, but I indicated I will return with more current statistics. Certainly, the numbers that I have provided here this afternoon show a positive trend in the sense of more and more women becoming doctors and physicians. So right now our plan to deal with physician recruitment has been very much focused on the objective of meeting the needs right across Manitoba. As the member knows, we have needs in some communities, particularly in some of our rural communities, and we have been doing a number of things to fill that recruitment need throughout all of Manitoba.

Talking about women physicians and women's health issues, I think again the part of the plan that has been the most important, I guess, and has received the needed attention are a number of women's health issues and the establishment of a Women's Health Clinic, the

whole issue of what we have already discussed, the Manitoba Breast Screening Program that is in place. I know we have had some questions here in the past about the whole issue of a cervical cancer screening program. We just recently announced the introduction of midwifery and a number of initiatives dealing with women's health issues, changes to the LDRP rooms at HSC and St. Boniface and so on.

* (1540)

As well, in terms of the whole area of female medical practitioners, I think a very important adjustment that has just recently been made as of April 1 was the creation of two new tariff codes for gynecological exams, and it will more appropriately remunerate Manitoba's female practitioners. So it is a combination of more appropriately remunerating them, but also again continuing to provide support for the kinds of health services that are required. So there have been a number of things done dealing with women's health issues, dealing with support for female practitioners through the tariff code adjustments and with a focus very much on the concerns of many female practitioners in terms of addressing these important women's health issues.

I do believe, again, what limited statistical information I have been able to provide, it does show a very positive trend in that whole area of continuing to see more and more women enrolled in the Faculty of Medicine, thereby continuing to increase the percent of Manitoba-registered physicians that are women in our province, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. McGifford: Mr. Chair, the minister began his remarks by wondering—I do not think he wondered why, but did not quite understand why there was a paucity of women in the system or at least implied that. I think it is probably years and years of systemic discrimination that accounts for the fact that there are not as many women as men currently practising medicine.

The minister talked about some of the programs we have in place here. He talked about the Women's Health Clinic, the Breast Screening Program. He talked about the recent work in midwifery and the announcement of the

birthing rooms. These are all very fine and do address many of the health concerns that women in Manitoba have, and I am certainly happy that they are there. I think the minister would agree with me that it is too bad that they are not there for all Manitobans. The nature of our province sometimes makes it difficult for all these programs to reach into the remote areas in our province, but presumably that is one of our aims.

I just want to ask one last question in this vein, and I wonder if the minister could tell me if there are any specific strategies to attract women to medicine. Maybe this is a question more specifically asked of the Minister of Education or perhaps of the Faculty of Medicine itself, but if there are any provincial initiatives that are designed to attract women to medicine and then to keep those physicians, those female physicians in Manitoba, because I think that what works for men does not always work for women. Sometimes, if we can find a strategy that is particularly appealing to women, it is more successful with women.

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, I guess there are really the two issues. There is the one that the member has asked about in terms of whether or not there are any I will use the word incentives or programs to attract women into the Faculty of Medicine in the first place. There is then the whole issue of what kinds of steps are being done to keep women in medicine once they are in it. I would certainly argue that a number of steps have been taken to maintain having women physicians in Manitoba, and I have outlined some of them. Certainly, the adjustments recently on the tariff codes, I know, will be and has been well received by female practitioners.

I think the focus on a number of women's health issues for the reasons that the member has talked about in terms of often the clientele of women physicians also is a very positive step to do that, so there are a number of things that are keeping women practising medicine. I think I have already indicated the other encouraging part of this is the trend over the last few years with more and more of our medical students being women, so on that side I am not aware that any province—and we stack up favourably on that national comparison: we are at 25 percent; Canada is at 24 percent.

I am not aware, and I will certainly look into it, that any provinces are doing anything to incent women into the Faculty of Medicine. I think that the good news there is that it is happening for a whole range of reasons, so we see it happening in Manitoba. I think the steps we need to take are to be sure we keep them in Manitoba, we keep them in the Faculty of Medicine, and we do a number of things to provide the support to deal with women's health issues that I know they are very supportive of. So I think overall what we have before us in Manitoba is positive in the sense of what is happening with women physicians in our province.

Ms. McGifford: We may be 1 percentage above the national average, but I am sure the minister agrees that there are probably provinces where the percentage of female physicians is higher than it is in Manitoba.

Having said that, I really wanted to just ask a few more questions. In this case I wanted to turn to eating disorders and ask the minister about services for eating disorders. I understand that somewhere between 1 and 2 percent of women who fall between the ages of 14 and 25 have anorexia nervosa, and that about 5 percent suffer from bulimia, and that many other women, I think it is around 20 percent, engage in behaviours that are associated with these diseases but probably would not be diagnosed as either one of those.

Let it just be said, there are a lot of women in contemporary society who have problems with eating disorders. We do not necessarily have to go into the reasons here, and probably do not have to at all. But the reason I am bringing it up is because I also understand that there are very few services, particularly for teenage women. I wonder if the minister has any plans to augment current services or provide prevention programs for eating disorders in our province.

* (1550)

Mr. Stefanson: I think, as the member I am sure is aware, there are programs and services available through organizations like the Manitoba Adolescent Treatment Centre and the

adolescent treatment facility in the city of Brandon, as well, but what I will do is I will return with a summary of both the services and, just as importantly, the various prevention initiatives.

The member's question certainly is a timely one. My deputy just met on Friday with a group on behalf of individuals with eating disorders. They had submitted a document with various recommendations in it that is currently being reviewed by the department in conjunction with the Winnipeg Hospital Authority. So again, I will return with more details on the services, the prevention initiative and other initiatives that are being looked at.

Just on the question of women in the Faculty of Medicine, just to give a sense of some of the current numbers, first year students that are now going into second year in the Faculty of Medicine, approximately 40 percent are women, so that is much better. The second year going into third year are 32 percent. Third year going into fourth year are 34 percent, so again, all positive trends from an overall percentage of 25 percent in the province with the most recent information I have provided.

Ms. McGifford: Well, I just wanted to comment on those last statistics that the minister read because I think he said it was 51 percent in 1994. I do not see that as positive, because it seems that the numbers have gone down, have decreased, rather than increased. So I am sorry, unless I am missing something, that does not seem to me to be good news at all.

I thank the minister for saying he will bring lists of the services. I am particularly interested not only in services but in prevention, and I am sure the minister, like me, has been reading the stories in *The Globe and Mail* recently on the Montreux clinic. One of the things it brings to mind for all of us is that treatment is so incredibly difficult once a person is living with this disorder, so the prevention is extremely important.

I know that some years ago the Women's Health Clinic had a phone line, and I think it was funded by the United Way, but my understanding is that that phone line is no longer

in place. I think that the phone line was there to answer questions from the community, presumably more or less from young women who were in stress about their eating disorders. I do not think that is there anymore—and I am not advocating that it should be; that would certainly be up to the Women's Health Clinic and not to me—but I just wanted to stress my particular interest in prevention, stopping these programs before they get started. I do not know if the minister wants to respond.

Mr. Stefanson: Just to say, Mr. Chairman, I will return with the information that I have already outlined, and I certainly agree with the member in terms of the need to focus on prevention. I think any situation where that can be done, that certainly is an extremely important and positive thing to do.

* (1600)

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): Mr. Chairperson, I am going to be pursuing some lines of questioning for a couple of hours. I wonder if perhaps it is time we want to take a five-minute break for everyone concerned and then come back and pursue this.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Fourschou): Is it the willingness of the committee to recess for five minutes? We have unanimous consent. We will stand in recess till five after four.

The committee recessed at 4:02 p.m.

After Recess

The committee resumed at 4:07 p.m.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, without going too far down this line because I could spend the rest of the afternoon on it, I must indicate that despite my comments to the minister last week which are that I am supportive of the information from the Department of Health, I was astounded. I mean, I was astounded when I looked at the polls, the polling questions that were asked in the Department of Health poll and

the information, that it was as political as that document was. It only reaffirms my belief that the majority of information was driven not for health purposes but, as I indicated in Question Period, for purposes of the government's health.

I cannot indicate in strong enough terms how disappointed I was with my view of that polling information. The minister and I said we were going to agree to disagree, but I cannot see any conceivable way or any way that that poll can be construed to even remotely be considered as nothing more than really a political document. I think that is very much an indictment, and it will make it very difficult for the minister in the future to launch legitimate information programs because of the difficulty with that particular poll. Now the minister may or may not want to comment.

Mr. Stefanson: Again, the member and I probably agree on the point that we could spend many hours going over this poll. I think we could probably also agree that, at the end of all of that, we will agree to disagree. I talked about the total information campaign that we had and encouraged him to take a good look at the brochure that was circulated to every household in the province, the nature of the information provided in the brochure and given the rationale for some of the needs for change, what some of the changes are, what some of the next steps are and so on, Mr. Chairman.

* (1610)

Certainly one part of determining the priorities of Manitobans and recognizing what the views are of Manitobans in terms of the issues that need to be addressed, one way of doing that besides public consultation and individual discussions and meeting with different groups, is to do some polling which is used by governments of all political stripes right across Canada. It is certainly used extensively, and I will stress extensively, by the federal government.

I do encourage him to take a good look at all of the questions. He zeroed in on one subquestion out of a list of questions, if I recall earlier today in Question Period. I think the question that he zeroed in on were people who

attack the Manitoba health care system are more concerned with their own agenda than with improving the level of health care, if I recall correctly today. That is a subquestion in a section of statements, a split agreement, but even that question, 53 percent of Manitobans agreed with that.

But it goes on to ask a number of questions in that entire section that are all very important, I believe, in terms of—let us back up and say what is the objective of doing something like this? It certainly gives you a good sense of the priorities of Manitobans. It gives you a good sense of where Manitobans are getting their information from, how much credibility they give to their source of information, and so on. If you believe it is important for individuals to get information, I think you also have to start with that kind of a knowledge as to how they are getting their information now, how much credibility they give it, and so on. So I know we could go on at length discussing polling, discussing information campaigns. I am certainly prepared to do that.

I guess if there was any good news between the two of us last week, it was that we agreed that it is appropriate to provide information, and we agreed to disagree on the issue of how you go about providing that information. Obviously, I am not sure the member is disagreeing with polling as such, but he seems to be disagreeing with individual questions within the poll. If we are going to get down to discussing individual questions within the poll, I am sure we will find several that we might disagree on.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, I am doing my utmost to resist the temptation. I must admit I am very tempted to go down this road and to debate at length. I will just make one passing comment and then one question, and one other comment. My passing comment is this poll was designed as a PR effort for the government. There is no doubt. I am not talking about one question. If you weigh all of the questions, if you look at the advertising, there is no doubt in my mind, and we all know that in this Chamber. We know why this poll was commissioned. It was commissioned as a PR effort.

Having said that, when I talk about information, what I talk about providing the

public is questions that came up here last week that we discussed here. Palliative care, for example, you go to your general practitioner, there is a palliative care situation. You may, or may not, have the kind of relationship from your primary care provider to provide that information. You do not know where to turn in the crisis. It would be useful to know that we have an excellent palliative care program in Manitoba and we have an expanding palliative care program in Manitoba. If you are in that situation, now I know there are support groups and the like, but how does an individual access that kind of information or the feedback or the related information? That is the kind of information that the government should be providing, ought to be providing, and should be a subject of government advertising. That is the information that I am speaking of.

The fact that there is a question in a poll that says, by the way, do you think health care is getting better in a preventative way because of our Breast Screening Program, of course, I agree because we advocated the Breast Screening Program for year after year after year. I remember the former, former, former minister standing up and saying we are still studying it, and we were saying: no, go on with breast screening because all of the studies show that it is, in fact, useful. Well, we are not sure it is useful. Now, the government has accepted it and is using it as part of their response to the need for preventative health care, and we agree with it.

There is no doubt that that polling was slanted, in my view, dramatically, but my sense that the kind of information that should be provided—and the best example that I can come up with off the top of my head is the example of palliative care because it is something, in fact, as we saw, that arose in this Chamber last week amongst people and individuals who were informed were not aware, in many instances, about the access and the need for programs. That is what I am speaking of.

Having said that, which the minister may, or may not, want to comment on, the minister received a letter from me last Friday with respect to the situation that developed at St. Boniface. I am not going to be asking generally questions in

public on St. Boniface, but I am looking forward to, as we discussed, probably a written reply from the minister, perhaps, and/or a meeting with the minister's officials to discuss the specific issues I have raised in that letter as well as some related issues. Is the minister aware of that, or is that acceptable?

Mr. Stefanson: I have not seen the letter yet, Mr. Chairman. The member is doing exactly what we discussed on Thursday, where he indicated a willingness to outline some of the questions he had in writing and allow us the opportunity to respond, both in writing, and to set up any kind of a briefing. So I mean I am still obviously committed to do that. I will look for the letter either later this evening when we are back in our office or tomorrow morning and undertake to respond to that as quickly as possible.

Just to give a very brief update from some information I was provided prior to Question Period today, Mr. Chairman, there has been, I am told, about a thousand calls. About 20 percent have been gastrointestinal lab patients. All lab testing will be organized at St. Boniface. Testing has in fact started. They are expecting an increase in testing this week as the registered letters are all arriving to individuals. Staffing has been increased to accommodate the expected increase in testing. St. Boniface Hospital as well, I am told, will be contacting the media every second day to provide them with an accurate update as one vehicle to keep the public informed as to what is happening with this issue, and so on.

So that is just a very, very brief status report for the member's benefit, but I will definitely look for the letter and certainly respond to the letter and arrange any briefing with appropriate staff that the member thinks may be beneficial.

Mr. Chomiak: I thank the minister for that response. Is the minister indicating that the lab is reopening in terms of functioning the level test? Is that what the minister has said in his statement? I am not sure if I understood that. Or was the minister saying that individuals are coming in to be tested as a testing follow-up with respect to the notice that went out on Thursday?

Mr. Stefanson: Just to clarify, it is the lab that will be testing the follow-up of individuals who have either called or been contacted that is going on; in fact, their staffing has been increased. The GI lab is still closed at this time, Mr. Chairman.

* (1620)

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, will the GI lab be closed until the very scenarios laid out by the hospital have gone through the internal-external audit? Secondly, who will pick up the offload or the increased need? Will that be at the Health Sciences Centre, or how would that be accommodated?

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, I should probably return with those further details as well. I know, as the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) will have noted in the release from St. Boniface Hospital on May 20, they themselves say that the lab will reopen as soon as the hospital is satisfied that the cleaning procedures meet current protocols and that all appropriate measures are in place to ensure patient safety, likely in early June.

Obviously, we are working with the hospital on that entire issue. In terms of where the tests are currently being performed and the financial impact, I will get back to the member with the details.

Mr. Chomiak: Just turning to some general questions, can the minister indicate whether or not there are plans in the offing or consideration being given to merging the activities of the Winnipeg Hospital Authority and the Winnipeg Long Term Care Authority?

Mr. Stefanson: I think, as the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) probably recalls, at the time that both organizations were established, it was indicated that they would most likely be merged in no more than five years. I believe part of the rationale initially for the two separate organizations was really to ensure that the community side of care, the home care, the long-term care, was adequately represented in the entire changeover and also the whole issue of this continuum of care that continues to be

focused on certainly by our government and I believe, again, mostly across Canada.

So the short answer to the member's question is, yes, the intention is that they will be merged; yes, the original commitment was in no more than five years, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chomiak: This next question the minister may or may not feel more comfortable dealing with at a later part in the appropriation, but it is a general question and it is a very complex question, but I am going to put it simply.

Let us take a hospital in the city of Winnipeg and its budget. In the old days, we had the rolling forecasts, and there was a two- or three-year idea as to where the budgetary expenditures would be, revenues, et cetera. How was it determined this year what the allocation of funding was to each institution, and, more importantly, on what basis are they working for the next year and the subsequent years?

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, I think, again as the member for Kildonan probably knows, the funding is provided to the Winnipeg Hospital Authority as it is to the regional health authorities to then distribute to each of the individual facilities on a program basis, basically on the services that they are providing. So that allocation to each individual facility is ultimately made by the Winnipeg Hospital Authority.

Mr. Chomiak: Two questions. Firstly, how does a financial planner or any kind of an administrator at any institution or even at any regional authority make a determination for the following year's expectations unless there is some kind of provision made for those particular programs to continue or not to continue? The second part of the question is can we have the individual breakdowns to the regions and the various regions provided during the course of these Estimates?

* (1630)

Mr. Stefanson: Well, the way I understood the first question is making determinations for the following year, which I am assuming the member is talking about the next budget, the year 2000. Maybe I should back up this year.

The RHAs and WHAs were provided with their funding commitment within three days of the budget. We continue to provide these indications earlier and earlier each year, and that is something previously all the facilities were asking for, hospitals were asking for. I think as the member knows, there was a time when hospitals would not know almost till the end of the year what their budgets were.

So we have continued to work to provide earlier and earlier notification, but on a go-forward basis how the next year's budget would ultimately be derived would be on a couple of fronts; obviously, working with the facilities in terms of getting preliminary requests from the individual facility, but, more importantly, the WHA looking at the programs that they are going to provide and the services they are going to provide initially within the money that they already have allocated and then making submissions for any adjustments, either for new programs or for expanded programs or whatever, not unlike what we saw during this last year where the WHA came forward with some of their requests. It was an opportunity to address them, and that was actually done mid-year, and that now rolls forward in terms of some of the initiatives that took place in '98-99.

Individual breakdown to regions on a RHA-WHA basis, I will undertake to provide that, Mr. Chairman. Again, it would be on the global budget basis, but I will certainly undertake to provide that.

Mr. Chomiak: Can the minister indicate whether or not we would be able to obtain the program-by-program breakdowns for the WHA because I presume at the regional level it is a breakdown on a regional global basis, but within the WHA it is a breakdown by program? That is what I would assume. Will we be able to have access to that?

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, I think it is important to point out that the WHA is in the midst of going through that transition, so the funding right now is a blend of historical and programs. Where the WHA wants to end up is ultimately with budgets that fund specifically programs. But right as of today it is a combination of both.

I am not sure we are at a stage that I can—well, if the member is saying give me the costing of each individual program in Winnipeg's health care system or Manitoba's health care system, I do not have that information to provide to him, but I would certainly undertake to provide him the global budgets, and as more information becomes available on program costs across the board, I am certainly prepared to provide that to him because that is ultimately where I think we all want to end up.

We want to be able to be recognizing what the costs of our programs are, the utilization of our programs and be funding our facilities based on the services they are providing, on the programs that they are providing, Mr. Chairman, but, right now, after one year of operation, that is still part of the transition that we are going through.

Mr. Chomiak: Would it be possible to obtain the various need analyses or the needs assessments that have been done throughout the regions as well as the city of Winnipeg for both the Long Term Care Authority and the Winnipeg Health Authority, whatever is available?

Mr. Stefanson: I believe I can certainly provide the RHA needs assessments. I will confirm what status the WHA-WCA needs assessments are at. As the member knows, that was part of the public meetings and consultations they were going through, but I will certainly undertake to get a status report on that.

Mr. Chomiak: When we get to the section on medical enumeration, would it be possible for the minister to provide us with a list of breakdown of doctors and specialties in the province, or should I simply go from the list that is in the College of Physicians and Surgeons?

Mr. Stefanson: I will provide that information to the member. Basically our source is the same as the College of Physicians and Surgeons, but I will also provide that information.

Mr. Chomiak: Does the minister have any documents that he wishes to table with respect to the items? The reason I am asking at this point is that I am intending to start moving down line by line, and I wanted just to quickly glance

through the information in case there were specific questions I wanted to return to.

Mr. Stefanson: I just have a few of the issues that the member raised. The first one here is an update on the status of the Breast Health Program that the member asked for and what is happening at 400 Tache. I could read these into the record, but I think it is just as simple to—I have three copies of a summary that I will table. Then he asked about remuneration paid to RHA board members. This currently is the setup. Then the member also requested some information with respect to the recent amendment to The Mental Health Act. I have three copies of just some briefings on each of those issues.

Mr. Chomiak: I thank the minister for these briefing notes. I am turning specifically to the Appropriation 21.1(b). I note there are 11 staff members in this area, and the comparison for FTs for '98-99 shows 11 as well, but actually the other supplementary book that was prepared last year showed 10 staff members. Could the minister just table a listing of the individuals and their various positions in that category of the Estimates?

Mr. Stefanson: I could do one of two things. I could read the 11 positions by description. I could also provide names along with the 11 positions, or I could just undertake to provide, by tomorrow probably, the listing to the member, whichever. [interjection] Table it tomorrow? Okay.

* (1640)

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, we did discuss this briefly in the general portion, but on page 22 of the Supplementary Estimates book, one of the Expected Results of that aspect of the department is the "Refinement of the provincial plan for health delivery." The minister made some reference to some information coming out. Is there a plan that we could possibly see, that the minister could table?

Mr. Stefanson: I think, consistent with what I said last time the member and I discussed this, this is now being finalized. The member has certainly seen elements of the plan through the

information campaign that we have discussed before. I indicated to him that the actual document I expect to have completed very shortly. I also expect it will be available on our website and in various means in terms of making it readily available for anybody who is so inclined to want to look at it in any degree of detail, Mr. Chairman. So that will be completed within the next several weeks.

Mr. Chomiak: I am expecting now to move along through the Estimates, move up towards 21.2.(c). As I indicated earlier, I do not anticipate we will get past 21.2.(c) in the Estimates, if in fact we get that far.

The nature of the change in terms of funding an allocation in the Estimates is such that I am anticipating that most of the questions that we are going to have in a variety areas by way of, for example, food services, I assume we will be asking under the appropriation 21.2.(c). I am just assuming.

I guess what I am asking is, as we move along and because the natures change, I do not want to preclude or lose the ability to ask questions in particular areas if we, in fact, pass by. So if I am assuming right, I guess that is what I am saying, if I am assuming right, when we get down to the appropriation dealing with subcategory 4, I am assuming at that point that we will be dealing with regional health authorities. For the most part, we will be dealing with medical related issues. I assume at that point we will be dealing with issues like food services, of which there will be questions. Am I correct in that assumption?

Mr. Stefanson: If I understood the member correctly, then he is right. Really, 1, 2, and 3 are more directly related to departmental operations. His comment about being under section 4 to deal with food services, and so on, I would agree is the appropriate section. I guess I state the obvious. If we go by a section and the member has a specific question on something and we have already dealt with the section, I am certainly not going to use that as a reason not to provide the information and respond to the question. I think with that undertaking—you might, Mr. Chairman—but we will find a way to resolve that, but just basically saying that if we

miss a section and the member has questions, certainly we can deal with it in some way.

Mr. Chairperson: Item 21.1. Administration and Finance (b) Executive Support (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$556,700—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$159,700—pass.

Item 21.1.(c) Finance and Administration (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$2,182,300.

Mr. Chomiak: We are dealing with 21.1.(c).

Mr. Chairperson: Yes, we are dealing with 21.1.(c) Finance and Administration.

Mr. Chomiak: I wonder if the minister has received any kind of report or update as to the status of The Protection of Privacy Act and The Personal Health Information Act, and if he has, whether he could provide it to members of the House.

Mr. Stefanson: Again, if I understand the question, the member is looking for information as to the number of inquiries we have had. I can certainly provide that.

Mr. Chomiak: I thank the minister for that response. That would be appropriate. My next question is—and I do not want to cause any work to be undertaken as a result of this question. If it is available, fine. If not, that is all right. Is there a general listing of where all the sites are for the Department of Health employees and staff? Is there some kind of general listing that we could have access to? If there is, if we could have it; if not, I do not want to cause people to search around to do it if it is not available.

Mr. Stefanson: I am told that is not a problem to produce, so we will provide that.

Mr. Chomiak: Yes, thank you. I believe I am correct in assuming that Y2K is not dealt with in this particular area, that it is dealt with in a further appropriation. I think my card index says that, but I just want to make sure that is the case.

Mr. Stefanson: The member is correct. We should probably cover that under Item 21.2.(c) Information Systems.

*(1650)

Mr. Chairperson: Item 21.1.(c) Finance and Administration (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$2,182,300—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$1,387,000—pass.

Item 21.1.(d) Human Resources (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$973,500.

Mr. Chomiak: Last year the department handled 67,000 civil servants, and now it is down to 32,000. Can the minister give an explanation for that? I am assuming that is a result of the changeover to a regional system.

Last time during the Estimates, we went through some statistical breakdowns as to how and when that happened. I wonder if I could have an update as to what the status of that is and where we are going in terms of that, because it is fairly significant in terms of both how the department delivers health care and, as well, how health care proceeds.

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, again, if I understand the question correctly, what we are down to now for 1999-2000 are the roughly just over 1,100 employees of the Department of Health, along with all of the home care employees. So, if the member was doing a comparison to last year, that would be when there were still some employees on the Department of Health payroll system that have now been transferred to the RHAs. In fact, since '92-93 to the current year, some 1,400 FTEs have been transferred to RHAs across the province. I am not sure if that was a request for some additional information or whether that is sufficient.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, I thank the minister for that response. That did answer one portion of my question. I was referring to the fact that Human Resources handles 32 civil servants' payrolls, et cetera, and doing the comparison, obviously, that accounts for the changeover.

Is there any way the minister can provide us with a rough listing of which areas of employees are still retained by the department, which areas have been moved out, and how that transition

and where that transition is heading? For example, I do not know, are we heading for a situation where of the 1,100 existing employees we are going to be down to 150 and the rest can be—I mean, we have no idea as to what is happening. Can we be updated next time?

Mr. Stefanson: Yes, I can provide that information. Just to give the member an overview, of the 1,109 positions today: 604 are actually departmental FTs; 416 are at the Selkirk Mental Health Centre; and 89 are at the Cadham Provincial Lab. That totals the 1,109. But I can give him at least that, if not a more detailed breakdown. I could also give him a breakdown of where the functional areas were that were transferred to the RHAs, the roughly 1,400 positions I referred to earlier.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Chomiak: Madam Chairperson, I appreciate that response, and I would like to see that information. Can the minister also provide for us an outline. Now, I recognize that this might be difficult. There might be some collective bargaining issues and ramifications of this, but is there a way we can get some sense as to where the department is going in terms of employees? What will be core retained services and what will not be, or what is the plan?

Mr. Stefanson: Well, the member himself expressed caution around this entire area of staffing and staffing levels, and so on, so I will certainly provide him what information I can at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Chomiak: Yes, I specifically pointed that out to provide with the minister an understanding that I am aware of the difficulties but that this is a question actually in order to ascertain some future developments just so that we can understand better. So I thank the minister for that response. I have a few more specific questions on this line, but I note the member for Inkster wanted to ask a few general questions before we move on specifics, while it is appropriate.

Just by way of administrivia, I still plan to get to 21.2.(c) by the end of the day. Then I

anticipate that we will have considerable questions on 21.2.(c) when we next meet, probably the balance of the time, for the minister's planning. So that is where I think that we will head, 21.2.(c) being SmartHealth and Information Services.

* (1700)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): I was just wanting to ask a few questions in regard to a couple of issues. The first one is that there has been a lot of discussion in the province in terms of the status of nursing. There would appear to be some sort of a shortage. I was wanting the Minister of Health to indicate, and you will have to forgive me if in fact this question has already been posed, in particular with respect to RNs, what sort of a shortage the province is at today.

Mr. Stefanson: Yes, we have discussed this before. I do not mind making a few comments. We have discussed it during Estimates; we have had questions during Question Period. The 1999 budget includes \$32.5 million to fill approximately 650 nursing positions. Those nursing positions that need to be filled are created really in two ways. A significant portion of them is as a result of vacancies that need to be filled. Basically, that service is currently being provided by nurses working extended hours, either overtime or working a longer shift than their regular shift would be. The other portion is through some of the new funding initiatives that have been announced and provided for, the expansion of programs or new programs. So in our 1999 budget there is \$32.5 million to fill 650 nursing positions.

A number of issues come into play in terms of our ability to do that. First of all, one issue that has been raised consistently is the whole issue of compensation for nurses and, with the collective bargaining that was just agreed to with nurses, the hourly rate for nurses in Manitoba is now fifth in Canada. Traditionally, with most of our comparisons, we are normally in that fifth or sixth or seventh range, so we are certainly positioned where we should be on a national basis, recognizing that this nursing shortage is, as the member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) knows, is not unique to Manitoba.

In fact, the data we have, every province, including Quebec, from Quebec west, needs more nurses today. In fact, as he has heard me answer in this House, on a per capita basis, Manitoba has the highest portion of registered nurses per capita of all of the provinces from Quebec west. Only the Maritime provinces have a better ratio than we. So it is a challenge for us. It is one that has to be addressed, but it is also one for the majority of provinces in Canada.

We have set up the \$7-million nurse recruitment and retention fund that has six individuals on it. Two were appointed by the Manitoba Nurses' Union; two were appointed by the employer; and two were appointed by the government of Manitoba. Again, we have discussed that fund before. I think the member is somewhat familiar that the fund can be used to bring nurses back into the system, to pay for recertification, retraining; it can also be used to bring nurses into Manitoba, pay for moving expenses, and so on.

We are also working with our educational facilities, our Faculty of Nursing. I believe 115 nurses are expected to graduate in 1999 through the Bachelor of Nursing program at the Faculty of Nursing at the University of Manitoba. Again, I think the member has probably noticed that they have been quite aggressive in terms of recruiting more nurses. Their enrollment last year was up, I believe, 23 percent, and I am sure he has seen some of the ads in the newspapers and so on promoting a career in nursing. He is also very familiar with the expansion of the licensed practical nursing program from an enrollment last year of 90 to enrollment of 190, and basically having six intakes this year: two at Misericordia, two at Assiniboine Community College in Brandon, and there are going to be two rotating intakes throughout the rest of Manitoba.

So if you look at filling nursing positions, obviously there is no one single solution. It is a combination of recruiting into and retaining nurses in the profession, keeping them in the profession, bringing nurses back into the profession, using our educational facilities as best we can to bring more nurses into the workplace and a number of initiatives. So we have what I would describe as a comprehensive

nursing recruitment and supply initiative underway and meant to address that very important issue.

Mr. Lamoureux: The nurse shortage, is it limited to R.N.s, or when we make reference to shortages are we referring to LPNs, R.N.s, B.N.s? In addition to that, the 650 that the minister refers to, that is a number which he is hoping to be able to get back or recognizes as a number that we need to fill certain positions? If the Minister of Health could wave a wand-type situation, what sort of a nursing complement would he like to see the province of Manitoba be at?

Mr. Stefanson: Madam Chair, we had discussed this at some length, but really nurses are needed throughout the health care system. Nurses are needed in the acute care facilities, in the Long-Term Care program, the personal care homes and the Home Care program, and so on. So, again, we need nurses throughout the entire health care system to varying degrees. As a result of that, we need nurses, again, with all kinds of backgrounds, academic backgrounds and skills. We need LPNs, we need B.N.s, and so on to fill those vacancies. There is the need across the system.

There is the opportunity to meet that need through the kinds of initiatives that I have outlined for the member. I could give an overall breakdown to him of the number of LPNs in the province as a percentage or as a number of the total nursing complement. I am not sure I am in a position to give an individual breakdown of every facility in Manitoba of what their nursing complement is between B.N.s, R.N.s, LPNs. I believe I can do it region by region though. So I could give you a region-by-region breakdown of the types of nurses employed in the region if that would be useful.

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Chair, that would definitely be beneficial if we could get some sort of an idea of the complements of nurses that are there, and then from there we might be able to get a better idea of the quantity or the need for the different types of nursing. It would definitely be beneficial, and I would appreciate that information.

The minister has made reference to three or four ways in which he is hoping to achieve having more nurses in the province. One in which he did not necessarily make reference to or direct reference to was the overseas or looking abroad. I know that the government has been giving that consideration. I am interested in knowing or getting some sort of a report from the Minister of Health with respect to that aspect of recruiting nurses.

* (1710)

Mr. Stefanson: Madam Chair, I am glad the member for Inkster reminded me when I was going through the various ways of bringing more nurses into our health care system. As I said to him, there is no one single answer. It is a combination of all of these. Certainly immigration is one solution as well. I know there is at least one private organization looking at accessing some nurses to Manitoba through immigration.

We are currently working with the federal government on that whole issue of accessing nurses through immigration to the province of Manitoba. The member may have seen recently some comments from a federal immigration official I believe out of Minneapolis, was it, out of the U.S., a Canadian immigration official expressing that there was not any indication of a need for more nurses to her or to him, whoever the official was, which caused us concern because, as we have already discussed in this Chamber, Manitoba does not only need nurses. Quebec, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia all need nurses today. So we see immigration as one solution. I believe there are also people currently in our province who would have some of the skills through an opportunity for certification, and so on, to potentially be nurses in our health care system. That is also something we are looking at.

So there is no one single answer to fill 650 nursing positions. It is a combination of all of these, using our education, using immigration, using our retention and recruitment fund. All of these elements will help us basically put in place more nurses in our health care system.

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Chairperson, just to lay the groundwork a little bit here, most

individuals, I want to focus some attention on the immigrant portion of recruitment or trying to ease some of the pressure on our health care by looking to would-be immigrants or individuals who are here today. That is where I just want to spend a little bit of time just focusing in on it.

There is some concern that many have from within different communities that we want to make sure that individuals who are here are in fact being provided those opportunities to practise nursing. So we look at the recruitment drive, we look at the educational component, where the government is trying to get more people brought into our universities for nursing programs.

If we are not able to meet the demand, I think it has more to do with the short term than the long term. If in the short term we cannot meet the demand in order to provide quality health care services from within, then I believe, and I believe that to be the case today, we need to appeal to get others from abroad to come to Canada, in particular to Manitoba, to help us provide that quality health care service.

Now, two things come from that. One is that we have immigrants who are here today who have the expertise to virtually immediately go into alleviating some of that shortage. As an example, I am aware secondhand of an individual who is a registered nurse back from the Philippines who I believe was a supervisor in one of the hospitals. Now, she came here today under the live-in caregiver program. That is the reason why she is here today. Now, we have a demand, a very high demand for nurses to the extent that we have an organization, I believe that private firm is actually WeCare. It is actually out or has visited the Philippines trying to get immigrants to come to Canada that have the expertise, yet here in the province of Manitoba we have an individual that is supposedly a registered nurse from the Philippines that has the experience, that has the opportunity to be able to meet what we need, and that is more nurses within the profession.

So I am looking to the Minister of Health as to what he would advise someone of this nature. I do not know how familiar the Minister of Health is with the live-in caregiver program, but,

in essence, it is a program that allows someone to avoid having to get a landed status. Usually in coming to the country, what will happen is, they pass a medical, they find a demand for their particular position, and they then are allowed to come to Canada, in this case to Manitoba.

This one happens to be a registered nurse, so there is an obligation on her part to fulfill the two-year requirement. Well, if we need her today, some, including myself, would argue why then would we not see what we could do for someone like this. I say someone like it because I do not necessarily believe that she is alone. I do not have any idea in terms of what the actual numbers would be, but I do not believe that she is alone. What can we do? We now have a provincial immigration nominee. Maybe that might be one of the ways of looking at it, but what do we do with someone like that? That is one question.

The second one is that we have many immigrants who are here today, who have the ability to practise nursing, and the biggest problem that they have is more of accreditation or recognizing their credentials that they brought to the province or to Canada. Again, I do not know what the numbers actually are. I do know that it is there, and that is one of the reasons why I had asked in terms of where is the demand. If the demand is strictly for R.N.s, I do not think then it would be as applicable, but given that you are looking at a variety of nurses that we are in need of, I am convinced that we have a number and I would even dare to say many immigrants that are landed who are here today, that if provided the opportunity would be able to fill some of those shortages.

So I would ask the minister if there is something that we can do today to provide these individuals a vehicle in which they can go to in order for them to be able to meet some of that demand?

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Stefanson: I basically agree with the member. I alluded to that in my comments that there is an opportunity here with individuals who are either already living in Manitoba, who can potentially become nurses in our health care

system. We have actually had discussions, exchanged communications with the Prior Learning Assessment Centre to review that whole issue of the requirements for credentials and so on.

So if the member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) has some individuals by name, I would encourage him to have them contact probably one of two areas, either contact Sue Hicks, the Associate Deputy Minister of Health, who was a member of that nurse recruitment fund, the six-person nurse recruitment fund, and/or to contact the settlement branch of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship. We can certainly provide a name or a contact, and as a result of what we are already doing with the Prior Learning Assessment Centre, in discussions we have had about the nurse recruitment fund that we have in place, we definitely see this as an area for potentially finding more nurses for the health care system.

*(1720)

Now, in some cases you refer to the live-in caregiver. I think you suggested she had a two-year contract or whatever, so in some cases you would have to have a discussion with the employer and resolve some other kinds of issues, but I think the point here being that there is a resource that already exists here in Manitoba, people who are living here who have had experience with our province who would be very interested in getting into our health care system, and we are looking at just that through the communication that I have referred to in terms of looking at the whole issue of credentials, encouraging the nursing fund to again find a way to target that market as well, those people, as well as a resource to bring into our health care system. So I agree with the member for Inkster.

Mr. Lamoureux: I appreciate the comments. The committee that the minister makes reference to, would there be any individuals who would be familiar with the immigration who sit on that particular committee? I ask that in particular if there is someone who sits on the recruitment board itself. I ask that because it is a positive gesture, and I would be quite delighted to provide some individuals who do have some background in that area. When I say individuals

I am talking two, possibly three people to meet with Ms. Hicks or whomever.

I look for the minister's guidance, where they can actually share some names of people who would love to be practising nursing in the province of Manitoba and possibly give advice to this particular committee on how they might be successful in getting people who live in the province today who are either landed immigrants or like the live-in caregiver, and I would be more than happy to assist in that fashion.

Mr. Stefanson: I thank the member for that offer, because I would encourage him to provide those names to Sue Hicks. She will co-ordinate a meeting with them and be sure to include any other appropriate individuals whether it is from immigration or the settlement branch at that meeting, and we would welcome that information literally as soon as possible.

Mr. Lamoureux: If time allows, by tomorrow morning I will be sure to pass on that information.

Having said that, I believe the minister had indicated 115 who are being expected to graduate this year. There are two things. Quite often in university you make a class available and the demand for that class is not necessarily there, so the growth of that class is somewhat limited. In other situations the demand for the course far outweighs the number of available spots in that particular institution.

The minister probably already has an idea in terms of what my question is going to be. If we have 115 who are actually graduating or looking at graduating this year, does the minister recognize whether or not there is a higher demand, just limited spots, or was there in the past as many spots were made available, just not as many people making application for those spots. With my limitations in grammar, I could have probably put it a little bit better, but that is the best way I could think of right offhand.

Mr. Stefanson: I think I understood the question. As I indicated earlier, there are 115 nurses that are expected to graduate from the Faculty of Nursing at the University of Manitoba. The University of Manitoba, as the

member, I am sure, will have noticed through various ads, is aggressively recruiting more nurses to the faculty. They have the capacity to handle more nurses. They are expecting, I think, next year to be as high as potentially 190. They are targeting to get to 400 as quickly as they can through the Faculty of Nursing at the University of Manitoba. That is the Bachelor of Nursing, the four-year program, although you can now take an accelerated program where you can do it in three years under certain circumstances.

The other program, of course, is the LPN program. It is a 14-month program. It is run by Assiniboine Community College. As I mentioned earlier, it is now going to have six intakes. It had 90 last year. It is now funded to a level of having 190. It has had a waiting list to get into the LPN program. Its capacity is being expanded; it has a waiting list to fill.

So both of these programs are supported to a level where it is really a matter of getting the students into the programs. That is why you are seeing the Faculty of Nursing at U of M being very aggressive. The LPN program can now basically meet the demand that is out there for their program.

Mr. Lamoureux: Then, if I understand correctly, the minister is saying, look, if you want to be an R.N., start your education for an R.N., you are not going to have a problem. As long as you have the ability, obviously, and get the general acceptance into university, you are going to be able to register and go forward.

Then, in terms of LPNs, through Assiniboine, I know Red River College used to provide some sort of a course, or it was the St. Boniface Hospital that had the two-year course at one time but, generally speaking, yes, there is a bit of a backlog that is there, so a higher demand, but the government is going to be expanding that. So I would anticipate that over the next 12 months there likely will not be a backlog in that area also?

Mr. Stefanson: The honourable member is basically correct, that the Faculty of Nursing is targeting to get to up to 400. The LPN program is run through Assiniboine Community College at Brandon, but out of the six intakes, two of

them are at the Misericordia Hospital here in Winnipeg—I am probably being repetitive here—two are at the Assiniboine Community College in Brandon, and two will be at rotating sites yet to be determined to make the program readily accessible in other regions of the province.

That program is going to be at 190 this year, so the support is there to do that, and that is why we are seeing the Faculty of Nursing at U of M being aggressive with their recruitment.

* (1730)

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Chairperson, wanting to be cognizant of the time, there is one other area before I leave the nursing at least for now are the nurses that have chosen to leave the profession or to leave the province. Does the government have any sort of numbers as to what is actually happening currently with our nurses? What is our retention really like? Are we losing more nurses to other provinces, other countries? Is it nine times out of 10 when we lose a nurse, is that what happens or are they just giving up on the profession? Is there any sort of a breakdown why we are actually not being able to retain our nurses?

Mr. Stefanson: It is not that we are having a major loss of nurses today in any other regions of the province. The issue is that we, like every other province in Canada, need more nurses today. That goes back to some of the events of the early '90s, the change in the educational program, some of the changes in the health care systems across Canada, so today we are facing a need for nurses. I will certainly try to get some statistics on the retention rate of graduates from the Faculty of Nursing and from Assiniboine Community College here in the province of Manitoba. I would expect that we fare quite well in that entire area. So our nursing numbers I believe have been pretty static the last few years. Again, I can provide numbers of total nurses in Manitoba over the last few years to give the member for Inkster a sense of that. But the reality is we need more nurses and that is why we are doing a combination of all of these things that we discussed here this afternoon.

Mr. Lamoureux: I bring it up because I do think there is some value in getting an

understanding of why we do have some nurses leaving the profession because by addressing some of those particular issues, we might be better able to retain some of the nurses for whatever reasons are either leaving the province or leaving the profession in its entirety. A good way to mark that against would be in comparison to previous years. You are going to see some form of turnover in any given year even under the best-case scenarios. What you are watching for are the oddities, the ones where in one year we have had an abnormal number leaving the profession, and it could be attributed to a recruitment drive from some other jurisdiction. It could be from stress. That is why I think there is some value in finding that out.

Having said that, I did say it was going to be my last question on nursing. I want to change topics. I had an individual that had approached me with some very serious concerns, very serious allegations. Recognizing we can say virtually whatever we want and do not have to worry about being sued for slander or libel, but there is a notice for us to be somewhat responsible, so I am not going to use names.

Having said that, it involves an incident that occurred at the Health Sciences Centre, and what I am looking for is more government policy than anything else or if the minister can give me some sort of an indication of what he would know about something of this nature.

From what I understand, there is dental surgery that is done at the Health Sciences Centre from a Monday to a Friday. That has been the case for a good while. Now, there was supposedly some sort of an audit that was done in which the people who were doing the audit were told that there was work being done on Saturday and as a result of that work, a lot of it was under the table. They were using medical supplies; they were using it as a private facility virtually.

Again, what I am told is after the audit was done, it ceased, the work stopped on the Saturdays, and ultimately the individual who tipped off the appropriate individuals or supposedly tipped off the appropriate individuals was ultimately laid off. Yet the individual who

was being questioned in terms of why those services were being provided on the Saturday, from what I understand, still remains. I realize it is a very specific case, but if the minister can enlighten us as to whatever he can at this point, it would be much appreciated.

Mr. Stefanson: Just before I respond to that specific question, to conclude with nurses, the member is right. There are still a number of other things that could be done to keep nurses in the system, to make it more attractive for nurses to come back in the system or become a nurse through our educational facilities. I hear time and time again about the issue of more permanent positions for nurses in our health care system. That is something that the employers are working to address. They are creating more permanent positions, that is something that is very important to the majority of nurses.

The whole issue of the role of the nurse in the workplace, again when I have met with nurses they raise that issue in terms of the role they play and the issue of respect in the workplace and so on. So the member is right. There are a number of issues. There is the issue of what a nurse gets paid. There is the issue of their role in the workplace, of permanent jobs, a number of issues and this retention fund of \$7 million that can help us. I am certainly open to suggestions. We are, through all of these vehicles, doing a number of things to keep nurses in the system, bring more nurses into the system, use our educational facilities to the maximum and all of those kinds of opportunities that are available to us because we, like other provinces, need more nurses. Nurses like many other sectors of our economy are aging as well, and we are going to continue to need more nurses. So it certainly is a great career path for anybody who is looking for guarantee of a job in the next many years.

I think the member has given me enough details that I will do some inquiries around what he just raised. If there are any additional details that can be provided, I would welcome them. The references that he made, I could certainly have the department look into this matter and get back to the member. Obviously if some of the things being suggested here are in any way happening, they are not actions that we would

condone or accept when I hear references to "under the table" and so on. So, I think in terms of outlining the program, outlining reference to an audit, we probably have enough to at least make some preliminary inquiries and get more information. If the member has anything else he can provide us with confidentially or in whatever fashion, I would welcome that as we look into this.

* (1740)

Mr. Lamoureux: I was provided a letter. I do not know if the Minister of Health was given a similar letter, but I will do what I can in terms of providing more information. I do think that it is definitely important that the minister be aware if, in fact, something of this nature did take place. I do not have any reason to believe that this particular individual would come and give me false information, so I will get back to the minister with what I can on that particular information.

Having said that, I did want to venture just very, very briefly into another area, which has been very controversial here in the Legislature in the past, and just ask for an update in terms of what the government's most recent position is with respect to deliverance of home care.

When it was being debated quite extensively, I recall the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) and others were up on a daily basis; it consumed a great deal of session time and debate, questions and answers, and so forth. I had talked about, in good part, the benefits of trying to get our communities more involved in the delivery of home care services. In fact, I had even had a trip out to Montreal where I checked with one of the community health clinics out there, where they do play a much larger role in ensuring that our communities get home care services. I guess what I am really looking for is what ideally the long-term but, more specifically, the short-term agenda with this minister in regard to home care services and how it is being delivered.

Mr. Stefanson: As we know, we have a separate Home Care line in the Estimates that the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) might want to be asking some questions about when we get to Home Care as well. I would be

interested in terms of what additional information the member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) has when he refers to communities more involved. I think he is well aware that our Home Care program, I think, is recognized as the most comprehensive in Canada today. This budget has \$147 million, \$20 million more than last year. If you go back 11 years, the budget basically triples, so we are certainly dedicating an awful lot of resources. I am always interested in community involvement and community and/or other support groups or volunteers, whatever the member for Inkster might be referring to. I welcome any further suggestion that he might have in that area.

I know we have a detailed line. I will have appropriate staff, and I am just anticipating the member for Kildonan probably has some questions as well.

Mr. Lamoureux: The member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) and I were having a chat. I think there will be some fairly detailed questions that we will be going into. If the opportunity is there and there is no conflict of time with other Estimates, I would like, if I could, to be notified on it because I could be in another committee room at the time and not necessarily knowing when it is called. I would like to further explore this because it is one of those areas in which there is an expanding role, it would appear, for home care. I think it would be nice to have some sort of dialogue on what has happened over the past and where the government would like to see home care in the future.

I know, as an example, many people would like to see home care, and I advocated it quite a while, go in terms of its being even part of the Canada Health Act, or being incorporated into the Department of Health in a more significant way.

Having said that, I thank the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) for being able to pose these questions at this time point in time, and I look forward to continuing questions as we go through the Health Estimates. Thank you.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, moving right along, we are still at 21.1.(d), and I just wonder if the minister can just briefly outline for me

what is the SAP software program as it applies to human resources.

Mr. Stefanson: I think the simplest might be to give the member for Kildonan a briefing note or an overview of it. If he has had a chance to look at his pay stub, which I am not sure he has had a chance to see it, but he received a revised pay stub recently as we all did in terms of the summary of our pay. It really is the fully integrated human resource management and payroll system for basically all of government right now, but I will provide a more detailed overview of the whole implementation of the SAP initiative which began on April 1 of this year.

Mr. Chairperson: Item 21.1.(d) Human Resources (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$973,500—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$201,800—pass; (e) Corporate Services (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$1,785,900.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr Chairperson, do I take it correctly that Corporate Services is a merger of the Planning and Policy secretariat together with the—can the minister outline for me what this new area is?

Mr. Stefanson: I do not have the comparison but the member was heading down the right path. I think it is a consolidation of a number of what I would say smaller corporate services. It had, to give some examples, the federal/provincial advisors, the French Language Services, the Legislative Unit, the special projects unit, the correspondence unit, the decision support services, the issues management, the health effectiveness audit policy, audio-visual—all of those are now combined to make up the Corporate Services.

Mr. Chomiak: There was formally a component of the Planning and Policy that was called private-public partnerships. Can the minister please indicate whether that still exists? If it does, where it is and what its role is, and, if not, what has happened to it?

Mr. Stefanson: I am told that that was a line referenced under Activity Identification, I think. I gather some time was spent on this last year. I am told that the fact is that most of those areas are really operational areas. I guess one example that has been given is the issue of a call centre or call centres that really should be pursued and

driven and reviewed by the regional health authorities. From a government perspective, while the individual who was performing that function is still in this area, really the focus towards those kinds of initiatives are more driven at the operational level, which is at the RHA levels as opposed to the departmental level.

* (1750)

Mr. Chomiak: Since the French policy is under this area, could we get a briefing note as to the highlights in this budget with respect to French services and the direction that your department is going? Would that be possible?

Mr. Stefanson: Yes, we will provide that, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chomiak: I am trying to find some way of segueing into the issue of the federal government commitment and the revenue that the province is receiving this year from the federal government. In my card file, I noted this section, because this area of activity is to assess the policy, fiscal, and strategic environment in order to represent the ministry and anticipate policy direction when required.

So having provided that introduction, I would certainly like to get a sense from the minister as to the rationale of the draw-down that was taken this year from the federal government as well as the ramifications of the need for future revenues in order to maintain existing programs as announced today. Now, the minister may not be in a position to offer that today, but this is the area that I thought I might try.

Mr. Stefanson: This issue was touched on certainly budget day. I am sure the Minister of Finance (Mr. Gilleshammer) is anxious to comment on this as well, but I think if the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) sort of looks back over the last couple of years at comments made by provincial governments right across Canada, premiers right across Canada of all political stripes, he will recall many of the points made to the federal government after the significant amount of money that they took out of the health care system in Canada.

We had the federal government talking about a Pharmacare program, a home care

program. Literally all provincial governments were saying, do not get into new programs. In fact, some of them were calling them boutique programs, do not get into new boutique programs, and so on, and saying, basically provide the core funding back to the provinces, because they know where the areas of greatest need are.

We have certainly made that argument over and over and over again. By drawing on I believe it is \$131 million this year, it certainly provides us with the opportunity to do just that, to stabilize the health care system in Manitoba. That amount of funding from the federal government drops down next year to \$30-some million, and I am going by memory now, and then it starts to increase again over the next three years. It goes up \$60-some million the year after, and then it hits about \$90 million. So it gets back fairly close to where it is today.

So we believe that can be sustained obviously on a go-forward basis, that a drop in federal revenue can be made up again, once again as happened in the past from provincial revenues as a result of growing revenues in Manitoba, a strong economy and so on, but we felt it was more important just to stabilize the health care system in our province. It is allowing us to do a number of things that the member for Kildonan (Mr. Chomiak) has noted and been a part of or seen over the last several months. So that is the rationale, and I certainly believe it is the right one. I am pleased to see that we made that decision as part of this budget, and I am assuming it is one of the many reasons that the member and his colleagues voted for the 1999 budget.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, and we did touch on this before: is it possible for the minister to provide members, even though it touches on the Minister of Finance (Mr. Gilleshammer), it is clearly significant in terms of program delivery with an analysis of the funding implications of both this year and subsequent years as a result of this year's one-time drawdown as well as the funding that is anticipated to come up in the next several years, just the numbers of the next few years?

Mr. Stefanson: I take it the member is then just asking for what the numbers are. We can

quantify the one-time drawing, and I can show what the CHST increases are over the next three years. That might even have been in the budget, but I will certainly undertake to provide those numbers.

Mr. Chairperson: 21.1. Administration and Finance (e) Corporate Services (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$1,785,900-pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$486,300-pass.

We will now move on to Resolution 21.2. Program Support Services (a) Insured Benefits Services (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$5,999,600.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, I am still anticipating going through some general questions and moving on to 2.(c). I have a series of questions that will take us through the rest of the day as well as just beginning next occasion, but unless something untoward should occur I am almost 100 percent certain that the minister should probably be prepared to probably deal most of the next session with the item of 21.2.(c) dealing with the Information Services. Having said that, I do have some specific questions on the whole question of the pharmaceuticals and the like, the Drug Standards and Therapeutic Committee.

I do not think I should start with two minutes to go, so that is where I will probably begin asking questions about it. Now maybe the minister does not anticipate questions on the Drug Standards and Therapeutics Committee, but it is in this section of the Estimates so that is why I was going to start with that next week, deal with some general questions and then move on to the information program if that is appropriate.

Mr. Chairperson: Is the will of the committee to call it six o'clock? Six o'clock. Committee rise. Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Marcel Laurendeau): The hour being six o'clock, this House now adjourns and stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m. (Wednesday).

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Tuesday, May 25, 1999

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