



Fifth Session - Thirty-Sixth Legislature

of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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The Honourable Louise M. Dacquay
Speaker*



MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Sixth Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ASHTON, Steve	Thompson	N.D.P.
BARRETT, Becky	Wellington	N.D.P.
CERILLI, Marianne	Radisson	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CUMMINGS, Glen, Hon.	Ste. Rose	P.C.
DACQUAY, Louise, Hon.	Seine River	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard, Hon.	Roblin-Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary	Concordia	N.D.P.
DOWNEY, James	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
DRIEDGER, Albert	Steinbach	P.C.
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.
LATIILIN, Oscar	The Pas	N.D.P.
LAURENDEAU, Marcel	St. Norbert	P.C.
MACKINTOSH, Gord	St. Johns	N.D.P.
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	N.D.P.
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McALPINE, Gerry	Sturgeon Creek	P.C.
McCRAE, James, Hon.	Brandon West	P.C.
McGIFFORD, Diane	Osborne	N.D.P.
McINTOSH, Linda, Hon.	Assiniboia	P.C.
MIHYCHUK, MaryAnn	St. James	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie, Hon.	River East	P.C.
NEWMAN, David, Hon.	Riel	P.C.
PENNER, Jack	Emerson	P.C.
PITURA, Frank, Hon.	Morris	P.C.
PRAZNIK, Darren, Hon.	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
RADCLIFFE, Mike, Hon.	River Heights	P.C.
REID, Daryl	Transcona	N.D.P.
REIMER, Jack, Hon.	Niakwa	P.C.
RENDER, Shirley, Hon.	St. Vital	P.C.
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ROCAN, Denis	Gladstone	P.C.
SALE, Tim	Crescentwood	N.D.P.
SANTOS, Conrad	Broadway	N.D.P.
STEFANSON, Eric, Hon.	Kirkfield Park	P.C.
STRUTHERS, Stan	Dauphin	N.D.P.
SVEINSON, Ben	La Verendrye	P.C.
TOEWS, Vic, Hon.	Rossmere	P.C.
TWEED, Mervin, 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

Wednesday, May 26, 1999

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

* (1335)

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 Sturgeon Creek (Mr. McAlpine), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Linda McIntosh (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation Act): I am pleased to table the 1998 Annual Report for Manitoba Public Insurance.

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 nineteen Grade 6 students from Salisbury Morse Place School under the direction of Mr. James Warkentin. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Leader of the official opposition.

Also, twelve Grade 11 students from Nelson McIntyre Collegiate under the direction of Mr. Jim Ruel. This school is situated in the constituency of St. Boniface.

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

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Labour Force Skills Training

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business in Manitoba rated Manitoba amongst provinces as having the most acute shortage as a problem of any province in Canada to deal with skilled workers and trained workers in this province. KPMG has a study that said there is a serious and growing shortage of skilled people for high-tech industries here in Manitoba.

I would like to ask the Premier, who is responsible for the training strategies of the province: why are these skilled workers and training programs not meeting together in a coordinated strategy under his government?

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): I think that the Leader of the Opposition should first give credit to the fact that we have this incredible demand in our province because of all the jobs that are being created as a result of the policies of our government.

It is because of the policies of this government that we have been able to attract investment and job creation at a rate that far exceeds many provinces in Canada, particularly those with New Democratic administrations. I am sure that is one of the reasons why the Leader and his party voted for our budget in the recent vote, Madam Speaker, because they recognize the tremendous work that has been done to build that base for the future for our young people.

I might tell him that our young people, when they were in office, had an unemployment rate that was 3 percent above Canada's youth unemployment rate. Today, youth in our province, of course, have an unemployment rate that is more

than 4 percent below Canada's, and that has a lot to do with the policies of this administration. That puts pressure obviously on the side of ensuring that we have people with the skills to meet the needs, and we, through the Economic Innovation and Technology Council, have people who are working together with representatives of industry to ensure that we are going to be providing and meeting the needs over a period of time for those skills. We are also, of course, working on immigration because we realize that we can bring in people with those skills as well to fill some of the needs.

It is a wonderful problem to have, Madam Speaker. Probably any government in Canada would give their right arm to have that challenge.

Mr. Doer: We have obtained results of the latest '97-98 Canadian Labour Force Development Board human resource study on training and community college investment and technical institutions in Canada. Manitoba, regrettably, spends the lowest amount of money per capita on these training community college programs. Those are the facts. I would like to ask this Premier: why is he not investing in a high-skilled economy of the future rather than rhetoric of the past?

Hon. James McCrae (Minister of Education and Training): Again, Madam Speaker, we are very glad to have the enthusiastic support of our colleagues in the New Democratic Party for budget initiatives that do indeed go some distance toward meeting the challenges that a new and buoyant economy in Manitoba is presenting us with. I am glad the honourable Leader of the Opposition so enthusiastically supported the \$4 million college development fund in this year's budget. I was so glad for the enthusiastic support of the honourable member and his colleagues for the \$1.3 million strategic fund that is designed to get colleges and universities working more closely together along with the private sector to bring about the trained people that we need for the expanding markets that we have to serve. In addition to that, changes in the apprenticeship arrangements in the province of Manitoba are all designed to meet the demand that the honourable member has set out in his question and which I agree

with the Premier when he says it is a nice problem to have. It is still a problem, but it is certainly different from the problems that were left to us some years back when the New Democrats left this province on its knees basically.

Mr. Doer: On his knees with 6,000 housing starts per year compared to one-quarter of that now, Madam Speaker. Give me a break. KPMG, many—[interjection] Well, I hope so. They will come back after an election when we have the high-skilled, high-wage jobs of the future.

Madam Speaker, the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, the manufacturing association, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the KPMG study are all saying the same thing. We are not training our people, we are not having the skilled jobs of the future because we lack the skill, training and development in our infrastructure in our training programs today.

I would like to ask this Premier: why is Manitoba spending the lowest amount in Canada on training? Why is he not providing hope for our young people in the future, and why is Manitoba spending \$100 per capita in western Canada, Saskatchewan \$138 per capita, Alberta \$180 per capita and B.C. \$224 per capita on community colleges, vocational training, apprenticeship programs and training for the skilled jobs of the future?

Mr. Filmon: Madam Speaker, I am glad that the member opposite is finally zeroing in on a situation which is foremost in the minds of most Manitobans, and that is the availability of job opportunities. We remind him that when they were in office, the youth unemployment rate was 3 percent above Canada's; that is what they left this province with. Today, it is over 4 percent below Canada's. That is why in the recent news that I am sure he has been reading, it says: TD forecasts sun for Manitoba. Manitoba headed for a brain gain, talking about youth staying here because of the opportunities created. On the other hand, and this is from the Regina Leader Post, it says: Saskatchewan loses jobs.

Now that is the difference between the policies of this administration and the policies of

the New Democrats. They brought the economy of British Columbia to its knees in less than five years, and even in Saskatchewan, Madam Speaker, Saskatchewan loses jobs. That is what New Democrats stand for, is no jobs. In fact, the issue of the future is that under New Democrats, there is no hope for the future for young people. Under our administration, we have the challenge, the very pleasant challenge of being able to find enough skilled people to meet the job needs that we have created in this province.

* (1340)

Labour Force Skills Training

Ms. Jean Friesen (Wolseley): My question is for the Minister of Education. Madam Speaker, not only has the Filmon government got the lowest per capita investment in training of any province in Canada, it is a government which has failed to produce specific strategies to deal with present and future training needs in Manitoba.

I would like to ask the Minister of Education and Training to offer any explanation as to why his government has ignored the consistent reports of a decade on the skill needs of the future and the outmigration of Manitobans, including the two reports from Winnipeg 2000, the Canadian Federation of Business every year, the information highway report of two years ago, the emerging skill needs task force of last year, as well as the Roblin report of 1993, all of them sounding an alarm of lack of skills training in Manitoba and outmigration of young people.

Hon. James McCrae (Minister of Education and Training): Madam Speaker, if the honourable member feels this way, it is hard to explain then why she would be on her feet so vigorously supporting the budget brought forward by the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Gilleshammer) just a short time ago. In fact, I think honourable members opposite are going to have quite a job explaining that particular situation which Frances Russell described as a tactically stupid and dishonest approach by honourable members opposite. Be that as it may, we appreciate the support because it tells us that, at least in the opinion of the

members of the New Democratic Party, we are on the right track.

I am glad for the honourable members' support for initiatives that Morris-Macdonald School Division is undertaking, for example, with Anukiiwin school here in Winnipeg to bring students, predominantly aboriginal students, to the levels of high school graduation so that they can go further and take part in other opportunities that are made available. Certainly, the additional \$4 million this year for the college growth fund is going to help by putting 1,000 additional students into classrooms in the Manitoba community colleges.

Ms. Friesen: Madam Speaker, could the Minister of Education explain why he has so far ignored the emerging skills task force report which asked the government to take leadership in a training plan in the information technology sector, to produce an annual report on the labour market supply—that is after 11 years, and they have not done it—and to develop a training plan for human resources and information technology? Those are clearly specific proposals. What is the government doing?

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The question has been put.

Mr. McCrae: In addition to the large sums of money being made available for school divisions with respect to technology, technological advances are happening at other levels as well, as pointed out by the honourable member. We are pleased that she supports us in our budget in addressing technological challenges and opportunities that are presented to our post-secondary sector, as well as our trades and apprenticeship sector. We appreciate the support of honourable members opposite.

Ms. Friesen: Madam Speaker, can the minister confirm that the higher per capita funding for skills training in other provinces could be one part of the reason that we in Manitoba are losing pharmaceutical investments to Quebec, and we are losing the research in agriculture and agricultural diversity programs to Saskatchewan?

Mr. McCrae: Madam Speaker, we have an excellent education system in Manitoba, and our

graduates are indeed sought after by other jurisdictions. We also see graduates from other jurisdictions migrating into Manitoba as well. That is a cycle that is not an unusual thing, but it is true that Manitoba competes very well in research. It competes very well with respect to any high-tech area of endeavour because Manitoba graduates and Manitoba workers are in demand not just in Manitoba.

The one thing that I notice about the honourable member's approach is that she forgets that we are dealing in a global economy. This government does not forget that and has been making preparations and taking a leadership role in the business community with respect to making sure Manitobans are prepared to compete and to compete effectively. Honourable members opposite tend to be somewhat selective when they are dealing with various reports, but I think that the major indicators indicate that what the Premier (Mr. Filmon) said earlier is very correct. When we compare ourselves with our most immediate partners to the east and to the west, we compare rather favourably indeed.

* (1345)

**Victims' Rights
McEvoy Family**

Ms. Marianne Cerilli (Radisson): Madam Speaker, the death of Erica McEvoy in front of Club Regent, last May 4, by a speeding driver, is a tragedy that has shaken her family. The facts show that the victims of this crime have been unjustly treated by our justice system.

I want to ask the Minister of Justice to consider that the family did not know who the Crown prosecutor was until May 17, over a year later, even though there were 11 months of delays and six remands. They were not encouraged to file a victims impact statement; they were not encouraged to use the Victims Assistance Program. They were not aware of a plea bargain and reduction of the charges and to have no trial. I want to ask the minister, in view of his victims assistance legislation, can he tell the House what kinds of victims' rights are these?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): I appreciate the question

from the member. Without accepting the preamble of what the member has stated because just last week she brought some very false information to this House and we, in fact, had to correct her, the Minister of Housing (Mr. Reimer) had to correct her, so I do not necessarily accept that, but I can say that the Ontario court in a very recent decision, in listening to some of the witnesses there, indicated that Manitoba's Victims' Rights Act is the only act that has an effective victims complaint mechanism to ensure that if there are victims who are not satisfied with the treatment that they received at the hands of the justice system, there is an effective complaint mechanism. So I certainly will look into the particular case, but I certainly would not accept the member's comments at face value.

Ms. Cerilli: I would ask the minister if he would consider what I am bringing to the House, as asked by me for the family, and if he would explain to the family why they were not asked to prepare a victim impact statement as his legislation requires. Why were they not even given this pamphlet?

Mr. Toews: Madam Speaker, I would certainly, in speaking to the members of that particular family, listen very closely and carefully to their concerns. I would certainly ensure that my staff respond in an appropriate fashion. Unfortunately, I do not have the same level of trust in the comments that this member has brought to this House. So I do in fact take very seriously any accusation that is brought forward like that, but I know from last week and the types of comments she made that they simply were not accurate.

Ms. Cerilli: Madam Speaker, I want to ask the minister to explain why this family did not even know who their Crown prosecutor was, who the Crown prosecutor was in the case, and why they were not advised to use the Victims Assistance Program. They have had delays for over a year; there were six remands; they went to—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The question has been put.

Mr. Toews: As indicated, I will certainly look into that particular case, and I will take the

particulars of that case as notice. I know that I spoke very recently to the administrator of the victims complaint mechanism, and I know that there has not been a complaint filed in that particular case. So I am just wondering why the member would not advise the family to take advantage of the mechanism that is there already unless she is bringing it to this House for some particular political purpose.

**Victims' Rights
McEvoy Family**

Mr. Gord Mackintosh (St. Johns): To the Minister of Justice. When we have another conditional sentence in such a serious and violent crime as the killing of 21-year-old Erica McEvoy, I suggest, Madam Speaker, that the minister is obliged not just to point fingers at Ottawa or to tell the victims and the survivors just to complain to the same department that breached their rights but to examine the role of his own department.

My question to the minister is: will the minister not admit that the seriousness of this crime was downplayed by his own department when it reduced the charge in a plea bargain from the most serious charge of criminal negligence causing death, which can attract up to life imprisonment, to the lowest charge of dangerous driving? Did his department not risk—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The question has been put.

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Madam Speaker, as you are well aware, the political office does not get involved in any particular charges. I know that the Crown attorneys have an ethical duty to ensure that, in the case that is brought forward to the court, there is sufficient evidence, evidence that is acceptable in a court, not evidence according to my standards or evidence according to the member for St. Johns. I know that Crowns often have very difficult issues and struggles in respect of particular cases, and I know that they have executed that responsibility in a very diligent fashion in the vast majority of cases. But, if there is an issue on this particular case, I will have my department look at that, and I will, as indicated, take the particulars of the matter as notice.

* (1350)

Mr. Mackintosh: How can this minister explain, this minister who made a big to-do about a so-called Victims' Rights Act last year which promised helpful information about criminal matters that affect victims and their rights about courtesy, compassion and respect, why the survivors, who we understand, on top of waiting over a year for a very unjust outcome, were never involved in a plea bargain, let alone told about it or told about the right to prepare a victim impact statement, were not told by his department about the right to victim compensation. They did not know who the Crown was till last week. His Victims' Rights Act is a big—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The question has been put.

Mr. Toews: Well, Madam Speaker, I am sorry that the member feels that way, because I do not think that accords with the facts. In fact, it has been recognized in testimony in a court in Ontario that Manitoba's act is in fact the only one in Canada with an enforceable mechanism in order to ensure that victims in fact are heard.

Our government does not simply pass legislation in order to ensure that victims are compensated in an appropriate fashion; we put the taxpayers' money where our mouths are, and that is that the current compensation budget in Manitoba is \$2.6 million, compared to the Saskatchewan NDP government of \$300,000. Madam Speaker, who is it that speaks for victims? It is not the NDP government in Saskatchewan; it is this government here in Manitoba.

Mr. Mackintosh: Would this minister, instead of listening to somebody in Ontario in the court system, listen to the victims in Manitoba and explain why the McEvoy family survivors were never told of their right and their ability to prepare in advance a victim impact statement, as he promised last September would be their right? Why the accused was given the right—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The question has been put.

Mr. Toews: Madam Speaker, the answer to that is quite simple. The last week, when members on the opposite side brought forward information, it was simply incorrect. For example, they indicated that the rate of recovery in maintenance enforcement in British Columbia was higher than it was in Manitoba, and that was clearly false. Manitoba has the highest degree percentage of recovery in Canada of any province.

So all I am saying, Madam Speaker, is that the facts that are brought forward by this individual have consistently been wrong.

Point of Order

Mr. Steve Ashton (Opposition House Leader): Madam Speaker, on a point of order, the minister violates two provisions of Beauchesne: 417, answers to questions should be as brief as possible and deal with the matter raised and should not provoke debate; also, the provisions referring to members, 481.(e), in which he is clearly imputing motives.

We had a very serious question asked about victims' rights in this province, and for the minister to get up and not even attempt to answer the question and attempt to get into a debate-related matter that was raised last week, another issue this government has failed miserably with, is totally out of order. It is an insult to the family, the victims in this case who did not get the kind of victims' rights that this government said they would get and that those victims deserve. His conduct, his answers were an insult to that family. It is unacceptable.

*(1355)

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

Mr. Toews: Madam Speaker, the question that was put to me is why I answered a question in a certain way. I answered that quite directly. It was simply because the information that members opposite have consistently brought to this House has been incorrect. So I know that our government and I personally feel very, very deeply for victims. That is why in fact we have been fighting for victims. But the fact is I answered the question that he put to me.

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

Mr. Mackintosh: On the point of order, when there is such a serious issue raised that puts a test to the minister's rhetoric, given that last September he announced a victim impact statement program and here we have facts that are brought to this House, we understand, from the family that they were— after having to hear extensive input on behalf of the accused of the impact of the crime on him, the family and the father of the accused were simply asked—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. With the greatest respect, the honourable member for St. Johns is now debating the issue, not speaking to the point of order.

On the point of order raised by the honourable member for Thompson, he cited two violations of our rules. I indeed will research Hansard to confirm the accuracy of the statements made and bring a ruling back to the House.

Crown Corporations Standing Committee Review

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Whether it is Manitoba Lotteries or Manitoba Hydro or Workers Compensation, these particular boards and others are held accountable through the Legislature when we go through standing committees. This government's past record clearly demonstrates gross neglect in terms of not bringing forward those boards to our standing committees. The question, very simply, to the Premier: how does this government try to come across as an accountable government when in fact they do not even have the courage to call standing committees to deal with these vitally important Crown corporations on expenditures and revenues that are very important to all Manitobans?

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Madam Speaker, I could be wrong, but I do not recall boards having been brought forward to committee in the past, so I think the member is confused. If he means the annual reports of the Crown corporations being brought to committee

for debate and discussion, I can tell him that this government prides itself on its accountability and that this government—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mr. Filmon: Madam Speaker, we obviously have an accountability to the public, and the public has watched over the last 11 years how Crown corporations now operate in a very business-like fashion, how Crown corporations under the New Democrats used to traditionally lose millions and tens of millions of dollars every year, taxpayers' money, whose rates were set in the cabinet room are now being done in a very open and democratic fashion with competent boards who operate at arm's length from government, who are running those corporations in manners that are seeing us have some of the lowest utility rates in the country, some of the best profitability in the country and some of the best accountability because they are accountable ultimately to the public. We take great pride in their achievements.

* (1400)

Mr. Lamoureux: My question for the Premier is: how does he tell Manitobans that his Crown corporations or the government's Crown corporations are being held accountable when in fact they might spend one or two hours a year in committee with staff people here to answer questions from opposition, even government backbenchers? How does that account for accountability?

Mr. Filmon: Madam Speaker, you have corporations like MPI and Hydro being examined firstly by the Crown Corporations Council and being given a very, very thorough external examination by experts in the field. Our current Auditor used to be the former financial person at the Crown Corporations Council. They get a very rigorous examination each and every year. More particularly, those two corporations go before a thorough long-ranging examination by the Public Utilities Board.

We have people from all different—the Consumers' Association, the Manitoba Society

of Seniors, we have political representatives, we have many, many people come before that Public Utilities Board process, a process that did not exist under the New Democrats. They used to simply make those decisions in cabinet, which is why they lost millions and tens of millions of dollars that they added to the rates and ultimately impacted to the detriment of the public of Manitoba. We take great pride in all of the various steps of accountability that have been introduced by our government to ensure those Crown corporations are much better off today than they ever were under the New Democrats.

Mr. Lamoureux: Can the Premier then tell us: why does this Premier not recognize the benefits of having our Crown corporations being held, in part, accountable through our standing committees? That is why we have the standing committees in part. Why does this Premier not support accountability of our Crown corporations here in the Manitoba Legislature?

Mr. Filmon: Madam Speaker, our Crown corporations are accountable and will be held accountable, not only by Crown Corporations Council, not only by the Public Utilities Board in many instances, but they will be as well by the committees of this Legislature.

AIDA Program Assistance Criteria—Flooding

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): Madam Speaker, when the Minister of Agriculture signed the final agreement on AIDA just a few weeks ago, the flooding situation in western Manitoba was already developing. I would like to ask the Minister of Agriculture if he can tell this House what efforts he made to have disasters such as flooding as a criteria to receive assistance under the AIDA program before he signed the agreement.

Hon. Harry Enns (Minister of Agriculture): Madam Speaker, my friend from Swan River has advanced the season somewhat in terms of what occurred on the landscape.

But to answer her directly, the AIDA program is an income support price for farmers essentially developed for the poor prices in commodities, wheat, barley and grains, as well

as pork. Certainly the problem facing the farmers in southwestern is an income problem, or potentially will be an income problem this fall if significant acreage is not seeded. It is my expectation that the AIDA program will be very helpful under these circumstances.

Ms. Wowchuk: Given the crisis farmers are facing in the southwest part of the province, I would like to ask the Minister of Agriculture to explain the comments made by his colleague the member for Arthur-Virden (Mr. Downey), who says that funds from AIDA should be redirected to help farmers who are in this situation right now. Is there criteria to redirect these funds, the funds from AIDA, to help farmers in a disaster situation? [interjection]

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable minister was not recognized because I feared I might not be able to hear him, given the disruption in the Chamber.

Mr. Enns: I was simply putting on the record that I was always prepared to take good advice from my good friend the honourable member for Arthur-Virden. I only regret that I do not have that advice right now on the cabinet table with him from time to time on these issues.

But be that as it may, what the honourable member referred to and what I am prepared to accept is to examine seriously whether or not a modification of the AIDA program can be applied to make an interim payment. As the honourable member knows, this program is based on income tax documentation which would not be filed till the months January, February 2000. No money from AIDA would flow to the southwestern, the flood-stricken farmers, till about this time in the year 2000, and that is a long time. I am trying to see whether there are some opportunities to provide some of that assistance on perhaps an interim payment earlier.

Disaster Assistance Program Compensation—Farmers

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): Given that farmers are facing a crisis and expect leadership from government, and given that they cannot access AIDA funds from last year's

income, can the minister indicate when we are going to finally see a disaster assistance program that farmers can count on rather than ad hoc programs that they do not know whether they will cover the disasters that they are in?

Hon. Harry Enns (Minister of Agriculture): I am fully cognizant of the risks involved in agriculture, but I can say without fear of contradiction, no other government in the history of Manitoba has provided more support for agriculture than the government that I have the privilege of serving.

Provincial Parks Entrance Fees—Seniors

Mr. Conrad Santos (Broadway): My question is directed to the honourable Minister responsible for the Seniors Directorate. The regulatory and licensing powers of government are exercised either to regulate the behaviour of citizens or to raise revenues. Since the last three years, this government, this party in power, has not only forced senior citizens to get entry passes to public parks and licence fees, they also increased these fees consistently throughout the last three years. What is the purpose of this regulatory or licensing power, to raise revenue or to regulate the behaviour of citizens?

Hon. Jack Reimer (Minister responsible for Seniors): Madam Speaker, one of the things this government has tried very, very diligently and consistently with is to try to make life not only better for the seniors of Manitoba but for all Manitobans. One of the ways that we have looked at is to make this economy of Manitoba vibrant, aggressive and growing so that there are revenues that can be shared through all aspects of our society.

One of the things that we are very proud of is our parks, our recreation areas, and our ability to have people use these facilities. The charges against these are of a minor nature in regard to some of the seniors passes and the fishing licence, but it is the enhancement for all Manitobans that a lot of these amenities are there for. As I stated earlier, it is our commitment that the economy of this province and the growing and the revenues that are generated are shared by all Manitobans, including seniors.

Mr. Santos: Supplementary, Madam Speaker. Since the institution of these park entry licensing fees, how much revenue has the government raised?

Mr. Reimer: Madam Speaker, the issuance of licence and the fees that are collected are I believe controlled through the Department of Natural Resources, and I believe that is a question that should be directed towards that minister and his department in their Estimates. We do not have that access through my department.

* (1410)

Mr. Santos: Another supplementary, Madam Speaker. Contrasting and upsetting the revenue received in terms of the psychological lack of opportunities for senior citizens to enjoy the public facilities of the parks and the fishing opportunities, does this government wish to reconsider this unpopular policy and practice regarding our seniors?

Mr. Reimer: Madam Speaker, I must remind the member, too, that in the support of the budget that was just passed, there was reference to the costs and the associated facts. I find it ironic that in supporting the budget, they are now criticizing part of the revenues that are created by that, but at the same time—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable Minister responsible for Seniors, to complete his response.

Mr. Reimer: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. As I was saying, I find it ironic that the member there that voted for this budget, that voted for these types of fees, is now criticizing and wanting accountability.

As I mentioned earlier, the parks and the recreation areas for all Manitobans are set out for their enjoyment. I would say that the maintenance of them and the participation and the involvement by peoples of Manitoba in our parks is something that is very, very enviable in all areas of Canada. I would think that these can be enjoyed by not only Manitobans but seniors throughout Manitoba also.

Education System Physical Education Curriculum

Ms. Marianne Cerilli (Radisson): If members had taken the time to talk to physical education professionals outside the building today at noon, they would have found that these people are very concerned about the lack of leadership by this government encouraging physical education and that school divisions are now following their lead and are reducing lower than the curriculum requirements the amount of physical education time.

I want to ask the Minister of Education if he is aware that the proposal that was defeated in Brandon School Division would have eliminated four teaching positions. Does he think it is acceptable for school divisions to save money by eliminating physical education and physical education positions?

Hon. James McCrae (Minister of Education and Training): Madam Speaker, I was pleased to join with my colleague the Minister of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship (Mrs. Vodrey) today and spend a little time on the grounds of the Legislature with hundreds and hundreds of Manitoba school kids and their teachers and engage in a little physical activity and some fun. It was a wonderful occasion this afternoon, and my compliments to all of those who were involved in its organization. I was honoured to be able to take part in the presentation of the Toba Award just before resuming my work getting ready for the Legislature this afternoon.

I think the honourable member raised the question of physical education in the Brandon School Division in the past. I think I made the point at that time that parents, physical education teachers and others were making their views known to the school division in their planning process. The system indeed works, and again I think honourable members, by their repeated questioning, are very, very loudly hinting that it is their intention, if they were ever given the opportunity—I do not think that will ever happen—but if they ever had the opportunity, they would get rid of school divisions, and that is not the policy of this government.

Ms. Cerilli: Madam Speaker, I want to ask the new minister responsible for fitness and

recreation if she has pleaded with the Minister of Education to understand that his curriculum requirements not being met in Manitoba schools is going to jeopardize her agreement and this government's agreement to reduce by 10 percent inactive Manitobans in the next number of years. Has the minister asked him?

Mr. McCrae: Madam Speaker, you just need to look at the successful students in our system to know that those are the students who are also engaged in regular physical activity. The Department of Education and Training certainly supports that and wants to see an appropriate level of physical education and physical activity undertaken by students right across the province. With the New Directions, we are asking that certain standards be met, and I think that in some cases they are more rigorous than they were in the past, and I think this is something that students can benefit from. In order to meet those requirements, a healthy body also allows a healthy mind to do a better job. So I am very much in line with the suggestions being made by the honourable member.

Madam Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

Speaker's Ruling

Madam Speaker: I have a ruling for the House.

On May 13, 1999, the honourable Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Enns) in a point of order asked that the honourable member for Interlake (Mr. C. Evans) withdraw the inference that the minister had not been truthful. The matter was taken under advisement so that I could review Hansard. The honourable minister did not have a point of order. There was a dispute between the minister and the member for Interlake in their interpretation of the facts of a matter.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Poppy Trust Fund

Hon. Rosemary Vodrey (Minister of Culture, Heritage and Citizenship): Madam Speaker, last evening I had the pleasure of attending the Fort Garry Legion No. 90 poppy trust fund ceremony. Each year the legion makes a

donation to the hospitals in the community. The donations are a result of the sale of Remembrance Day poppies. Because of the outstanding support from the sale of the poppies, the legion was able to increase their donation to the hospitals.

This year, the Victoria General Hospital, the Riverview Health Centre, the Misericordia Health Centre and the joint hospitals each received \$2,000 from the poppy trust fund. I would like to commend the Fort Garry Legion No. 90, their poppy trust fund committee who worked so hard to collect the dollars for this distribution, and I would like to commend them for their commitment and their dedication that they demonstrate towards the community. I would also like to thank them for their wonderful donations to the hospitals in our communities.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mining Industry

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): The community of Leaf Rapids, Manitoba, was built around an operating mine, Ruttan. For over 25 years, this mining community has contributed millions of dollars of tax revenues to the provincial government. Despite this, the community has largely been ignored by the Filmon government. It seems that for every dollar this government takes from us in the North, they only give us back a dime.

Early in May, at their annual general meeting, the Manitoba Chamber of Commerce gave unanimous approval to resolutions supporting mining communities in northern Manitoba. The Chamber noted that in many areas, and especially around the communities of Lynn Lake and Leaf Rapids, the geological information base is weak. The Chamber stressed that the province should give geological information high priority because such information is vital in attracting mining investment.

* (1420)

The Chamber of Commerce has asked for the Premier to call and sponsor a conference on

the mineral industry in this province. Major stakeholders should be brought together: exploration and mining firms, workers, the mayors of mining communities, banks, aboriginal leaders, and so on. Innovative ideas are needed, and an action plan needs to be developed to improve the state of mining in Manitoba. We need a proactive government. The Chamber of Commerce and northerners recognize the importance of mining to the provincial economy. They are aware of the current fragile state of mining and of depressed metal prices. This province has great mineral potential. Twelve thousand Manitobans are employed in the mining industry. It is time that the provincial government gave more than lip service to such an important industry.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

SummerActive '99

Mr. Gerry McAlpine (Sturgeon Creek):

Madam Speaker, I am issuing a challenge to all honourable members to join thousands of other Manitobans throughout the summer of 1999 and get active. I would like to remind all honourable members, instead of just talking about it, actually going out there and physically doing it and participating in these events.

Today is the start of the national SummerActive '99 campaign for healthy, active living. The campaign was launched in several communities across the province this past weekend, and A Taste of Activity, the kick-off event for Winnipeg, started a couple of hours ago on the south grounds of the Legislative Building. I know I and my colleagues enjoyed participating in these events. The festivities included demonstrations, displays and interactive events for people of all ages and abilities. All were designed to show Manitobans how easy it is to get active and practise healthy, active living in their daily lives.

Madam Speaker, being healthy is much more than getting medical, vision and dental check-ups. Being healthy is also about active living. People can get active through just a few minutes of physical activity every day. Active living can improve quality of life and foster a great sense of community, and I am proud to say

that across our province more and more Manitobans are realizing the value of taking part in one or more physically oriented activities and consciously striving for a healthy, active lifestyle.

Today, A Taste of Activity event is one of many to be held as part of our province-wide participation initiative for SummerActive '99. I would like to congratulate the more than 200 Manitoba communities that are taking part in this summer's events.

Madam Speaker, many people are involved in the SummerActive planning committee. They include staff from Culture, Heritage and Citizenship, the City of Winnipeg Community Services Department, the Manitoba Fitness Council, Sports Manitoba, Manitoba Society of Seniors, Manitoba Physical Education Teachers Association, Manitoba Physical Education Supervisors Association, the Provincial Parks Branch, Manitoba Camping Association and Manitoba Recreational Trails Association.

Madam Speaker, I look forward to seeing all of us accept the activity challenge and hope that we will be enthusiastic participants in the SummerActive '99.

Ms. Marianne Cerilli (Radisson): Madam Speaker, I also want to rise to congratulate the organizers of the events from the various community groups and agencies for the SummerActive program as it was launched today. There is an often referenced study, an Australian study that is being promoted by Sport Manitoba that has the startling statistic that if 40 percent of the population could be involved in regular physical activity, the net savings to that country's health care alone would be \$6.5 million per day. That is a 1988 study.

We know though that the trends to reach those goals are moving in the opposite direction, that actually half of Canadians are obese, that the average child watches 6.5 hours of television per week. When we hear members opposite talk about acting and doing, we have to encourage them to actually put into place those policies as they affect all of Manitoba.

I think it is a little bit hypocritical of this government to put out materials with the smiling

face of the Premier (Mr. Filmon) on it that say children need 30 minutes of physical activity every day to improve fitness and health, and then turn around and have a government that has reduced by half the time requirement for physical activity in our schools. So this government's record on physical education, on eliminating health education as a required course, is going to speak louder than their one-day event that we had at the Legislative Building today.

We know that there is a study that is being done at the University of Manitoba to show that indeed over 70 percent of students are not receiving at the Grades 1 and 2 level the curriculum requirements in Manitoba. We in the NDP want to see this reversed. We know the government has to make recreation and physical activity accessible. They have to stop allowing and encouraging school divisions to save money for technology by signing computer contracts with YNN. They have to start—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member's time has expired.

The honourable member for Broadway. [interjection] Order, please. I would like to remind all honourable members, now that a question has been raised by the honourable member for Radisson (Ms. Cerilli), that there are two minutes for a member's statement at which time the member is supposed to be completely finished his or her statement, and I stand, give a signal, and ultimately when I start saying order, please, the mike is shut off.

All members are given a warning at one minute, 45 seconds, and I believe if I check with the Clerks, both the honourable member for Sturgeon Creek (Mr. McAlpine) had two minutes and about 16, 17 seconds, as did the honourable member for Radisson when her mike was shut off.

The honourable member for Broadway.

Mr. Conrad Santos (Broadway): Madam Speaker—

Madam Speaker: The honourable member for Radisson, on a point of order.

Point of Order

Ms. Cerilli: Apologies to my colleague from Broadway, but I wanted to rise on a point of order to ask that you will review Hansard and ensure that the time that my microphone was shut off was the same as the time that the member opposite's microphone was shut off, and that his excessive statement was not recorded while mine was cut off. I hope that the fairness will be afforded to this House. Thank you.

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

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): On the same point of order, Madam Speaker, I think we do not want to necessarily reflect on the table officers.

My understanding of what your indication was is that both individuals spoke for two minutes and 16 seconds when the mikes were actually cut off. That would seem to be an appropriate fairness for both sides. I would also caution all members that it is a two-minute member's statement, and we should all try, including myself, to ensure our comments are under that two minutes, as you have pointed out.

Madam Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable member for Radisson, the honourable member did not have a point of order. I have been further advised that I was wrong. Both members had in excess of two minutes and 25 seconds.

Seniors Month

Mr. Conrad Santos (Broadway): I wish to make a statement on the Seniors Month in Manitoba. The incoming month of June is designated as the Seniors Month in this province. This annual event, celebrating the accomplishment of our senior citizens, was initiated by the NDP government. Because it has proved successful, the current government has continued the same.

There is no doubt that, due to toil, sweat and labour, our senior citizens have built up this province. We enjoy today the fruits of their labour. Since the year 1999 has been designated

as the International Year of the Older Person, it is fitting and proper that all the more the month of June should enjoy a special significance this year. Recognizing and honouring the contribution of our senior citizens contributes to the link between the younger and the older generations in our community. The elders in our province deserve the special treatment of respect and deference. This range of events concerning seniors and their special activities include special barbecues, dinners, teas, social evenings and other activities.

The honourable Minister responsible for the Seniors Directorate (Mr. Reimer) and I as Seniors critic invite all the members of this Assembly and recommend to them to attend some of these events commemorating the activities of our senior citizens. Thank you.

* (1430)

ORDERS OF THE DAY

House Business

Hon. David Newman (Deputy Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, I wonder if there is leave to waive private members' hour in order for Committee of Supply to sit until 6 p.m.

Madam Speaker: Is there unanimous consent of the House to waive private members' hour to permit the Committee of Supply to sit till 6 p.m.? [agreed]

Mr. Newman: Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Minister of Seniors and Urban Affairs (Mr. Reimer), that Madam Speaker do now leave the Chair and that the House resolve itself into a committee to consider of the Supply to be granted to Her Majesty.

Motion agreed to.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Mr. Chairperson (Gerry McAlpine): Order, please. Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This afternoon this section of the

Committee of Supply meeting in Room 254 will resume consideration of the Estimates of the Department of Education and Training. When the committee last sat, it had been considering Item 16.2. School Programs (c) Assessment and Evaluation (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$5,149,700 on page 47 of the Estimates book. Shall the item pass?

Ms. Jean Friesen (Wolseley): At the end of last time, we had been discussing examinations and examination results. The minister indicated that he wanted to make the examination system better-known publicly, and I had asked whether he would consider tabling all of the examinations which have been given to date. The minister I think wanted to consider that, so I assume that is where we can start.

Hon. James McCrae (Minister of Education and Training): I thank the honourable member for bringing us up to date where we were. Indeed, we were talking about making samples of past examinations available for the honourable member, and that is what we are going to do.

While we are getting those documents together, I have some documents to table respecting aboriginal language instruction. This document is dated 1992-93, but it is revised in 1996 and 1999. It sets out the school divisions, the schools and the numbers of students in those schools. So I am going to table that information.

I have another document that I would like to table for the honourable member entitled Aboriginal Education and Training Human Resources Development Training. One of the elements of the aboriginal education and training strategy is to provide training for all Manitoba Education and Training staff designed to increase sensitivity and operational ability to meet the program needs of aboriginal students. The document goes on to talk about initial training and about sessions that have been conducted for various staff of Manitoba Education and Training. Level II training discusses resources related to training. So I am going to table that for the honourable member.

There was also a discussion about Manitoba Aboriginal Head Start programs. Approximately 560 children are enrolled in 14 Aboriginal Head

Start programs and six satellite programs. An average of 30 students attend each centre. Numbers are greater for centres with satellite programs. Ninety-five people are employed in both full- and part-time positions. I have here a list of directors and sponsors for all Head Start programs for the northern region, the Parklands region and the Winnipeg region. I will table that information for the honourable member.

I have a training manual that is made available to the co-ordinator for local marking, as we discussed yesterday. This is related to Grade 6 English language arts, and this is the training manual made available to the co-ordinators by the department. As we discussed yesterday, this information is the subject of a couple of days of training for the co-ordinator. The co-ordinator then returns to his or her division and conducts half-day seminars for teachers using this manual. I have the same information for the Senior 1 mathematics standards test, and I have it for English.

I also have *Séance de formation des coordonateurs de la correction à l'échelle locale pour mathématiques de secondaire avril 1999*. So that is the same thing for the française.

Mr. Peter Dyck, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

I have for the honourable member the Senior 1 Mathematics Standards Test for January of 1999, which gives the honourable member a picture of exactly what the students were dealing with in January.

With respect to the January 1999 English Language Arts Provincial Examination—there is a lot of information in this next tabling. It is a Provincial Summary Report, Senior 4 English Language Arts Examination; the Provincial Examination Administration Manual for Supervising Teachers; the Senior 4 English Language Arts Provincial Examination Checklist for Supervising Teachers; the Senior 4 English Language Arts Provincial Examination Preparatory Readings. In this case, the theme is Responsibility.

We have Senior 4 English Language Arts Provincial Examination Student Responses to

Readings, the theme being responsibility, and the date of January 12, 1999; a document entitled *Your Process Writing Task*; Senior 4 English Language Arts Provincial Examination Process Writing Student Response Booklet, the theme being Responsibility, January 1999; the Official Answer Key under that theme; Senior 4 English Language Arts Provincial Examination for January 1999. There is a Rationale Booklet for Exemplar Paper #1, Reading Component, Senior 4 English Language Arts Provincial Examination, January 1999; a Rationale Booklet for Exemplar Paper #2, Reading Component, Senior 4 English Language Arts Provincial Examination, January 1999; and a Senior 4 English Language Arts Provincial Examination Process Writing Exemplars, January 1999.

That is all part of this one package that I am now tabling for the honourable member in triplicate.

* (1450)

The next tabling contains the following information: Summary of Results for the January 1999, Senior 4 Mathematics/Mathématiques 40S/40G Provincial Examinations; the Provincial Examinations, Mathematics 40S January 19, 1999; Mathematics 40S Answer Key & Common Errors, the Provincial Examination for January 19, 1999; Provincial Summary Report, Mathematics 40S, January 19, 1999; Mathematics 40G Provincial Examination, January 19, 1999; Mathematics 40G Provincial Examination Formulas and Tables, 1999; Mathematics 40G Common Errors and Answer Key Provincial Examination, January 19, 1999; the Provincial Summary Report for Mathematics 40G, January 19, 1999, in triplicate.

The next tabling, Mr. Chairman, is the summary comments, Grade 3 Mathematics Standards Test, May 1998; the English Program; Information Bulletin, Grade 3 Mathematics/Mathématiques Standards Test—1998; Grade 3 Mathematics/Mathématiques Standards Test—1998; Administration Manual for Supervising Teachers, May 26 and May 27 of 1998.

Then there are samples of student responses: Provincial Summary Report, Grade 3 Mathematics Standards Test, English Program, May 26

and 27, 1998; the Grade 3 Mathematics Standards Test Answer Key and Scoring Rubrics, May 26 and 27, 1998; the Grade 3 Mathematics Standards Test, May 26 and 27, 1998. Then the same information is printed in the French language. That is the information the honourable member was talking about to which I did not have a chance to respond in full because we needed to gather all this information up. We also ran out of time. Six o'clock came along, and the Chairman does not allow any latitude whatsoever. At six o'clock, everything stops, and now I think we are basically caught up where we are supposed to be.

Ms. Friesen: I thank the minister for tabling all that. I am interested specifically in two or three of the areas, and I wanted to, before we move on in this section, just ask some questions about it. The three sets of material on examinations that the minister has submitted are now public documents since they have been tabled. Does the minister have any way or any objections or any policy whereby these can be put into public libraries?

I suggested this to the Minister of Education a number of years ago. It is a common practice in British Columbia. It is actually the most active part of the library. If you go down to the Vancouver city library, there is a whole section of the library which has back papers, has back answers. They are standard. They are there for all students to see and their parents. It makes transparent, makes public; it creates a public record throughout the province.

It seemed to me a very good idea and one that would be easily done in Manitoba. You could also put the same kind of thing on the Web, but having it physically available in local libraries seems to me quite useful. The minister at the time said that she would look into it, but nothing further happened. So I am making the suggestion again and seeing if the minister could find some way to do that.

* (1500)

Mr. McCrae: We have no concerns about making these documents available to the public, as we have tabled them here. They are obviously already public documents, so that is

not the issue so much as the mechanics of actually stocking libraries. I do not know what all is involved in that. We are indeed looking at doing just that, but I am not able to give the honourable member a cost estimate of doing that.

These documents are available from the Textbook Bureau. They are in all schools now. Libraries, that is something we are pursuing, as I say to the honourable member. Making it available on the website is not as easily done, I am told, because of copyright issues involved there, so we are not making the commitment about the Web. We are saying that we would like to make them available to public libraries. We are in the process of finding out what all is involved in doing that.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, I wonder if the minister could clarify for me what the problem is in copyright terms. If it is available as a tabled document, if it is a public document of the Crown, why is there a copyright issue when it is put on the Web? Secondly, it would seem to me that the simplest way of getting these to public libraries and/or to school libraries is simply, when you send the exam to the school, you send them a couple of extra copies and say: hold these until a week after the exam. Please put them in your public library. Please put them in your school library.

Local schools have that kind of access. It does not seem to me a difficult issue. It has always puzzled me why the previous minister simply was not interested in doing it. It seems to me a cost-effective, public, transparent way of ensuring that people understand the examination process.

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairman, in order for us to use this material, we make agreements that only so much of this material is the subject of those agreements. That implies that there is a copyright commitment there that ought not to be breached. So I think that covers the question with respect to the Web, unless we wanted to renegotiate. We would have to find out what that would cost, and if we wanted to renegotiate those things in order to put it on the Web, then the copyright holders would have to be consulted, and it would have to be the subject of an agreement.

With respect to schools, yes, the honourable member is right about that, that it is a simple enough thing for schools to make this material available to local public libraries. I am just simply wondering what we need to do in order to go ahead with what the honourable member is suggesting. I do not know the nature of the discussion with the previous minister, so I cannot really comment on what the honourable member has said about that, but this is public information paid for with public money, and I tend to agree with the honourable member.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, I can understand that there may be some difficulties with the copyright agreements in the English language exam, but where would the copyright problems be in the Grade 3 math or the Senior 1 math or any of the mathematics exams? Are they not entirely composed and produced within Manitoba by the Manitoba Department of Education and its advisory committee?

Mr. McCrae: Yes, anything of this material that we are able to make available and put up on the Net, I am committing that we will do that, too. It is just I am holding back just a little bit because I am not aware of all of the implications. I cannot just make commitments without understanding what it is I am committing to, but to the extent that we can make public information available to the public that is the result of the public's money, that it would be my intention to move in the direction of placing it for public view on the Net.

Ms. Friesen: With reference to the English language contracts that are made for copyright, is there an estimate, an average price that the department pays each year for that? There are different choices each year. Is there a budget for that, and how much does the government pay?

Mr. McCrae: I think at this point with this question it would be best for me to take it under advisement and ask the department to undertake a review of the questions that are being raised here with a view to compliance with what is being asked for here. I think that it is not so much the money. It might be some amounts of money but not such large amounts that it would really be a big problem when contrasted with the requirement, in my view, to be open with public

information on the one hand and to be helpful to people on the other hand.

So I think it may be that this might be the subject of a letter the honourable member might want to write to me somewhat later on in the year to find out how we are doing with this as a commitment that I am making.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, I will certainly remember to do that in a general sense, but I did ask a specific question of how much money is paid on average, and I understand you may not have the information here—how much money is paid for the agreement with various authors for poems, pieces of literature, for the English language arts exam? The reason I am asking it obviously is, is there a difference between how much you pay for the limited rights that you believe that you have now and the broader rights that would enable it to become part of a public package? I mean, are we looking at a great deal of money? Is it only a small amount? So that is the reason I am asking it.

Mr. McCrae: We do not know if a blanket approval would be a lot more costly or whether it would even be a possibility. The honourable member is simply going to have to allow us a little time to get back to her with this response.

With respect to the cost per test, that is something we can table for the honourable member, and I undertake to do so.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, I wanted to ask a couple of things about material the minister has just tabled, and it is for clarification. The minister tabled something on Manitoba's Aboriginal Head Start Programs, and one of the questions I had asked about this in the beginning was the funding of these, because something the minister had said implied that there was provincial funding in it. There is nothing in what the minister has tabled which indicates any kind of funding at all, although it does say that the program consultant is with Health Canada.

So I repeat my question: Is there any Manitoba provincial funding in Manitoba's Aboriginal Head Start Programs, or is it all federal funding?

* (1510)

Mr. McCrae: Since these are federally funded programs, we do not recall the honourable member asking about the funding part of it. But it is our understanding that these are all federal.

Ms. Friesen: I just wanted to clarify that. The other piece that the minister tabled on Manitoba Schools With Aboriginal Language Instruction, the minister has provided a list of schools which have some aboriginal language instruction. But what I had asked for was how many students were actually taking language instruction. This was one of the three or four major thrusts of the Native Affairs Directorate. My questions were directed at how many students were being affected by this, and it is not possible to tell from the list that the minister has offered here.

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairman, in order to complete the undertaking that we made for the honourable member, the specific information she is talking about is still being worked on, and it is still to be made available to the honourable member.

Ms. Friesen: I notice at the end that no information has been available for this preparation from the Manitoba Association for Native Languages, and I wondered why that was the case. Is there not a grant from the department to the Manitoba Association for Native Languages and is there a reporting mechanism within that grant, or is it in another department?

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairman, I do not think we grant to the Manitoba Association for Native Languages. In any event, even if we did, not all agencies which are the recipients of grant monies from the government are required to provide activity reports—not all. Some are, depending on the nature of the arrangement.

Ms. Friesen: So there is no grant to the Manitoba Association for Native Languages from the Department of Education.

Mr. McCrae: We will check, we are going to check that out, but we do not think there is a grant going to the Association for Native Languages.

Ms. Friesen: I wanted to raise some issues about the English language exams that I believe have been raised with the minister by letter. It is quite a long letter. It was addressed to the previous minister and it—no, sorry, that is an enclosed letter with it. It is addressed to this minister, and it is signed by Deborah Schnitzer of the English language and literature discussion group, which includes members of the Department of English at the University of Winnipeg as well as some teachers, and it attaches the Manitoba Association of Teachers of English letter to a previous minister. This document raises a number of issues, and I wondered if the minister had yet responded to it and whether he had the opportunity to look at some of the specific issues that are enclosed here.

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairman, we have not to this point responded to that letter. We are analyzing the contents of the letter in preparation to make an appropriate response.

Ms. Friesen: It seemed to me that one of the important issues that was raised by this study or sharing of assumptions and ideas amongst English teachers is that the provincial examination for Senior 4 English does not emphasize the study of literature, primarily poetry, fiction, drama, et cetera. It certainly requires analysis of that, but it is not curriculum based, and it does not enable students across the province to have the common basis of certain authors, historic and contemporary, that they have had in the past, not necessarily in the recent past but certainly at other times. I wondered what the minister's response was to that.

* (1520)

What you are testing is a standard of writing and a standard of comprehension, written not oral. There is not the particular sense that students have to have a body, a core of work of particular authors in the English language. I am not necessarily speaking of Shakespeare but of the many authors who are being dealt with throughout the Commonwealth, many different kinds of English writing that are increasingly being considered important, and that our students are not necessarily—some may, some may not, but the test is not directing teacher's

attention towards that particular changing nature of English and English studies, something which I think would have great benefit, particularly in multicultural classrooms.

Has the minister looked at that? It is obviously a basic issue of dealing with a standards test rather than a curriculum-based test.

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairman, the English language arts curriculum does not now require schools to study a common body of literature. We want to respect the diversity represented within our schools and therefore use a resource-based learning approach allowing schools to select literature from an approved list suitable for their students. The test is and will be curriculum congruent.

Ms. Friesen: One of the arguments that I found in this particular paper to be most telling is this one, and I want to read it into the record: the study of literature is important for all students whatever their goals are after high school. Literature is a highly valued asset in Manitoba, a crucial element in a culturally rich standard of living that Manitobans cherish. Literature is not only one of the most rewarding expressions of culture; it is also one of the most accessible to those who may be financially disadvantaged. If we de-emphasize or undervalue literary study in our schools, either in the curriculum or in our evaluative practices, we are, in effect, denying students this privilege. It goes on to talk about the study of literature, nourishing cultural awareness, et cetera.

New Directions has made a different choice. I would reject the minister's argument that the study of a body of literature chosen from many sources is one that is necessarily restrictive. I do not think other provinces find that, and I wonder why Manitoba has made what seems to me a relatively narrow approach to the testing of cultural understanding, literary understanding, as well as, the basic skill understanding which is what the tests at the moment are dealing with.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Is the minister prepared to consider a wider approach, a broader approach, to the English

language exams that might include not just examination of particular writing and comprehension skills but would also enable students to deal in their studies, particularly in the Grades 11 and 12 era, when they have a very different cognitive level and are able to debate and to discuss literature across the curriculum and on the basis of their own experience?

Mr. McCrae: Well, I guess without being too cute, I would have to say that I agree with everything the honourable member said except for those things where we disagree. I mean, she makes a lot of points that really make good common sense, and I do not argue with that. However, one of the areas maybe where we disagree is this point she has made about the narrow approach being taken in the tests. It can be argued and is argued that the test is not narrow, as suggested by the honourable member. It includes a variety of works, poems, short stories, articles, letters.

I do not think that what the honourable member said about the test versus her point of view, I do not think those things really do, I do not think they are exclusive one from the other. I do not think New Directions has made a different choice, as the honourable member suggests. There is no doubt in my mind that literature is an extremely important, extremely enjoyable and enriching part of our experience. It certainly forms part of our culture. I do not care how technological we get, there is always going to be lots of room for literature.

The choice in the classroom is left to the teacher. English teachers are people who have education and experience, and one of those things they also have as a result of all that is some judgment. There is no prescribed list that all teachers have to use, and the study of literature is certainly not devalued in any way in the curriculum which is part of New Directions. I think that it is in that area where I disagree. When it comes to the value of literature as part of our learning experience, you cannot place a dollar value on it. But when it comes to the enrichment of the human experience, I do not know, how do you measure that? I do not think it matters. If you think it is important, which I do, then I guess you have your own personal ways of measuring things.

In my personal experience, literature formed an important part of my education experience, and it has been important to me ever since, off and on over the years, mostly on. I have enjoyed the ability to learn from and to enjoy as a pastime literature of various types. It is a required element of the English language arts curriculum. Requiring specific literary texts is not a required element of the curriculum, however. Manitoba's approach to resource-based learning aligns with the approach used within the western provinces and territories. Respecting the diversity of our peoples is central to our approach, and literature would be essential to building that kind of respect for the diversity of our nation and the people in it. We want to facilitate schools in selecting from a range of literature approved so students can study aboriginal literature, the literature of western Canada, Canadian literature, Shakespeare, et cetera. This approach predates New Directions going back to the early '80s.

So I hope that responds to what the honourable member has said. As she spoke, I could not help but think that is just what I believe in, what people I work with believe, but conclusions are sometimes different, the conclusion that we arrive at, but that is not unusual either. I think people are like that. They can look at the same thing and come to a different conclusion.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, I think the issue that concerns the people who have prepared this for the minister—and I am sure he will recognize it when he comes to prepare his final reply—is not that literature is not there in the curriculum. Of course, it is, but the issue is that it is not being tested in the instrument that the government has devised for testing and that the test inevitably may be undesirable but inevitably it is going to focus the attentions of both teachers and students perhaps to the detriment of the other part of the curriculum. That is the general point I think that this particular group is making. It may be that we will simply have to agree to disagree on that.

I had a couple of quite specific issues that the people raised in this letter, and I do not know whether the minister wants to take them one by one. They are questions of fact I think. Let me

start with the first ones. On page 6, they say that students have realized for example that they can avoid the provincial exam by taking summer school. Is that the case? What gives rise to that assertion? Maybe I will list the others so the minister's staff could look at them.

* (1530)

Still on page 6, Manitoba Education and Training has not published any official information about key exam elements. For example, there is no definition of what constitutes an acceptable editorial or persuasive essay. They have yet to publish as well—and this is written only I think a month ago—a list of the range of forms on which students might be expected to be evaluated. So that is No. 2. Number three, Manitoba Education and Training has never provided teachers with a list of the literary terms a student should be responsible for. They make some points generally about how there can certainly be disputes and different interpretations of literary terminology which students are responsible for in the exam. This is my numbering, by the way, it is not the numbering within the paper. I am pulling out some very specific elements, and it seemed to me that there must be specific answers on.

Finally, they talk about nowhere on the exam paper are students told the level of the question but that they are being marked on a Level I response, at a Level II response, and yet nowhere on the exam paper are students told the level of the question, and they give an example. For example, on the January '99 exam, two questions ostensibly at Level II were considered to be fully and completely answered by direct quotation or straightforward identifications, i.e., Level I answers. They argue that this kind of inconsistency poses problems for students, teachers and evaluators. Those seemed to me very specific issues. Does the minister or the minister's staff here have responses to that?

Mr. McCrae: Normally summer school is for students who have failed their courses and need to attend summer school in order to get a pass.

Ms. Friesen: The minister's word "normally" may be right, but in fact I am pretty sure that there are students who take summer school

because "they have not been able to fit X or Y course into their program," or some students who want to get ahead on the next year, or some students in some of the schools I know who have part-time jobs and who are trying essentially to get the Grades 11 and 12 by combining regular school plus summer school. The minister might be right normally, but I do think there are, in many areas of the province, occasions where that is not the normal situation. So could the minister tell me whether those students are in fact avoiding the provincial exam by taking summer school?

Mr. McCrae: Just on the summer school question, I guess you can go through your year, and if you do not make it in a particular course or you need summer school, as the honourable member pointed out, to make up a course, I guess summer school has always been there for those types of purposes. I guess the question that is bothering me a little bit is, I am trying to figure out where the honourable member is taking me with this discussion. Is it that she wants to have more tests? Because I understood that she did not like the tests in the first place.

An Honourable Member: You see, you have made that assumption.

Mr. McCrae: Well, no, I am asking, because I did not make that assumption. I am—

An Honourable Member: You have made that assumption all the way through.

Mr. McCrae: I am curious here.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. The minister was attempting to answer a question, I believe, and I would ask the minister to continue with his response.

Mr. McCrae: Thanks. I do not really think the member did anything that bad, actually, Mr. Chairman, but thanks for keeping us on the straight and narrow anyway.

No, I think that with the honourable member's position being not terribly favourable of the provincial exams, she is hardly going to be suggesting that we have them for summer school as well. She can correct me if I am wrong about that.

We think that only a handful of students actually do this on purpose in order to avoid all the trauma or whatever that we have been hearing about.

* (1540)

We just want to be assured that summer school is not being used in some way that is inappropriate or that is not supported by our wish to achieve equality in a firm way of giving students credit for courses completed. There might be a handful of students that are doing this, but I do not think it should be viewed as a major issue or a major problem. That is as much as I can say about that.

It does not seem very productive to be going and deliberately getting yourself into summer school, having gone through the course of study all winter, simply to avoid an exam. Those people, it may be that they have other problems too. They might be good candidates to be exempted from the exams in the first place, because students can be exempted under certain circumstances.

There was something I should have said also in response. The provincial test accounts for 30 percent of the mark at the Senior 4 level. That means that 70 percent of the student's final standing is determined at the local level. That is where, if the honourable member has concern about literary issues, that can be addressed, if it is felt that the provincial aspect of it does not do a good enough job. It was never put forward to be everything. I think that some people are under that impression, that the provincial exam is everything when really it is not. We do not want to say that it is not a significant part of the requirements to get through school, but I think that when 70 percent of your final mark is determined at home then maybe that is where the latitude, the flexibility is there for issues like the kind the honourable member is raising.

Now, you have to remember too, the honourable member is an educator and is conversant with these things, but I will bet you if she had this debate—and my predecessor was a teacher, and I think one or two of her predecessors were teachers as well, and maybe they are like farmers, I do not know. I am told

by some of my farm friends that if you have two farmers you might get three opinions. Well, I do not know if that is true in the teaching profession. I do not even know if it is true in the farming one, but the point I make is that the kinds of things the honourable member is bringing forward may be as she sees it or some of the people that maybe she consults with, that some of them feel that way. There are other opinions, too, and I think the Education department does its best to reflect what is felt to be a good consensus of highly skilled and educated people, and I do not think they have missed the mark.

The honourable member may have reason to argue that point, and she can do that. But I am really not in a very good position to engage in a debate about what percentage should be literary and what percentage should be some other aspect of English language arts education in a given year, so that is why I need a little help from time to time from the people with whom I consult, and it is a good debate to have. I just do not know if I am the one to have it with.

I think the debate has been had in developing the language arts examination. The debate has been had in developing the other tests that are put in front of our children, and the debate is carried on amongst people who are very, very knowledgeable on what is the appropriate thing to be doing. No doubt it is going to be a debate on an annual basis in respect to what kinds of questions ought to be asked in these examinations.

Anyway at Senior 4, the tests count for 30 percent, and the test does not even pretend to examine the students on all aspects of English language arts. We have always said that we want to test for—we want to know about process skills in reading and writing with our students. We want to know, I guess to put it simply: when they come out of Grade 12, can they read and can they write? There was evidence that some students in Manitoba maybe were able to read and write at that level but not at a very high level, not at the level that one might reasonably expect of a high school graduate.

So I would think that our tests should be trying to find out those kinds of basics. Then,

with respect to the other 70 percent, that is where the latitude should come in, and the issues raised by the honourable member might well come under that 70 percent. To the extent that they need to be in the 30 percent, I guess then we need to have a debate around this table, but that is why I am fortunate to have people from the department who are a little more knowledgeable in respect to these matters.

I have a lot of respect for anybody who is an educator because these are important things that we are doing in relation to young people in Manitoba, so they are good discussions to have. But we think it is the provincial department's business to know how the students are doing at these levels in respect to process skills in reading and writing. Beyond that, we need to leave to local school divisions the right to test or to instruct with respect to 70 percent of the effort here that should be done locally. We believe that testing is very important, and our exams and their percentage value support that. Here again it was once proposed that there should be more than 30 percent, and I think the debate went the way it did in recognition that there is a need for there to be flexibility in what we put before the students.

We have produced a support document related to the existing curriculum that provides a range of student writing samples, and it is marked by Manitoba teachers and rated high, medium and low and with rationale for the ratings. I hope that gives the honourable member a little bit of an idea of how I view this, and I do it after some considerable discussion with educators, including the honourable member.

Before I complete my answer about the levels, the question levels about which the honourable member asked, I should go back to the Manitoba Association for Native Languages and correct something I said to the honourable member. This part of the department, the K to 12 part, does not grant money to that agency, but the other part does, the Training side.

We have checked, and the Manitoba Association for Native Languages does indeed not receive a grant from the Education part of the department, but it does receive \$73,000 from the Training side, Continuing Education, to

assist the agency to organize the delivery of aboriginal language instruction in Winnipeg and other communities. For example, it advises and assists Winnipeg No. 1 Division, the University of Manitoba, Red River College, and continuously updates and compiles standard reference work such as dictionaries, grammar, provides translation services and acts as a clearing house.

So I did not mean to mislead the honourable member. Certainly, this part of the department does not grant money to the agency, but the other part of the department does.

* (1550)

With respect to these questions, the question the honourable member was asking, saying that students are not told what level their response is supposed to be at, as I understand it, a Level III question is a really hard one. It is harder than a Level I question. It is an evaluative type of question for which a simple answer simply would not do, and, by contrast, a Level I answer calls for a more simple, perhaps short type of response.

Why are students not told what level that question is? I guess what I would think is that you read the question; that is the one thing the teachers taught me, is read the question. Do not get so interested in what level it is. If you read the question and the context in which the question is asked, if you have done your homework and you have done your studying, you will be able to answer that question.

The questions, by the way, are pilot tested with students. This is what I am advised, that if you simply answer the question, then you should not be so concerned about whether it is a Level I, Level II or Level III. If it is a hard question, maybe you can assume a number of things. You can assume that you did not study that part, your teacher did not teach it to you, or you missed school that day, or that it is really a hard one and you better spend some time and do some really good thinking. That is my rather simplistic way of looking at things. But it is not felt that it is necessary to state up front that, watch out, this is a Level III question, for the reasons that I have given. All questions are pilot tested in advance

of the administration of the test, and any questions that do not pass muster in the pilot testing stage are not used in the exam.

A little bit more on this point, why do we not define in terms like modes of response or editorial in the exam, and I am advised that the answer here is fairly straightforward. These are terms used in the curricula. It is expected the meaning and the use of the terms would have been taught, and students are, by the way, permitted to us a dictionary or a thesaurus during the writing portion of the exam. I hope that addresses some of the concerns the member was raising.

Ms. Friesen: It deals with most of them, although I have difficulty with the answer the minister gave on the Level I, II, and III. Certainly that is the answer you have given. The one other part was the people writing this said that the Manitoba Education and Training has not published any information about key exam elements, for example. There is no definition what constitutes an acceptable editorial or persuasive essay. Is that the case? Have there not been examples given? Are there not examples provided in the department's response to the teachers and hence presumably to the students the following year?

What I am reading from represents a joint committee including post-secondary students, University of Winnipeg, English Faculty, Manitoba high school teachers, administrators, adult educators and program developers. They began meeting in December 1997, which I think would be after the department decided to move back from the 50 percent allocation of marks for this exam to the 30 percent, so that the minister's answer on local versus central allocation of marks would have been part of the discussion. The minister's answers may not be the ones that apply at this point, but I am simply putting the issues that they have presented. The most general one was the issue of literature versus the skills and the argument that the exam itself may, in fact, be not by design necessarily but may be narrowing the range of things that are being taught. Then the specific questions, of course, dealing with summer school and what information is provided about the nature of the exam.

Just to conclude, does the minister have anything on what kinds of definitions and what examples are offered to teachers and students of what constitutes acceptable editorial or persuasive essays?

* (1600)

Mr. McCrae: I think it is important to note that when I did all those tablings a little while ago, I tabled a lot more than what I think we talked about. We talked about tabling the tests. I tabled a whole lot of other information, and I did that because I wanted the honourable member to know that a lot of things happen besides putting a test in front of some students and thereby challenging that student and challenging the teacher and all of those negative things that we have been hearing about the whole issue of testing in our schools. Much of the material that I have turned over to the honourable member should help me to answer the questions that she is raising right now. For example, about the examples. There are examples in that material that can be relied on.

With respect to many of the questions the honourable member asked, the answer to those questions is in the curriculum itself. Then there is all the support documents and support resources that are made available to teachers, so that they can teach that curriculum. Examples of student work with scores awarded are also made available to teachers. So I think the key here in this whole discussion is that even though I think we acknowledge in one area or another, there were things we can approve on as we moved into New Directions. We did those things. We did it because it needed to be done and because we wanted teachers to know that we understood what it was that they were going through. It must have been quite a change for teachers operating under the old system to be asked to review and learn about all these new curricula and to look at all the supporting documents. I do not know if everybody did look at all the supporting documents, but I think if they were reviewed, much of the answers to the questions being raised by the honourable member would be answered by doing that.

Definitions are part of the expected goals and objectives of the Senior 4 curriculum. A

Senior 4 student upon completion of a Senior 4 credit is expected to know, understand and be able to apply these terms. As I say, we have produced the support document as I referenced earlier. Our exam packages themselves contain previous tests with examples of tests marked and scored.

I get a sense that there is the information that is needed to address in an effective way the whole scenario of New Directions. The information is there. I have heard criticism from some that in some cases we got the supporting information to teachers a little later than they might have liked in order to prepare themselves. Now, maybe that is valid. This is something that I have raised with the department. I think the department had a lot of things to do too, and they were trying to get their work out in a quality way, but I think that that is behind us. I think we are giving the teachers the time they need to adjust to new curricula coming on in the future.

That is an important thing that has been raised. I think we have tried to be responsive to that as a genuine concern. So I suggest, maybe the information I provided to the honourable member, she may have seen much of it already through some other sources. That is quite all right. But I think if it is your job to teach a curriculum and that information is there, a lot of the teachers, probably the majority, will have very diligently been going through all that information. If there is somebody who should be offering some advice about how best to go about getting through all the information—I saw a photograph in one place where the information was taller than the teacher when you added up all the different curricula. So which document do you go to first? That sort of information would, I am sure, be helpful and may well be there and available for the field.

There is a lot of excitement about the curriculum. It is generally felt to be excellent. That is the word that is used most often. I do not hear "very good" or "good." I hear the word "excellent," and there is a fair amount of excitement. As Manitoba's teachers get a little more accustomed to New Directions, I am finding that there is more enthusiasm for New Directions as we move forward, because I think everyone agrees with the basic fundamentals of

what we are trying to do. There are exceptions to that of course but, generally speaking, the real people out there in the real world are beginning to embrace New Directions with a little more enthusiasm than I think we experienced at the first.

In this regard, I have to hand it to my predecessor for having the strength to get us through that particular period in the development of New Directions because, in a lot of ways, I feel that I am the beneficiary of some good work that was done before I got here. It was not easy. There were criticisms. I know that I get criticisms too, so my predecessor would not be necessarily surprised about that. I know that any time you try to break some ground or new ground or make an improvement, that means somebody is going to take it that, you know, I have been doing something wrong because you want to change it or you want to make it different. Maybe that is just human, but it certainly never was intended by anybody, my predecessor, myself, the government I represent or anybody in the department, to make some negative comment about members of the teaching profession. That was never the intention whatsoever.

I am sure the teachers, the ones I know, taught me to strive to make things better all the time. That is what progress is all about. We were talking about English language arts a little while ago. My favourite person, one of my favourite, I had a lot of favourite teachers, but one of my favourite ones was an English teacher. I just disagreed with him so profoundly about one or two matters and yet that teacher did so much for me. I just disagreed with his view. I thought English was like my view of mathematics. I thought like mathematics, they tell me there are questions and there are answers. I used to think there were questions and impressions in math, and I had it brought to my attention that, no, that might work in language arts, but it does not work that way in math.

I took my impressions to language arts, and they were not always the same as the way the teacher interpreted them. We had some very good friendly arguments about that. I grew and learned in the process, but I still think I was right on one or two things, even after all these years,

but it is not important enough to go back and refight those fights. I just think though, that if all the teachers were 100 percent aware of all of the assists that are available to them in the implementation of these curricula and if they had made use of all of it, there is no doubt they would be busy people. I have no doubt about that. But they would be very comfortable with what is trying to be accomplished. They would be very comfortable, I think, and fulfilled in the conduct of their work because, as I understand, what I have been learning, the curriculum and the accompanying resources work well together if they are used as designed. Again, I think that it can be a very fulfilling experience, but I am not going to deny that it is going to have teachers very busy in order to implement these curricula effectively.

We believe anyone who has seen or taken the time to find out what we make available to our teachers will realize the quality of the tests and the ways that we enable students and their teachers to succeed. We do not just throw them to the wolves. I think we have been accused of that, and I do not think it is fair criticism. I think that, again, it is always so confusing. Are there interests other than the best interests of the children here? Am I naive for asking that question? But that is what strikes me sometimes is that there might be some interests other than the interest simply of doing the best thing for our students. So maybe I am deliberately a little bit naive sometimes, but on that score, I got a sense that there are other forces at work here besides just a genuine altruistic wish to do the right thing for the kids. It is really hard to pin that on anybody because somebody who has an axe to grind with the government can find some way to do it without being seen as having the wrong intentions.

* (1610)

In any event, coupled with the realization that we do not pretend that our tests are a complete picture on assessment, by no means, and we have tried to make that point over and over, that the tests are not the be-all and the end-all. I am moved to observe that teachers administer tests on a fairly regular basis, some of them. I remember some teachers who do administer tests much more often than others. It

is a style or a way of going about the business of finding out whether the lessons are getting through to the students. Teachers make tests of their own performances, their projects, portfolios. In the event, we are not the only show in town, is the point I am trying to make. The provincial Department of Education and Training, in my view, is a very important part of the show, but we are not the only show in town. I do not want anyone to assume that these tests are the complete picture, that there are a number of pillars in New Directions. You have got to remember, we want to see parental involvement, we want to see good-quality curricula, and we want to see tests that show whether or not those curricula are quality, and whether they are getting through.

Local assessment and local ways of knowing about how and what our children have learned are very important, and we have heard that, that teachers will tell you, we know the kids very well, but I think in order to have a consistency, in order to generally raise the overall level of the quality of the education our kids are getting, you need to have some kind of consistency. I guess there are analogies. Analogies are always dangerous, but there are analogies in other professions, and best practices show up in other professions, so the next thing you know, all of the professionals in that particular field are using those best practices. Well, is this not a way for us to bring about the best practices that we can, the best curricula, and the best way of getting them across? Never is it going to be a substitute for the genuine chemistry that happens between a given educator and a given child. I do not know if that will ever change. I hope it never does, because that is really, really important in the educational experience, too, but it is not the whole story, is it? There is another teacher who may or may not agree with me on this, but there he goes. [interjection] That particular teacher agrees.

In any event, I guess what I am not doing a very good job of, but it is to say that there is a lot of support out there that before coming into the department I did not know all that support existed, and now I am learning about it and I am very pleased about it. I hope that the members of the teaching profession are aware of the supports that are available, and make use of

those supports as and where appropriate. I do not mean to imply that it is 100 percent perfect, but it is good, and the teachers I have spoken with tell me it is good. There were a few of them said, you know, there was quite a lot in a relatively short period of time, and I am sensitive to that. I can understand that. I get a lot of work sometimes and I simply feel like I am overwhelmed, and it is a little bit of a helpless feeling, especially if you are a professional. No professional wants to feel helpless, and I understand that. So I think that we have tried to make some appropriate responses to concerns like that, and we will keep listening in the process of the ongoing implementation of curricula in Manitoba.

Ms. Friesen: So the answer was that the writers of this document should look at the process writing exemplars, that would be the parts of the material tabled the minister would be referring to.

Could I ask the minister another point that arises from the letter, and that is: what post-secondary representation is there on the test advisory committees? I am including both college and university.

Mr. McCrae: I am asking for the department to provide me with a profile of a given committee membership to give the honourable member a sense of it. I am just getting that compiled now.

Mr. Chairman, because we believe that it is important to have these tests designed by people who have a good understanding of the curriculum, post-secondary representation on that aspect we do not feel is necessary or appropriate. We do want, however, to have post-secondary representation on our steering committees; for example, the English Language Arts Steering Committee, which makes curriculum and assessment recommendations. That is the right place for somebody representing the post-secondary sector.

The Interorganizational Curriculum Advisory Committee, which deals with broader questions of curriculum and assessment, that, too, is the place where there ought to be representation from the post-secondary sector, and there is on that particular committee.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, can the minister tell me who is the post-secondary representation? Well, maybe we should just look at the whole committee rather than singling anybody out. Does the minister have a list of these advisory committees in curriculum for both language arts and mathematics?

* (1620)

Mr. McCrae: We will table specific lists of the two committees that I have named tomorrow.

Mr. Chairperson: Item 16.2.(c) Assessment and Evaluation \$5,149,700-pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$5,214,700-pass.

16.2.(d) Program Development (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$3,164,200.

Ms. Friesen: I notice that there is an increase of three personnel here in the Professional/Technical, and I wonder if the minister could tell me—sorry, four, I think. It goes from 30 staff years to 34. Could the minister tell me how those people are to be employed? Have they been hired yet? Are they transferred from another section of the department?

I understand the minister is going to get a response to the staffing question, and we had agreed at the end of last time that we would look at an earlier question I had raised about Desktop Services. What I had asked for was an update from last year's questions when there were many new appropriations and Estimates in this area. What I was interested in, as I had mentioned last time, is an update on what has happened and how the costing of this new contract has been allocated throughout the department.

Mr. McCrae: Just before we move on to the desktop issues, the honourable member asked about Salaries and Employee Benefits, no? [interjection] Yes, four new staff. Here is what they are doing.

These four staff people, who are new, relate to a new project called Curriculum Information Technology Integration. We want to integrate technology into everything as much as we can. These staff are responsible for infusing our new curricula, beginning with K to 8 English lan-

guage arts, math and science, with information technology. That will be an interesting project. I do not know where all of these people get all their skills, but we sure have a lot of skilled people. As the member pointed out earlier today, we do not have enough, but we have a lot more skilled people than I even knew existed. That is the answer to that question.

Ms. Friesen: To follow up on that, I notice that it is listed on page 57 and in the anticipated developments. Is the minister saying that all four are to be devoted to that project in the K to 8 area? Could he give me some sense of whether this is a continuing project? Is it something that is time specific, will be completed in two years? Is it preparing software or is it preparing instructions to teachers on how to integrate curriculum?

Mr. McCrae: If I could answer that in just a little more detail which will break it out a little bit more for the honourable member, this is the Curriculum Information Technology Integration Project.

The Curriculum Information Technology Integration Project, formerly Curriculum Multimedia Integration Project, was initiated to support teachers in their selection and integration of information technology in core curricula as outlined in Technology as a Foundation Skill Area—A Journey Toward Information Technology Literacy, 1998, and to ultimately integrate technology as one of the four foundation skill areas into Manitoba curricula.

Integration of information technology with curriculum provides Manitoba teachers with strategies that help educators achieve the information technology outcomes found on the information technology literacy continuum contained within Toward Information Technology as a foundation skill.

The goals of the Curriculum Information Technology Integration Project are: first, to provide an electronic resource that assists teachers in integrating information technology outcomes with core curricular outcomes in Manitoba curricula and in tracking and reporting integrated outcomes across all grades and

subject areas; second, to develop and deliver a professional development implementation process supporting teachers in their integration of information technology; and third, to develop student information technology literacy competencies through their use, management and understanding of information technologies.

Presently, members of the Curriculum Information Technology Integration Project development teams are designing and developing suggestions for instruction and assessment which integrate information technology outcomes found in the information technology literacy continuum with identified core curriculum outcomes in Kindergarten to Grade 4 for English language arts, mathematics and science curricula. These activities will become part of a Curriculum Information Technology Integration Project on-line electronic resource.

I am going to say C/MI, which is short for Curriculum/Multimedia Integration Project. As C/MI, Senior 2 Science 20S, Senior 3 Physics 30S, Senior 3 Chemistry 30S, Senior 4 Chemistry 40S, Senior 3 Biology 30S, Senior 4 Biology 40S, and Senior 4 Physics 40S transitional curriculum documents have been integrated with information technology. This integration involved the identification and field testing of information technology resources and Internet links that were then included in the suggested learning resources. Suggestions for instruction and assessment describe how these learning resources can be used. The Curriculum Information Technology Integration Project will be an ongoing project. We will need to keep the curriculum currently being infused with technology, that is K to 8 science, English language arts, math, currently, and over time, and will need to infuse additional curricula with technology, that is S1 to S4 English language arts, maths and science and Kindergarten to S4 social studies.

* (1630)

So all of that is to describe what it is that this project is about. I do not know how you could ever say it is not going to be ongoing. I think it is going to be ongoing to keep that as an essential part of our learning, to infuse everything we do as much as appropriate with a

technological integration, because that is the way the world is these days.

Ms. Friesen: So, essentially, it is providing the resources, assessing the resources, enabling teachers to find new ways of assessing the use of these resources, but it is not actually the production by the department of a new package, a new piece of software itself that could be distributed elsewhere.

Mr. McCrae: We will produce support tools for teachers in two electronic formats out of this project: on-line support and CD-ROM support in K to 8 English language arts, K to 8 math and K to 8 science. These electronic support tools will provide additional help to teachers with ideas related to the outcomes in these curricula in terms of suggestions for instruction, suggestions for assessment, suggested learning resources like software, for example, on-line support. I mean, can you just imagine what is available to us and imagine how did we manage before we had that in terms of on-line support? It is something that can be changed, added to on an ongoing basis. I think CD-ROM support is also important, but on-line support seems to me to be the most living kind of support that we can make available.

Ms. Friesen: I know that the member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) wants to ask some questions and that is fine, but we had earlier agreed that we would look at the Desktop Services first, and I know that the staffperson has been here for a while. So maybe we could do that and then move to the member for Inkster. [interjection] Well, I keep repeating it, so it is actually taking root.

The issue is—and I am asking for an update as we agreed to at the end of last session yesterday—on the Desktop Services initiative of the government which has required particular outlay on the part of each department and the allocation of those new outlays to different sections of the department. We spent some time on it last year, and I was looking for an overall update. I notice the actual section we are on now increases from \$87,500 to \$194,000 which is interesting, but I raised the question the first time that it came up in the Estimates but was looking for an overall presentation. So simply

an update on what has happened and where has the money been allocated or how has it been?

Mr. McCrae: In November of 1997, the government awarded a five-and-a-half-year contract to EDS Systemhouse for the provision of desktop management services. The Department of Education and Training was transitioned into this new outsourced environment over fiscal year 1998-99. Here are some facts and figures for the honourable member, and I am going to make a tabling in a few minutes, as well.

* (1640)

One thousand and fifty work stations were transitioned over an 11-month period, a huge undertaking. In Winnipeg, there were 865 and in the rest of Manitoba there were 185. A total of 2,250 devices were transitioned. These were devices like work stations, printers, monitors, et cetera. Forty-five offices were transitioned, 19 in Winnipeg and 26 in the rest of Manitoba. All departmental employees have access to a work station including a standard office suite, word processing, spreadsheet, et cetera, e-mail and Internet access. Each departmental employee was provided with an opportunity for four days of training in the new environment. The 1999-2000 estimate for the operation of this initiative is \$2,798,800 including provision for new staff years. Annual amortization costs on a four-year basis for the new equipment and infrastructure upgrades is \$1,537,500. That is some background information for the honourable member.

Now this is a breakdown of what I have just said on a program-by-program basis. I am not going to go through each of these documents. I am going to leave it for the honourable member to do that. This is annual charges by device type, and it talks about the different types of the PCs, the laptops, the monitors, the printers and other equipment, and then there are annual charges by the type of service. The types of services would be Internet services, additional support, e-mail, PDN, telecommunications—that is the other part of what I am tabling here. Then we are going to do desktop unit counts, and that gives you, for example, the Native Education Directorate. It is mixed in with subappropriation 16.1(c) and there are seven seats there and five of them have PCs, one laptop, four monitors, one

printer, for a total number of units of 11 in the Native Education Directorate. You go down the list and it will tell you all about it.

Then the last page of this tabling gives you a list of all office locations in the province of Manitoba at which all of these programs are located. So I am sure it is of assistance to the honourable member; she probably does not have any other questions now with that particular tabling.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, yes, it certainly will take me a while to absorb it. What I am interested in is the principles by which the department has allocated the costs in this area. Is it then on the basis of personnel? You talk about a certain number of desktops within the department and money for training and money for services. When we look, for example, at this line that we are on, School Programs, and it says \$194,000, perhaps you could give me an example of how that number has been arrived at and maybe assure me that that is the same principle that is used elsewhere in the department.

Mr. McCrae: The reason for the difference there, as the honourable member has not heard, is that we were dealing with half the fiscal year, and this year we have to deal with the whole year.

Ms. Friesen: And I am assuming that that also takes account of the increase in the number of staff in this area as well. Okay. The department, before this new contract, had, I think, a plan to renew equipment every four years. I think there was a four-year rotation or maybe it was a three-year rotation. I do not remember. Can the minister tell me in the new contract how that rotation is dealt with? Is there a formal plan for rotation and updating of equipment or is it something that is going to be done on an ad hoc basis. I do not mean that in a derogatory sense. I mean it in the sense of as new things become available.

Mr. McCrae: Whenever it is required to undertake a full desktop renewal, every four years, as pointed out, it is amortized over time. So everybody gets it all at once. It is not a question of assigning a certain priority treatment

to one program or branch. Everybody is to get the same treatment and all at once. Now, that is not physically possible, but within a reasonable period of time, to make the desktop adjustments, by the time that the four years has elapsed you have paid for it, because it is amortized over that period of time. So basically you are ready to enter into a new four-year contract for equipment and services that are equal throughout the whole government. So it is not a question that anybody is getting a higher priority. They are all getting the same priority.

Ms. Friesen: Just to clarify, when the minister says amortize, does he mean then that the department or the government owns the desktop computers, the actual hardware? Is that owned by the government at that point, at the end of four years?

Mr. McCrae: We do own them. We just amortize the cost over four years. My question is similar to the member's, I think, you know: then what happens?

Ms. Friesen: Again, just for clarification, does that mean that at the end of four years the equipment that the government owns will be available for schools and for other institutions as the equipment has been from the previous round. Of course, I am assuming, I expect we all are, that there will be considerable updates in the equipment that will be advisable.

Mr. McCrae: I think, Mr. Chairman, that we will have to look at that in a similar way to what we have done with our Computers for Schools and Libraries program. If what everybody is telling me is true, the technology that exists today will be certainly either dated or obsolete four years from now. With a little bit of work we can make the equipment that we have suitable for things like schools and libraries, but we are likely going to need to keep this investment going in order to ensure that our government offices can be up to date with respect to what is available out there in order to run an efficient and effective public service.

* (1650)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): I did have a number of questions, and I would ask for the

minister to possibly give a little bit of leeway—or members of the committee—given that we do not necessarily have the same opportunities to be notified when we are on a specific line or to ensure that we are on the exact line that we should be. If the minister does feel it is absolutely inappropriate for me to pose the line of questioning that I am going to be posing, he can just advise me of that at the onset.

Mr. McCrae: My only comment is, for the honourable member's convenience, and taking account of the ability of the department, if the honourable member can be flexible too, I certainly can. I know that his questions may not be on the line that we are dealing with, and I do not mind about that, as long as he does not mind waiting a day or so for a detailed response, which we can make available to him. If we have the answer at hand, we will give it to him, but sometimes—it has worked with the honourable member for Wolseley (Ms. Friesen) and me—if I do not have the answer immediately available, I undertake to make it available.

Mr. Lamoureux: I thank the minister for his comments.

No doubt in education there are many different areas or issues which one can address. For this afternoon, what I wanted to focus in on is an issue that was brought to my attention a number of months ago from a constituent. It was a constituent which I have a deep amount of respect for who brought me into a conversation when I was over at a restaurant in the north end in which we talked about standard exams and how standard exams are in fact administered. What I wanted to do at this point was to go into the administration of standard exams and possibly get some more details so that my constituent's requests of trying to get a better understanding of the situation—we can at least expand on what has taken place to date.

To start off, I realize that there are standard exams. I believe it is 3, 6, 9 and 12.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. Before we proceed with this, could I have the committee's unanimous consent to revert to a section, line 16.2. School Programs (c) Assessment and Evaluation in order for—

An Honourable Member: On the same point of order.

Mr. Chairperson: There is none. Is there unanimous consent of the committee to revert back?

An Honourable Member: I do not see a need to. No.

Point of Order

Mr. McCrae: The reason I raise the point of order is to remind you and the committee that that has been passed. I do not think the future of these Estimates relies on the answers I give to the honourable member for Inkster. He wants to ask some questions. We have passed it. Let us leave it passed, and if we have to give leave, give leave to allow the honourable member to ask his questions. Is that okay?

Mr. Chairperson: That is the process in terms of what we are attempting to do, to allow the honourable member for Inkster to ask the questions, but we do need leave of the committee to revert back in order that the member can ask the questions.

Ms. Friesen: On the same point of order, it seems to me that it is not necessary to revert back. The minister has been very flexible in earlier sections of the department in answering questions that have broad range over the department, today was flexible in answering a department-wide question under a particular section of Program Development. So I would view this as simply asking the minister questions on education that could be done under many lines, and the minister is flexible. Some ministers are; some are not. At the moment, this one is. So it seems to me, why not?

Sorry, I am not putting the point of order very well, but just my impression.

Mr. Chairperson: I thank the honourable minister and the honourable member for Wolseley for their advice with regard to the point of order. My instructions are that this line has already been passed, and accordingly we will need unanimous consent of the committee in order to revert back.

I seek the guidance of the committee in terms of what they want to do, but those are the instructions that have been given.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Inkster, on the same point of order.

Mr. Lamoureux: Yes, just in order to facilitate the committee, Mr. Chairperson, what about if I were to ask for leave to ask questions of this particular nature as opposed to asking for leave to go back to a particular line, just to ask leave of the committee to continue on this line of questioning at this particular line of the Estimates, if that would help?

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): With a smile on my face, Mr. Chairman, on the same point of order, I might ask the question: might it be in order to move a common-sense motion?

I would suspect that if one really perused Hansard and searched very diligently, I think one might find that there were significant amounts of debates and discussion that had taken place over the history of this building that would reflect the essence of the relevance of the Estimates, and need not always—even though lines had been passed—have followed as critically as one might want to the issue at hand. Therefore, I would suggest that, if we really allowed ourselves a bit of diligence in this matter, if we allowed the department to assume its role in giving good sound advice to the minister, and if we would listen very carefully to the questions that are being put by the member opposite, I think we would then realize that it might in fact be useful to continue the debate in the manner that we have and resume a bit of flexibility in the process.

I would suggest that maybe even the Clerk's office might bend a warm ear to the suggestion that we not revert back or not change our mind on the line that had already been passed, assuming as I said before, that we could in fact just hear the question and maybe let the minister answer in his own way the question that had been put. I think then in that manner, we might well accommodate the ongoing orderly discussion I have heard so far in this committee. I think that what this process is all about is if we can get the information from the minister and the

department on the operation of Education as a whole.

I think regardless of whether a line has been passed or not is not what we really need to be debating here, but it should be that the information be readily available to the members. I know that there are some members at this table who cannot always be everywhere at the same time, because there are not enough of them to cover all three of the committees. When there are only two members in a given caucus, it is somewhat unreasonable to expect that they would have the ability to be at all the debates at the same time. Therefore, I think there needs to be some diligence shown by the Chairman. So, I would beg that he would make some change of mind, maybe not of heart but of mind, to allow for the debate to continue in the manner that we have without reverting back to the issue.

Now, I would say, though, at the same time that when issues of importance come up during the discussion and the debate within any committee, there should be a significant amount of attention paid to all of us that are members of committee and/or members of caucuses, members of government. When an issue might be heard or dealt with, we might make every effort to be there in order not to cause the Clerk's office concerns about proper procedure. Proper procedure is extremely important in these committees. I think we have seen from time to time when issues have been allowed to get out of hand and proper procedures have not been followed what that can lead to.

* (1700)

I think the member asking the question in all earnestness was only attempting to gain the kind of information from the minister that would help him determine whether their position as a political party could be maintained in relevance and maybe even in support of the budget. I know they did not vote in support of the budget but might in fact help him change his mind that, in future, they might have also a change of heart and therefore see the benefits of the Education budget as has been set by the minister and the department. Therefore, maybe the need even for an election might be averted. They might pass a resolution. The opposition members might

consider passing a resolution or maybe even a bill suggesting that there need not be another election for the next five years and that we can just continue on providing good government, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairperson: I thank all honourable members for their direction and suggestions and advice. I think in order to facilitate, if there is a willingness by the committee, that the honourable member for Inkster—we do need unanimous consent—be allowed to ask any questions with regard to the Estimates pertaining, and we do not necessarily have to revert back, as long as there is unanimous consent of the committee. Is there unanimous consent of the committee? [agreed]

* * *

Mr. Lamoureux: Thank you, Mr. Chairperson, and I thank the honourable members of the committee for that. As I indicated, I bring this particular issue up primarily because of a constituent of mine who I met with. I was brought into a conversation in which the very important issue of standard exams and the administration of standards exams was the topic area.

What I wanted to do first before we go into the specifics, a number of questions in regard to the policy of the government. From what I understand, it is 3, 6, 9 and 12, even though from a party level we have a great difficulty with the standards exams at the Grade 3 level. I am going to forgo the discussions I had with my constituent, and that being the government obligates school divisions to conduct standard exams. What I am interested in knowing, when government makes the statement that you as a school division will administer a standard exam, then what obligation does the school division have, and how is that in fact carried out?

Mr. McCrae: Speaking generally, as the honourable member has asked that I do, it is true that the New Directions that came down something over four years ago brought in a system of standards and curricula and a system of testing as well in Levels 3, 6, 9 and 12. The Public Schools Act bestows on the provincial government the right and, we felt, the

responsibility to mandate certain things. Through that instrument, the department mandates the various curricula for the various subject areas and also imposes or calls upon school divisions operating under The Public Schools Act to administer the tests, and that administration, the right of that, is in The Public Schools Act.

In addition, the power to count these tests and the results of these tests as a certain percentage of a mark is also within the administrative power or within the power of the provincial government to do. In doing that, it is also incumbent on the government to provide assistance and support to ensure that the administration of these initiatives is carried out in an effective way. That is why the government makes available various supports, including documentary support and money to assist divisions in carrying out this mandate that we have asked them to carry out.

Mr. Lamoureux: So The Public Schools Act is what then gives you the legal authority to go to a school division and say: we want you to administer standard exams. Then there are some resources that follow that mandate in order to allow for the school divisions to administer it. Does the government not set up criteria on how those standard exams would actually be administered?

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairman, yes, to all of that. The department, having mandated standards tests, provides the leadership in order to get the job done, and that calls for lots of services to be made available to school divisions in the carrying out of the work. That includes pulling committees together to design tests, to design curriculum. It includes the province taking a role in the Western Canadian Protocol group, which consists of the four western provinces and the territories. I guess it is three territories now. Are all three involved?

So we are now at the position in that, with a lot of people's demands over the years for something a little more common across the country, we have gone some distance to achieving that. We do not have all the provinces in Canada in this consortium or this protocol, but we have made significant headway by getting

the four western provinces involved. There is progress being made to include other provinces as well because Canadians are a mobile lot, even though the honourable member and I have been fairly stationary for the last number of years. Canadians do tend to take advantage of all of the wonderful regions of our country, but so many of them end up right here in Manitoba or end up returning to Manitoba because of things like this.

* (1710)

This whole idea of having standards and finding ways to assess our performance is something that appeals to Manitobans. They are happy to be able to say that they live in a province where we now have standards, uniform ones, that can be measured through this testing scenario. Indeed, the province is able to set the test dates, and we do that. We give advance notice of it, to set test specifications and to give detailed direction, to maintain security around tests and that includes confidentiality, which means keeping tests under secure conditions with bundles intact, with cellophane wrappers unopened and all of those sorts of things that you need to do to ensure that those students are given any kind of unfair or inappropriate advantage. Adaptations are certainly permitted, as well, to take account of the various circumstances of various students in the system. Test booklets, directions are given as to how they are to be delivered and to whom. In short, there is a lot of detailed information that has to accompany a testing initiative which is province-wide in its scope and deals with hundreds of thousands, I guess, of students across the province in the various grade levels. So, yes, the province does have the right and the responsibility to administer this program in an effective way, and that includes, as I say, setting of dates and that sort of thing.

Security is an important thing. We do not like to see, would not like to see breaches of security, either intentional or otherwise. That is why it needs to be clearly spelled out and that we need to make appropriate information available. We think we are on top of that situation, but you know if the honourable member's constituent has some information that might help us improve the situation or if there has been some breach that we are not aware of or

something like that, I mean, I do not intend to engage in any witch hunts or anything, but it is important to the integrity of whole thing and the fairness for everybody that the rules that are a necessary part of the implementation of this type of program that those rules be obeyed in a uniform way or be observed in a uniform way. So, yes, the province does have the power and in this day and age, I suggest, the responsibility.

I think Manitobans were demanding something along this line in our education system. Post-secondary institutions and employers in the province had identified or helped identify because I think that the department personnel were aware and some of my colleagues were certainly aware, as I was, that we needed to move forward with New Directions in education in order to be responsive, not only responsive, but also to be well positioned to take advantage of changes going on in the global economy in which we all live.

So there is a general answer for the honourable member. If there are specifics, I would be happy to look at that too.

Mr. Lamoureux: Yes, Mr. Chairperson, I do want to get into some of the specifics, but prior to doing that—and I do appreciate the answers thus far—in listening to the minister, I agree that it is critical in terms of the integrity of the administration that there needs to be a sense of fairness. What I was looking for from the minister, he gave in the response when he indicated to the committee that this department is ultimately responsible for things such as test dates, test specification, providing test booklets for information purposes.

The part that I want to focus some attention on is the maintenance of security or protecting those exams. This is the area in which my constituent, who happened to work at a particular facility, raised the issue with me and asked if I would, in fact, bring it up. The question that I would ask, again being somewhat general here, is if there is a breach of security of the exams. The minister made reference to is it Saran Wrap that they wrap the exams in and they are not to be opened?

I take it at some point the exams leave a facility, and I would make the assumption that they are sealed in some way and then they have to be distributed out to the many different schools. When the school receives the document or the boxes full of tests, what are they actually receiving? How do we ensure that the security of those boxes are, in fact, in place between when the school receives the boxes from wherever they come from, I do not know, to the actual administration of those tests to the students the day that the student has to write the exam? Can the minister kind of fill in that gap for me, that gap of time?

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairman, indeed the honourable member is right with respect to the maintenance of security. The Department of Education goes to significant lengths to ensure that security is a priority concern, not only of the department but of everyone else involved in the chain right from the time the test is designed by the team involved with that to the printers, the steps that need to be taken by the printers who produce the tests, the way they are wrapped and counted and boxed and all of that. In the chain of people involved in this, from the time it is transmitted from the printers in a wrapped, bundled form to a given school, at the point it arrives at a given school, the principal of that school is responsible for the security of the test materials.

If any of that material from that point should get into the wrong hands, it is pretty obvious what is wrong with that picture. From the point that it arrives at the school, it is the responsibility well pointed out and well stated, well documented, that the principal of that school is required to follow certain protocols or measures to ensure that none of the rules are broken. If there is any incident of breach of security, we require a report about that as a start, from the supervising teacher involved as well as the principal who, at the school level, is the ultimate person responsible. We then might follow up, depending on the report and the details that are provided to us in order to ensure—I think The Public Schools Act bestows on the government the ultimate responsibility for ensuring that these aspects of the testing program are carried out in a way that does no disservice to any student or any person in the whole chain.

When we are dealing with professionals, I think there is a certain wish on the part of the department to rely on the integrity of professional people, that there not be any breach of the rules of security. The rules are there for a good reason. If there is any link along that chain that is weak or has done something wrong, we need to know about that. If there is any evidence of anything like that, we need to have it thoroughly looked into.

* (1720)

Mr. Jack Penner, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Lamoureux: The minister said that ultimately when it gets to the school, then it is the principal's responsibility, the exams themselves. Two questions come out of his response. First of all, are there some sort of guidelines that the principal has? For example, can the principal look at the exams in advance? What sort of restrictions are placed on a principal at a particular facility? That is one question. The second one is, the minister made reference that what we rely on is the principal and the supervising teacher to report any breaches in the security measures, protecting the integrity of the final exams. Can he expand in terms of: what does he mean by a report? Is there a written paper that goes with this that every principal or teacher has to fill out saying that it was not a breach? What sort of report has to go back to the department, or do they only send a report if, in fact, there has been a breach?

Mr. McCrae: I understand that there are very, very clear directions accompanying the packages that are wrapped, that they are not to be unwrapped, that the packages then go to the supervising teacher. The supervising teacher is the person who directly administers the test to the students. The tests are to be placed in front of the students unopened. I take it that they are to be opened when the supervising teacher says: All right, begin. At that point, then the tests are opened. They are not to be opened previous to that. If that happened, then it would be appropriate that a report be made to the department about such an incident. Those instructions are very clear for principals throughout Manitoba.

Mr. Lamoureux: What, in law, or what is the Department of Education able to do if in fact then they are made aware of an incident and it is demonstrated that there was a breach? What could happen? What authority does the Department of Education have to ensure that some sort of disciplinary action is in fact taken if there is a breach of the security?

Mr. McCrae: I will ask for that information to be made available but, before you get to the point where someone has been found to have committed a breach like this, you need to ensure that you are observing some form of process which involves a fair kind of investigation. Given that I do not believe that this is all run by only one agency, i.e., the Department of Education, I do not know how we would manage trying to run the whole system without input from the school divisions, very important input in terms of the ongoing education of our kids.

But, if there is an allegation of a breach, then it is somebody's responsibility to ascertain whether there was a breach or whether it is just an allegation. Therefore, that implies some sort of investigation should be undertaken. In these circumstances, it would be appropriate for that breach to be reported. I think that is called for, for that to happen in the very clear directions. The department then could either conduct an investigation of its own, I assume, or ask that the school division involved or the principal, I suppose, depending on the circumstances—the department could ask that an investigation be conducted and a report made.

Now, if the investigation was conducted by the department, I guess the report could be made to the assistant deputy minister responsible for the school's program division, or if it is a case of the department asking the division to cause an investigation to be engaged in, that a report could be made available to the deputy minister. That would be my understanding.

Now, I do not want to get ahead of myself, but the honourable member is asking about process here. In the case of an allegation, let us say you have gone all the way to the point where the department has conducted an investigation. I guess if there is found to be cause for concern or if an allegation turns out on investigation, prima

facie at least, proven to be true, there are sanctions available under The Public Schools Act. A charge of unprofessional conduct could be preferred against a person who has a teacher's certificate, for example.

You know, school divisions, like municipalities, are creatures, are they not, of the provincial government. They exist because of the existence of The Public Schools Act. So in that case, I mean I am talking about very rare circumstances, but, I mean, there are pretty serious sanctions available to the public in cases of breaches of what is essentially The Public Schools Act, when you are found to be in a position where your conduct has been accused of or found to be unprofessional.

So there are significant powers here. We use those powers, hopefully, in very rare cases, because as I have pointed out in the House, it is not my intention to run the affairs of school divisions. But the whole issue of standards and testing and New Directions is a provincial initiative. We want to ensure that the initiative is carried out with integrity, and if there were serious breaches along the way, we would like to get to the bottom of it and have it handled in an appropriate fashion.

Now, upon receipt of the report of an investigation, I guess it depends what is in that report, whether there is any suggestion of wrongdoing or a breach of the rules or unprofessional conduct. Then we go from there. But we have to make sure the process plays itself through and that due process is done. That is a concern, that due process is achieved in all cases. That is why we have, in the criminal courts, long drawn-out trials to ensure that due process is something that we are all entitled to and that we all get.

Mr. Lamoureux: In the past couple of years, and I do not know if the minister will have the specifics on it, the actual numbers, but how common of an occurrence is it where you will get a report from either a teacher or a principal where there has, in fact, been a breach of security of the standard exams?

Mr. McCrae: Since the introduction of New Directions, I am aware of only one allegation of

a breach of security in regard to the testing program.

* (1730)

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Chairman, did the department investigate that particular breach, given that in four years we have only had one? Was that something then that was initiated, an investigation from the department?

Mr. McCrae: The allegations about which this one matter is the subject involved a report by a supervising teacher who informed the Department of Education that in the package of booklets which forms the test there was one booklet missing. There was a brief investigation done at that point by the department in relation to the allegation made. As a result of that brief departmental investigation, the department last fall directed the school division involved to conduct an investigation into the allegation raised initially by the supervising teacher.

At this point we have not yet received a report of the investigation by the school division involved. I am advised that the deputy minister will be calling the superintendent of the division involved to inquire about the status of the investigation.

Mr. Lamoureux: From the department's perspective, the disappearance of one booklet not being there or the supervising teacher making note of the disappearance of one testing booklet, would he classify that as a serious violation of security for that particular exam?

Mr. McCrae: Let me just preface my answer by saying that considering the whole environment required to have a testing system that has integrity in it, any alleged breach that has any credibility to it should be taken extremely seriously, and that is I think what we do. It is important for me to add that the supervising teacher in this or in all cases is required to make out a routine report of the way the test went and that it would have been in that reporting scenario that the allegation first arose.

I do not mean to imply, and this is according to information that I have had made available to me as a result of the initial investigation, that the

test booklet is missing, because it is known where that is, but I do need at this point to say that we simply need to get the report in from the school division. I do not know why we do not have it yet. The request for it was from last November, and I do believe that it is appropriate that the deputy minister should be calling the superintendent of the division involved to inquire about the status of the division's investigation. If it takes all this long time to conduct the investigation, I guess we need to know: why is it taking so long? We are entitled to ask that. I think that is what the deputy minister should be doing.

Mr. Lamoureux: I suspect that I am familiar with this particular incident, what I was told. It was a while back when the issue was raised with me first. I did find it difficult to see what had taken place as a result of this booklet disappearing for a short time span or whatever happened to the booklet. I do not know, I do not want to claim to know what actually happened to the booklet, but what I can convey to the minister today or this afternoon is that it was actually a very innocent breakfast meeting I was at at Garden City Inn. As I was walking out I was then approached by someone that used to teach at the school that is in question, if we are talking about the same school, and I believe we are, in which I was brought into the conversation.

There are other concerns that were being raised that I think the Department of Education should be at the very least aware of if it is not aware of. From what I understand, there was all sorts of disciplinary action that was taken against the teacher that filed a report. I do not know whether or not those disciplinary actions had anything at all to do with the standard exam. I cannot say. He or she might have been a pathetic teacher. I do not know for what reasons this particular individual had disciplinary actions taken, but in the breakfast meeting that I had—and there were a few other teachers at the same school that were very clear to me in the way that they had portrayed it, is here is an individual that had the courage to report a violation or a breach of security on standard exams which this government has mandated that the teachers administer, and the perception that they had was that the disciplinary action was as a direct result

of what had taken place. Now, I did not take a note of all the teachers that were around that particular breakfast table, but I do know one of the teachers, the one that had actually encouraged me to participate in the discussion.

So there are really two issues here. One is the integrity of the administration of our standard exams and the position, and the second one is the position in which we put professionals by having to administer those exams. What happens as a result of administering those exams, this department, I believe, has to take some responsibility. I was told that there was an investigation. I thought that the school division, quite frankly, had made the initial investigation, but the minister indicates that the Department of Education made the initial investigation and then asked the school division to make an investigation.

* (1740)

A lot of time has lapsed since our hearing as to what actually took place. I do believe, at least I am told, that it has dramatically changed the lives of more than one individual as a result. It is a very difficult issue for me to address because I know a number of the school trustees and I have a great deal of respect for a number of the school trustees, and I know it is a sensitive issue for the school division. I know some of the other individuals who are involved, some of whom I have, and have had in the past, respect for. So it is a very difficult issue that needs to be addressed, and I am addressing it in this fashion because I do believe that this is having an impact not only on individuals but also on the integrity of the way in which we administer standard exams, and because The Public Schools Act is what mandates or allows this government to do what it has done, it has to take responsibility for it.

To that end, a lot of time has lapsed since the school division has not given—or it has not been able to provide a report. I would look to the minister and ask for a commitment from this minister to report back in short course or in an expedited way as to what is the current status of that report. I think that there are a number of individuals who are interested in knowing what actually did take place and to what degree the

Department of Education or the school division, whoever, is going to take responsibility for what obviously appears to be a violation of the security, because the department itself has had some feedback on the particular incident to the degree in which they have actually asked the division to look into it.

So there is something there. What we need to do, because of the impact that it has on the integrity of our system, of the administration, and because of the impact it has on real people, Mr. Chairperson, I think that there is a need for the Minister of Education to report back as quickly as possible on this particular issue. If he does not want to bring it back to the committee, because I have been very reluctant to throw names and throw the schools' names and so forth, I would be more than happy to have the discussion in a nonpublic record initially at the very least. I cannot guarantee that I would keep it in complete confidence if I believe that the minister is in fact at fault and should be doing more, but I would definitely let the minister know that that was the case prior to us going into a sort of detailed discussion.

But the big push is that there is an impact, and I think that we need to address the issue. It is an issue that is important not only to me but very important to a constituent who has lobbied me significantly to raise this issue, and that is the reason why I brought it forward today in the fashion that I have. I look forward to having more dialogue with the minister, which could possibly be more detailed dialogue depending on how quickly the minister could give us a report on that investigation.

Mr. McCrae: I certainly understand the sensitive nature of some of the matters raised here by the honourable member, and I also understand the importance of preserving the integrity of a public system in our education system, a public program. I am at a loss, though, because I cannot respond—and the honourable member has been good enough, at this point at least, to leave names and dates out. I do not think we need to leave dates out so much. It involves the testing session back in 1998 this time of the year. So it is a year old now. But I guess, when you have an investigation, one allegation can sometimes lead to another and that one needs to be investigated.

I can understand the school division involved taking appropriate time to do a thorough investigation; however, I do think that it is also appropriate, after the passage of a significant amount of time, that the school division involved who has been asked to conduct an investigation—it could have been done a different way—but asked that an investigation be conducted and here we are seven or eight months later, and we still have not heard anything. It is appropriate, I suggest, that I ask the deputy to inquire as to what is the status, not to get involved in it at this point. Having done a preliminary review, the department advice was that we should ask the school division to conduct an investigation.

I guess it is true to suggest that as the investigation that was being conducted by the department unfolded, more information or allegations came to light. Some information, of course, is in the category of rumour, but again do you just cast everything off as rumour or which allegations do you take seriously and which ones do you say, well, they are just driven by somebody who wants to do somebody else some harm or just wants to be engaged in gossip and rumour. I want to be assured that it is being done right and that it is being done thoroughly, but I have not heard anything at all. So I need to know the answers to those questions, and if there is any problem in that way, in those areas, then we will have to take it from there. Things can be complicated in these matters, but the purview—oh, and then there is always legal implications for people who get involved in allegations of wrongdoing.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Having said all that, I think I want to say to the honourable member that the supervising teacher involved has a duty. The member referred to the courage, and yes, it takes courage sometimes to do your duty, but it is the duty of a supervising teacher to make a report on the conduct of a test administration including perceived irregularities or whatever. So that is how this all came about, but I certainly have sympathy for the teacher who finds him or herself in that kind of position where there is an irregularity or a perceived one or a suggested one or some kind of evidence of one, the

allegation of one, who is working in a school environment and has to file a report like that. It puts that person into a very difficult position.

It is like analogous to the honourable member for St. James (Ms. Mihychuk) knowing that a colleague, in an extremely hypothetical situation, has done something wrong and the appropriate thing to do would be to do something about it. Well, it is hard. These are difficult, difficult circumstances; on the other hand, if somebody is out there doing wrong, something needs to be done about it.

At this point I appreciate the honourable member raising it. I think it is important to ensure that we have integrity in the administration of this testing program. I am troubled, not that an investigation takes so long, but that I have not heard anything since having asked that an investigation be conducted by the school division in question. It troubles me that I have not had a call or a note saying, you know, we are still working on this. Hang in there. We have come up with various allegations that require further investigation. I have not got that even. So I am asking the deputy minister to follow up on the request that he made last November that an investigation be done. It was November 20 to be exact. Perhaps I could return to the honourable member with information about what the status is, if I am able to share that with him.

* (1750)

I did not want to leave the impression we have heard nothing because that is not quite correct either. There has been correspondence back and forth between this division involved and the deputy seeking clarification of what it is that the department wanted to have investigated and various questions along the way. But, when I say we have not heard anything, we have not heard anything about actually where they are at with respect to this investigation, if there is any idea if they are getting anywhere near the conclusion of it or anything like that. I do not believe that it is appropriate, having turned an investigation over to an agency, to meddle in the investigation itself. On the other hand, some kind of status report about where we are at would be helpful, and it would not be

inappropriate for the deputy minister to contact the division and find out where we are at with that investigation.

I do not know where it goes from there until I know what the results of the investigation are, but we do have at the departmental level, I guess in a preliminary way, we came up with sufficient information to cause us enough concern that we, without dismissing matters out of hand, were asking the division involved to conduct a full investigation into the matters complained of or reported on. We also felt that in fairness to the division, they would be interested in knowing what had been made known to us in terms of allegations being made, accusations being made, and in fairness, that this is what we have heard, so will you find out what it is about, you know, that type of thing. So, once I know anything more, I will report to the honourable member about it.

Mr. Lamoureux: Mr. Chairman, I was actually going to stop, but the minister hit a few key words and those were: it is the teacher's duty. I had made reference to courage, and I really believe that it was in fact a courageous act for anyone in a situation where it could ultimately be to their detriment.

I would like to bring an analogy, if I may. If I work in a factory and I am part of the designers or work as an architect, and I see one of my supervisors doing something that is not proper, then I go to my boss and I say to my boss, look, this is what the supervisor is doing, chances are my boss might give a slap on the wrist to the supervisor for doing that. But then a month later, if I am sweeping the floor, whether that was because I informed the boss, whether it was right for me to be shifted down to sweeping the floors from doing my architectural work or not, if I believe that as a result of what I did, I am now sweeping floors and a number of my peers believe that, what message does that then send to my peers?

I believe at least at the group discussion that I had, that that was a part of the concern. That is part of the reason why, as I say, the timing is relatively important here because it is having an impact on the lives of more than one individual, more than the individual who was directly

involved. There are others that are indirectly involved, and that is one of the reasons, again, because I would be wrong in not stipulating that the primary concern that I have is more so as the Department of Education, if you mandate something to a school division because you have the legal authority to do that, you also then have to take the responsibilities of your actions.

That is ultimately what we are asking the Department of Education to do, and that is to take responsibility for what has actually occurred. The best way you do that is you ensure that there is a sense of fairness and that justice ultimately prevails. This is a minister that used to be the Minister of Justice and is somewhat familiar with the idea of natural justice. Again, I do not want to necessarily be saying that there is a ton of corruption and that something has to be done. I think that there is an onus for us to ensure that due diligence is given, the division is provided an opportunity to be able to report properly, but we also have to recognize the harm that has been caused and ensure that we are doing what we can to ensure that it is resolved as quickly as possible.

I very much would appreciate some sort of feedback from the Minister of Education as to what sort of response, more so with respect to the timing. It would be wonderful, for example, if we could continue the discussion at a later time, whether it is in concurrence or whenever, when we know what the report actually says.

On that note, I appreciate the member for Wolseley (Ms. Friesen) providing me the opportunity to ask the questions this afternoon.

Mr. McCrae: I think that, well, I was listening carefully to what the honourable member said, and I do not think we disagree about the meaning of the word "courage." The analogy the honourable member made certainly causes one to think carefully about our duty, and it does indeed call for some courage sometimes when there are implications. When you do your duty, sometimes there are implications that you did not expect. Be that as it may, I do not want to get into details of a matter that is under investigation. The allegations are of significant concern, serious enough concern that an investigation is called for. It is not something

you should just brush off. It is not something the department just brushes off, and it is not something the school division should brush off. I assume that by asking the deputy minister various process questions about the investigation, I am assuming today that the division is taking its responsibility seriously.

So, as the honourable member said near the end of his comments, when I know something that I am able to share with him, I will do so because I know that there are people approaching the honourable member with questions and concerns. It is unfortunate that matters from time to time arise, but if you want to run a system with integrity, one that is designed to be of benefit to the public and fair to everyone, then you have to have rules. If there are allegations that someone has broken the rules, then you cannot just brush them off, you cannot just pretend that nothing has happened because, as the honourable has pointed out, sometimes there are implications for people. Sometimes they are very serious ones, and they can be very hurtful indeed. I am not unmindful of that.

You do not have to live in a rural area where everybody knows everybody and everybody talks about everybody else's business. You do not have to be in that kind of neighbourhood to have serious matters of concern being discussed on the street and in the restaurants and that sort of thing. The honourable member for Emerson (Mr. Penner) probably knows that, as does the Minister of Government Services (Mr. Pitura) know that too.

I can only assure the honourable member that we are showing sufficient concern, but I would like at the same time to have at least some kind of update as to where we are. Some investigations take long, some of them do not. I guess I need to know a little more about the situation with this particular investigation. Sometimes it is not appropriate to share very much information until an investigation is complete. If that is the case, I will tell the honourable member that and hope that he will understand, if not, then he will say so, which is fair. That is certainly fair.

This is in a part of the city of Winnipeg that the discussions he has had, I assume, revolve

around issues related to that particular part of the city of Winnipeg. People there, like everywhere else, are entitled to know that the system that they have working works fairly there as it does everywhere else. If it has not been, if there is any suggestion that it has not been, and if there is any evidence to back up that suggestion, it should be thoroughly investigated. As I stated a little while ago, the potential sanctions, should there have been any irregularities or any improprieties, can be very significant.

The Public Schools Act of Manitoba sets out the scenario, sets out the chain of authority. The Department of Education under the Constitution of Canada is bound to oversee the education of our people. Within that framework, we have school divisions.

Now, in New Brunswick, they have basically got rid of school boards, and there is talk that that is on people's minds here in Manitoba too. Well, I think that school boards are elected people and they have responsibilities. Under the rules of The Public Schools Act, the ultimate responsibility rests with the Department of Education. I intend to carry out my function as minister of that department. So I will be expecting a report in the very near future from the deputy minister on what he has heard from the school division involved in this matter.

Mr. Chairperson: Is there a willingness to call it six o'clock? [agreed] The hour now being 6 p.m., committee rise.

* (1440)

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 30.1 Housing Executive (b) Executive Support (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits on page 98 of the Estimates book. I would just like to say now that it seems that our opposition critic—no, we cannot say that either. We cannot talk about anybody that is not—we will just have to wait for the questions from the opposition critic.

Order, please. The committee has been called to order, and the member for Dauphin, I believe, was asking some questions when we last were together.

Mr. Stan Struthers (Dauphin): Thanks, Mr. Chairperson. Yes, the member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk) and I were asking some questions yesterday dealing with, at least in part, the tendering process and trying to think of some ways in which at the local level we could involve more people at the community level in certain communities in the Parkland and actually participating in the renovations and maintenance of housing units, and I think we had a very good discussion. The minister did indicate a willingness to look at the many things that we suggested yesterday, and I commend him for that.

The one area that I left unclear about yesterday was a demarcation between—I know the minister indicated that they were not in the business of building houses, but it was not clear to me just as I was leaving whether the projects by which the minister was talking applied to repair and the maintenance side of it, or, whether there were renovations such as the idea that I think the member for Swan River and the minister talked about in terms of converting bachelor suites into housing units that were more comfortable, more useful in the situations in some of the communities in the Parkland.

In the conversion of one type of unit, say, a bachelor suite into a one-bedroom or two-bedroom or larger unit, what realistically can local people expect in terms of their participation when those decisions are made? Can local people have an input into the types of units that are necessary and the numbers of units that are necessary, and, if he would maybe help me to understand, if they would then have an opportunity to actually work to do the rebuilding in these units?

Hon. Jack Reimer (Minister of Housing): I think one of the things that we try to work very closely with in all parts, especially in rural Manitoba, is having the local community, having the local boards, the local administration, the town councils, made aware of and involved sometimes even with some of our decisions

when we start to look at major renovations or upgrades or changes of some of the seniors complexes or buildings within our portfolio, because in most of the cases in the small towns and in the rural areas, a lot of our public housing is occupied by seniors.

It behooves us to try to work with the community in recognizing what some of the needs are as to try to make sure that the seniors in the community can stay within the community, and most of them do want to stay in the community. So we try to work fairly closely with the community groups, some of the resources in the community, like the local volunteer groups and things like that and the town administration whenever we start to look at some sort of renovations.

If we were talking about a specific complex in a specific town where we were looking at possibly converting some of the bachelor units to one-bedroom units, I think that we would want to get some input from not only the local tenants in that particular complex but a lot of the people who are associated with that complex, whether it is the local, like I say, volunteer group like the Kinsmen or Rotary that sometimes take an interest in these clubs, too, so that we get a feeling that there is definitely a need for some of these conversions. A lot of these conversions, like I mentioned earlier, can be fairly inexpensively accommodated. A lot of it has to do with the physical characteristics of the building and the physical makeup of the building, whether we can more or less just put a hole through the wall and finish it off and make it into a one-bedroom.

For expediency's sake and for cost efficiencies and trying to have it looked at on a local level, we would make local contractors or local construction people aware of what we are proposing and look at asking them to possibly give us a quote or an invitation to tender on these conversions because here again a lot of times the local townspeople, it is the local people that have a better knowledge, a better flavour of the community. We have to respect that, and we would try to work within that. Our biggest concern would be is it complying to the codes and complying to the safety of the integrity of the building, to meet the standards for all

residents, but we would try to look at it on a local basis and give local recognition of their concerns in regard to not only the proposal itself but the implementation of a proposal.

* (1450)

Mr. Struthers: Mr. Chairperson, I think by the end of the day today we are all going to have a certain carousel song going through our heads as we leave tonight, but we will try to stay focused here. The only other part of the questioning that I did not get a chance to ask last night having to do with the tendering is that there are into my office many complaints saying that we did not realize something is being tendered; we did not see it anywhere. It usually ends up being something that once we take a look you can see in the local papers it has been tendered or in other areas. Is there a certain number of places that tenders need to be publicized so that local people can get in on some of the jobs associated with renovations and other projects that Manitoba Housing does?

Maybe the minister can indicate to me what the procedure is in tendering and where they have to publicize the project. That would probably help me a lot in serving the people who come to my office and ask about these projects and how they can be involved in them, whether it is through getting the tenders themselves and putting tenders in or having input at the projects to begin with.

Mr. Reimer: I am informed there are a couple of ways that are available for notification. We do advertise locally in local papers and local community publications for some of the tendering and some of the improvements or changes in our structures, but it also has been pointed out that through Government Services there is a registry. I am not exactly sure what it is called, but it is in Government Services, where contractors can register, and then it is all done through e-mail and through computers, that as work is being called for, it goes out to all these people who are registered on this computer network and through e-mail. This goes out as an automatic source of information, also. So if there are individuals who are looking for work from the government, they can register through Government Services. I guess it is an Internet

service of sorts, and they are automatically informed of where and when projects are being brought forth.

So that is one way, and the other way is through local advertising which is done in the local papers.

Mr. Struthers: Thanks, that is good.

Ms. Marianne Cerilli (Radisson): Mr. Chairperson, I apologize for my delay, but if I remember correctly, yesterday we were talking before I left about the ways that the government and Manitoba Housing are going to save money under the new devolution agreement, particularly as it deals with the not-for-profits. I had been raising a number of ways that have been suggested to me by some of the property managers or board members that I have met with, so let us just sort of recap and get us back, get me back anyway.

We had been talking about the replacement reserves—that is it; that is what we were talking about—and the minister I think was explaining the way that the replacement reserves are operated under a formula, and that issue was dealt with, I think.

The other issue that I wanted to ask about then is the way that sponsor groups, when they approach Manitoba Housing to have their budgets approved for that year, how that is going to be approached in terms of the sponsor group or the property manager who brings in their budget, if you could explain what the process is that they go through in having their budget approved, how that review is done.

Mr. Reimer: Mr. Chairperson, in doing the review of the budgets, it is usually done on not only the last year's budget. What is brought into consideration are two years budgets, and sometimes even three years is looked at in the review that the operation is running under.

The budget is brought forth. It is reviewed with the department or individuals responsible in that particular sector and looked at in its applications. If there is a request for additional funding for specific items or specific things that have to be attained to, they are looked at on an

individual basis and assessed as to their applicability or their needs as to whether that is justified, so there is always room for, even though the budget may be a certain amount, for justification or for a case made for exceptional or above expenditures in regard to that particular complex.

* (1500)

The budget then goes into, of that particular unit, our global budget which goes through the normal Treasury Board process of approval. So each one is not necessarily approved by Treasury Board, but they become a package that is brought forth in a global amount for monies that are spent, that is approved by Treasury Board. The monies, if they are approved, then the complex knows that this is their budget, and this is what they have been approved to spend. So it is a bottom feeding of information, and then a global approval of a total budget once it has been presented to Treasury Board.

Ms. Cerilli: Okay. Some interesting information there, but I am looking for, in terms of asking what the process is, things like: how is a housing corporation notified? Is it done on an annual basis at the same time? You have told me that they have to then send their information. They are not necessarily there for the first review, and then as I understand it, there is often a meeting with the chairperson of the board and the property manager where they are informed if their budget is actually going to be approved or not.

So what I am looking for is specifically how that process works and a little bit more detail about the kinds of things in the process that Manitoba Housing is looking for when you are going to approve or not approve the budget for any given housing corporation.

Mr. Reimer: I have been informed that usually the process for the costing or the budget for the complexes start in about June or July of each year, and then their final approval comes somewhere in September or October. Towards the end of the year, they then become part of the Treasury Board and the budget process. In effect, what has happened right now, even though we are into our budget process, final

approval of the budget does not come till after the Estimates process. So we do provide funding on the interim basis so the nonprofits can operate, but their budget theoretically is not approved until the Estimates process has been completed, which we are into right now.

So that is the process but we do give interim funding, so that they can take advantage of the building season or certain tenders that have to go out. Final approval does not come through until we approve the budget right here in this process right now.

Ms. Cerilli: How about the issue of what kind of things you are looking for in terms of approving a budget for a nonprofit housing corporation or a co-op?

Mr. Reimer: I am not sure what the member means by what type of things we are looking for.

Ms. Cerilli: How do you decide if you are going to approve their budget or not?

Mr. Reimer: I guess what we look at is we look at the history and the management and the proposals that are coming forth, whether it is a co-op or a nonprofit and the reasonableness of their requests. Those are decisions that are made on the individual basis in regard to the complex, so it is a matter of justifying what the expenses are and reasonableness of their request.

Ms. Cerilli: Maybe the minister can see where I am going with this or his staff can advise him, but if we look at some of the co-ops that have had difficulties in the past, where they have had to come to the government and ask for more subsidized units, and because they could not meet their obligations based on attracting people to pay market rents, those are the kinds of problems that these housing corporations are having when they are dealing with their budgets.

Places like the Veterans Manor, which we have discussed before, as I understand it, came forward and were told that their budget was not approved, that there were certain things that were no longer going to be allowed. For example, their security provisions were not in their lease. They had to be then removed, because they were not going to be allowed to

spend money on the security provisions that were not part of their lease.

There have been other things like that brought to my attention, that nonprofit corporations feel like they are basically being nickeled and dimed to death. They feel like now they are going to be put through a situation, and approval of their budget is going to be denied. So that is where I am headed with this, and I am wanting for the minister to comment then on those kinds of considerations that are being made for nonprofit corporations and co-ops.

Mr. Reimer: I think in looking at the budgets of all the nonprofits and the co-ops, we have not really changed our process or our approach to budgeting in the last five to seven years in looking at differences or different accountabilities or a different type of timetabling or things like that. I think that we have always tried to work fairly co-operatively with the various boards in their budgetary process.

We have made staff available. I know that even when there have been problems, we have had senior staff go out and try to work with them and try to look at some of their budgets not only in the unit that the member mentioned, the Veterans Manor, but other ones in the city where there has been a problem with their budget and what they presented and what we felt was more in line with the expenditure models that we look at. I guess there will always be, to a degree, some sort of a disagreement or minor conflicts in regard to what is perceived and what is actual in regard to the amount of monies that are being requested and what can be allocated.

* (1510)

But, like I say, in an overall sense, we have had very little change in our handling of these units or in our accounting, our accountability factors, and the whole approach. I think that there are always exceptions and I guess there will always be exceptions, but we try to work around them, and we try to work as best we can with the nonprofit groups because we realize that a lot of them—and the majority of them are volunteer, nonprofit associations—spend an awful lot of time in their commitment to try to help people, and that is a very, very valuable resource

and a very commendable position that these people put themselves into. We recognize that a lot of times we are dealing with volunteers. We are dealing with people who are from various backgrounds, and sometimes it takes more of an understanding on our part to recognize and to try to direct the goals that we have a responsibility for in regard to the taxpayer and the taxpayer dollars that are being spent in these units.

There will always, I guess, be a bit of a difference from time to time where the priorities should be and what the expenditures should be, but we try to work very closely with the various groups, and, if anything, we bend over backwards in trying to accommodate most of them. Reasonable requests are looked at in a very prudent manner.

Ms. Cerilli: Well, the minister said that there may be some minor disagreements. When it comes to dealing with the nonprofit corporations, some of them have not been very minor. I have referenced already the Veterans Manor. I mean, they were put in a position where they actually then said we are going to offer you the keys because we do not want to do it on a nonprofit basis anymore.

All these nonprofit corporations have had their budgets reduced by the federal government as well as your government, and I want to get into some of those kinds of details, but, first, I just want to see how many of these nonprofit corporations have been like Veterans Manor, have not had their budgets approved, where they have either had to go back and make revisions and come back again. How many have been put in that kind of position, let us say, in the last couple of years, two years?

Mr. Reimer: In looking at the budgets of the nonprofit associations and that, they are reviewed as I mentioned with the directors or the people responsible for drafting the budget. I do not know whether there is a set number as the member is asking that go back for review because I think it is an ongoing process with the department in looking at their expenditures and to get justification of expenditures. It is hard to put a number. I was just saying these budgets all come in clean so that they are automatically approved, and these budgets come in over and

have to be adjusted. Because of the review process that is initiated, they are all reviewed in a sense of trying to be continuous. But actually the budget line, I believe, has stayed fairly static. In regard to the budgets, the private nonprofits and the expenditure line is up a little bit over '98-'99 to '99-2000, so there is not that much of an adjustment on the private nonprofits.

I should point out that the complex that the member was referring to, the Veterans Manor, one of the reasons that it got into difficulty was the fact that under the original concept, it was strictly for veterans, and because of the demographics and the situation of the numbers of veterans, the number of people who were going into that complex was declining because there were just not that many veterans who wanted to or were available to move into that unit. So the occupancy rates there started to rise, and the expenditures that were associated with it could not be carried.

That is one of the reasons why they ran into some problems and they came to us for help. So that gives you a little bit of an idea of what was happening at the Veterans Manor.

Ms. Cerilli: I think the minister meant to say, in terms of Veterans Manor, that their occupancy rates were declining because they were running out of veterans.

Mr. Reimer: Yes, did I not say that?

Ms. Cerilli: No.

Mr. Reimer: Oh, sorry.

Ms. Cerilli: I understand that there was an approach made to them to start including as their tenants people who were not veterans.

* (1520)

Mr. Reimer: Right.

Ms. Cerilli: And I guess I would make the suggestion, based on the conversations I have had, that if that was handled differently, perhaps they would have been more open to considering that, but they felt that their mandate was for veterans. It is the way that it was presented and

the way that their budget was dealt with. This is just the way that it has been presented to me, anyway, that they feel like they have to change the mandate for their organization which is supported by the legions which has a mandate to support veterans as well. So I was just using them as an example, though, but I did not want to let that go unaddressed.

Does the minister want to comment on that, or should I move on?

Mr. Reimer: I was not sure. I guess I did say—in regard to the declining numbers, they were because of the lack of veterans. That is what I meant to say. The member is right in correcting me.

Ms. Cerilli: Okay, well, the issue as it has been raised with me is—let us talk about the cuts first, that nonprofit corporations in Manitoba, the housing corporations, have lost how much money from the federal government, just even in their maintenance line. I have met with one corporation that says that they have lost \$150,000 from CMHC for their maintenance.

That is one corporation. That is a lot of money. They cannot raise their rents because they are all regulated. How are these corporations supposed to continue to exist on a nonprofit basis if they are receiving those kinds of cuts and reductions from CMHC? We know that there have been hundreds of millions of dollars cut from CMHC even before the devolution agreements were being signed, so nonprofit corporations operating housing have had serious reductions just in their maintenance budgets.

So do you have that information? I am looking at this both—you know, some of this is the responsibility of CMHC, but what have been the reductions in the maintenance budgets by both your government as well as by CMHC?

Mr. Reimer: I am just looking at the operations budget for the MHRC administered ones. In the private nonprofit ones, actually the repair and maintenance budget has gone up 5.4 percent from '98-99 to '99-2000. If the number has other figures than that, I would like to share them, but our figures show that the monies have gone up in

that area. I am not too sure what she is referring to in regard to cuts to certain ones, I am not too sure. But our indications are that we are spending more money than last.

Ms. Cerilli: Well, we are going to obviously be spending more money now because your portfolio has doubled. So if the minister also then could clarify: is he looking at a document that I should have that is in an annual report or is this something else that the department has and if maybe they could share that with me? I am also still waiting for the other maintenance budget information that I had asked for the other day.

Mr. Reimer: What I was referring to does not include the federal portfolio. This is the portfolio that is under the provincial government. What I am saying is our allocation of funding in our expenditures have gone up by 5.4 percent over last year in our private nonprofit operated units.

Ms. Cerilli: Okay, granted then, the minister is saying that in this budget year there is an increase in the maintenance budget for the nonprofit corporations that are now and have always been under the management of Manitoba Housing. The ones that I have meant have been previously with CMHC, and they are the ones that have been levied the maintenance budget reductions by CMHC.

Now, Manitoba Housing has inherited all of these housing corporations and they are dealing with the corporations that have been struggling under these reductions. Are you telling me that their maintenance budgets now are going to be getting an increase because you put more into the maintenance budget for your portfolio that you have been managing? Is the CMHC portfolio going to be affected by this?

I mean if the money you have been getting for those are capped at the '95-96 levels, I do not understand how that could happen, but we know, based on previous discussions we have had, that Manitoba has lost at least \$5 million from CMHC over the last number of years so there have been reductions to nonprofit housing corporations that the minister is now responsible for.

Mr. Reimer: I have been informed that it is a flat-line budget; there has been no decrease in what was allocated in regard to the CMHC portfolio. Unless there are specifics that I should be made aware of, our indications are that the amount of monies that were allocated through the CMHC to their projects has remained the same and it has not been cut as indicated by the member.

Ms. Cerilli: I am going to have to ask the minister to repeat the last part of his answer.

Mr. Reimer: What I was saying was that our indications are that there has not been any reduction in funding that has been flown through from the CMHC to the portfolio that we have inherited from the federal government. So unless the member has specifics, our indications are that it is the same amount of money.

Ms. Cerilli: Is it not true though that there has been—I remember one budget year, and I have some of the specifics somewhere in my stuff here, that shows one year there was a \$270-million reduction in the budget for CMHC and that was going to be spaced over a couple of years. We had the discussions in Estimates previously that that was going to affect Manitoba at \$5 million a year over that. I think it was a three- or five-year period that those cuts were going to cover. If the cuts did not come to housing corporations based on their maintenance budget, how are those cuts spread out by CMHC? Again, this is a portfolio that you are now managing, so it makes sense that we would be able to get this information.

* (1530)

Mr. Reimer: In talking to the department, we were discussing the fact that there was mentioned a couple of years ago where the federal government had mentioned that they were cutting their global amount of funding that amounted to, as I think I alluded to, it was over \$200 million. As to how it filtered down into Manitoba, as to how that affected Manitoba, there does not seem to be any direct correlation or direct area that can be pointed to to say that this was money that we did not receive, which would have amounted to, I think the rough estimate was somewhere around \$5 million. As to where it may have affected our department,

there does not seem to be any type of specific area that can be pointed to and say that this is the result of that specific reduction in funding.

Ms. Cerilli: This does not make sense because, for example, the maintenance budget for the province, I think the minister has referenced before, this year is about \$11 million. The \$5 million per year then is almost half of that budget. I would realize you would not take it all out of the maintenance budget. So you have spread it throughout the department somehow.

My questions right now are how this has affected some of the nonprofit corporations like Veterans Manor that were told: you are not going to be allowed anymore to pay for this security system that you have, because that is not specified in your lease. We are going to follow the lease to the letter and that is not in there so you are not going to be allowed to spend that money on that anymore.

So what if your seniors are living off Higgins and Main and they feel that that security system is helping them remain tenants in this building? That was the message that was given to that specific housing corporation. Now, I guess that is one small example of how that \$5 million has been spread out through the department. If the minister cannot clarify for me more than saying there has not been an effect of \$5 million, which amounts to almost half of your maintenance budget, then there is something wrong here.

I am asking this based on the meetings I have had with a number of different nonprofit corporations, and phone calls. What they are saying to me is that they are afraid that they are being controlled by the budget process, that it says in the devolution agreement that the operating agreements with existing third-party corporations have to be followed but Manitoba Housing still holds the hammer in terms of that they are the ones that are going to sign off and approve their budgets or not. They feel like they are being nickel-and-dimed, as one corporation put it, or that they are being controlled through the budget approval process.

Mr. Reimer: I think one of the things that comes about sometimes when there is a different

type of approach or different type of change or a difference in direction is that there is always this bit of apprehension or this so-called resistance to change, that something new is going to be a detriment to the status quo.

This is one of the reasons why when we were in negotiations, I should say, with the federal government on the devolution that it became quite evident that what we were looking at maintaining was the status quo, was looking after the private nonprofits, all the other direct and sponsored, managed units in working for a status quo.

We did not change their relationship, because we felt it was important not to create any anxiety among the groups. I think what happened or what may have happened is that there was this apprehension and the assumption that Manitoba Housing was going to come in with a totally different type of approach or a more dictatorial type of attitude or a more direct hands-on type of management for these private nonprofits or whatever group it was and that there was going to be a change.

We have not changed our procedures or our directions or our programming in regard to the handling of these units. The reporting mechanism has remained the same. I think the perceived difference is and the only difference is the fact that the reporting mechanism now goes to the provincial government instead of to the federal government. For some reason people seem to think that is going to be an infringement on their decision making or their ability of independent thinking and making decisions.

But it was not our intention when we took over the federal portfolio that we were looking at changes. We tried to reassure them. I know I met with MASHM. I talked to their executive to assure them that we are not looking at trying to disturb their relationships. It is a reporting mechanism that instead of going to the federal government now, it just goes to us. We do not look to change these types of relationships. The reporting mechanism is the biggest change and, like I say, it now goes to the provincial government instead of the federal government.

Ms. Cerilli: The minister is not answering the specifics of my questions. He is making general

statements that they have not changed their system, but the nonprofit corporations, he is right, are seeing that there could be a difference between dealing with the federal government and the provincial government. Nonprofit housing corporations are seeing the difference. They, as given by the examples I have just mentioned here today, are seeing that the budget approval system, which some people dealing with CMHC would find it just routine, and now they feel that they are either in some cases, as I mentioned the other day, they were not given any information about who they are supposed to be dealing with, and, on another hand, their budget is scrutinized to the point where they are handing over the keys to the government. Rather than developing sort of a working relationship and trying to keep the volunteer nonprofit group involved, that was jeopardized.

So my point, though, is to try to find out exactly how much nonprofit housing corporations have been affected, whether they were managed by CMHC or not, and I hope that that is going to be part of the information I am going to get in terms of the maintenance schedules that I had asked for the other day, because I had in the past received information about which corporations or housing developments were going to be scheduled on the public housing side, but I am also interested in seeing how that budget process works for allocating monies to nonprofit corporations as well. So the minister can comment on that if he wants; then I am going to move on.

Mr. Reimer: No, it is okay. You can move on.

Ms. Cerilli: One of the other concerns that has been brought to my attention is that there are some family units that were operated by CMHC that are now under your portfolio. They had an RGI of 25 percent, not 27 percent as the RGI is for the Manitoba-operated family units. How are you going to deal with that?

Mr. Reimer: That would stay the same. We are not planning on making any changes in that.

Ms. Cerilli: So there is now going to be a difference in the portfolio that are family units. How do you anticipate that is going to affect the portfolio as a whole?

Mr. Reimer: I do not believe that that is going to effect any changes at all because the 25 percent was for the rural and native housing. That was there prior. We have taken that under provincial responsibility now, and we will not be changing that formula setup at all.

Ms. Cerilli: I am certainly not advocating that there be a rent increase, but I am, again, just bringing these concerns forward that have been raised with me by some of the nonprofit corporations. They will be happy to hear what you have just said. They will be happy to know that they are not going to get a rent increase.

* (1540)

Mr. Reimer: I should point out that since I became Minister of Housing, we have not had any rent increase in our percentage regarding the formula rent, even though the federal Liberal government has advocated that they go to a 30 percent RGI threshold. But we in Manitoba have maintained our present threshold of 27 percent for family and 25 percent for bachelor and for rural and native housing. So even though the federal Liberal government has advocated a change, we here in Manitoba have not changed that way.

Ms. Cerilli: I know we have had this discussion before, but I will just mention it now, because I know I have had letters and I have copied them to the minister, where I have had the federal minister—at the time, I think it was Mr. Dingwall—say that they did not have any policy change on their portfolio, and we know that that is true. Theirs stayed at 25 percent and Manitoba's was increased to 27 percent. Granted, that was before this minister became responsible for Housing in Manitoba, but it must have made for some pretty interesting negotiations or discussions with the federal government when you are sitting down with them and here they are trying to get you to raise your rents and they are keeping their rents at the same level and they are trying to negotiate an agreement with you.

How do you deal with that? How did you respond? Because you just confirmed there is a differential rate on family units that is now in your portfolio. So the federal government came

to you and said: increase your rent and we would like it to go up even as high as 30 percent, but we are keeping ours at 25 percent.

Mr. Reimer: The member is right. It had interesting conversations. I was not part of them, but I know that staff were down in Ottawa doing that type of conversations. So the member is right.

Ms. Cerilli: Then to top it off, the government in Manitoba takes the whole portfolio anyway and lets the federal government off the hook and allows them to cap their rate of funding, allows them to eventually completely get out of funding social housing into the province. I just think that the government has let down low-income people and that we are starting to see in other provinces the housing and homelessness.

It is amazing how quickly the effects of the cuts, the effects of the elimination of any new construction has had an effect. I mean, it has been combined with reductions in social allowance rates. It is combined with a number of other policies, particularly in Ontario, where they have also changed their rent control legislation. We are seeing day after day the problems they are having with homeless people, the problems that they are having dealing now with a crisis situation, providing emergency shelter.

I am wondering if the minister would agree that there has to be again a federal role in housing, that there has to be a federal commitment of new dollars for new programs to address the crisis and the situation that has been created. What has his department's approach with the federal government been since the signing of this agreement?

Mr. Reimer: When the federal government set on its path of getting out of public housing, which it initiated back in the early '90s, with not only their pulling out of the participation of building new public housing, which then went later on to a capping of the dollars to public housing, which later led to the devolution, the one thing that was very evident right from the very beginning was that the federal government was going to do what it wanted to do whether you liked it or not. It was more or less put to the

provincial governments that we are getting out of public housing, you have the opportunity to negotiate with us to the best of your abilities for what you feel is adequate for your requirements in regard to taking over our portfolio, but we are getting out of it. So you are left with the position of trying to make the best deal, just like Monty Hall, in trying to come up with what is good for Manitoba.

This is one of the reasons why the program and the devolution process took a fair amount of time and effort on the department to not only negotiate for the best deal for Manitoba but to also be aware of what the stock was, what the conditions were, what the programs were, what the arrangements were, what the financing package was with the federal government had with the various groups and housing sectors so that when an evaluation could be made as to what the true dollars could be associated with it, when we went there we were fairly confident that we could be well represented in the sense of getting what we deserved for Manitoba. The federal government told us that if you do not negotiate with us and if you do not want to become the landlord, we will make arrangements with somebody else, but we are getting out of it.

So I guess the thoughts were or the consensus was, well, let us try to make some lemonade out of these lemons and see how we can get the best deal for Manitobans and come out with something that we can work with, because we can utilize the monies that flow, we can utilize any type of surpluses that are realized, and we can make decisions more on a local basis in regard to a made-in-Manitoba housing policy.

Those are some of the things, the pros and cons that were brought forth for discussion when we were looking at the devolution package.

Mr. David Faurischou, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

The member is right. The federal government has pulled itself out of public housing. Whether they would turn around and come back into it, I think most provincial governments would look favourably upon federal participation back in public housing. We would always

welcome some sort of partnership arrangement where they felt that they could be a partner involved with public housing just like there was before where you actually not only had the federal but you had the municipal governments also being partners. It is those types of arrangements that I think we would be willing to look at again and to try to promote with our counterparts.

I know there is a ministers' meeting coming up sometime this summer. That will be one of the topics under discussion, the federal government's involvement with housing. One of the hardest things we have ever had to do and the one thing that has not come about in the whole time that I have been Minister of Housing is to have a Housing ministers' meeting with the Minister of Housing for the federal government attending. He or she, well, he, it has been male, but neither one of the Housing ministers ever attended any of the Housing ministers' meetings that the provincial governments sponsored. He was always invited but never attended.

So there is an invitation to him again this summer for the Housing ministers' meeting. Whether he will attend, we do not know. The federal government has been very reluctant to make any type of commitment towards public housing of any sorts. Like I say, we are not the only province I believe that is looking to the federal government to fulfill some of its responsibilities and the social obligations that we feel are necessary.

Ms. Cerilli: Well, the minister's answer raises a number of other questions. We know that there are other provinces that have said, no, thank you, to the federal government, and they are continuing to operate. It is interesting that those are the provinces, particularly B.C. and Quebec, that also have their own funded social housing construction program at this time.

* (1550)

I am wondering if the minister has had any discussions with those two governments or his department has had any discussion with B.C. or Quebec about how they are now operating with CMHC. I assume then that their budgets are also now capped at the same year even though

CMHC would still be managing that portfolio. You can clarify that. But what are the advantages? I mean, we had a discussion the other day about the fact that the only way you are going to plan on saving money is by not hiring as many of the CMHC staff that were involved in managing their portfolio. You really did not have a lot of other specific explanations about how you are going to find efficiencies or savings.

So, again, I go back to the statement I made earlier that you simply let the federal government off the hook. By the year 2030 in Manitoba, they are going to have completely walked away. I want to also ask the minister about any other specific discussions he has had with particularly the new minister that has been assigned for homelessness in Canada. What is that new minister going to offer us? How does that fit in with the kinds of discussions you have been having with the federal government?

Mr. Reimer: In doing an analysis or a comparison between the provinces that the member mentioned, each one of the provinces has its own uniqueness in its component and in its relationship with the federal government in regard to public housing. There is a bit of a similarity.

I guess our closest similarity in comparison really is with Saskatchewan in our numbers and our mix of housing, because other provinces have a different type of mix, particularly in British Columbia. What has happened there is because of the land prices and the appreciation of a lot of the properties in the downtown area, what the provincial government is able to do there is they have been able to sell off some of their public housing, and with that money realize some significant appreciation of capital dollars that they can reinvest into additional housing, so the housing in British Columbia enjoy a market that gives them the ability to take advantage of a fair amount of appreciation.

In British Columbia, too, they have a very, very long waiting list. In fact, I have been told that their vacancy rate is very, very low, and they have over 40,000 people who are on a waiting list to get into public housing in British Columbia. So British Columbia is in a bit of a

different scenario than Manitoba in regard to numbers and quality and quantity of houses, plus the fact of the amount of people who are wanting to get into public housing.

Quebec, we are not really sure what type of arrangement Quebec has with the federal government in regard to its housing. I can recall talking to the Quebec Housing minister at one of our Housing ministers' meetings. Their arrangement for public housing down there is—I do not even know how to explain it. I would have to really delve into that to give a correct answer on that. As to the minister of homelessness that has been appointed by the federal government, she has been invited to the ministers' meeting. I do not know whether she has replied to it—to come to the Housing ministers' meeting—but I should say that I have had no correspondence from her. There has been no contact on the federal, unless it has been to the department, but we have not had any type of overtures or contacts or inquiries from the new minister of homelessness. So the only contact that we are aware of is that there has been an invitation sent to her to attend the Housing ministers' meeting which is sometime this summer, and homelessness is on the agenda.

Ms. Cerilli: So the minister's own department has not had any direct correspondence to find out what kind of programs they are going to offer. What does it mean to be the minister of homelessness in Canada? What is she going to do? Have you not made that kind of inquiry to the federal government?

Mr. Reimer: I guess there has been contact made on the senior administration level as a runup to the meeting that is scheduled for this summer where the minister of homelessness has been invited. It would appear on the senior administrative level of the various governments that there has been either correspondence or conversations as to try to bring forth some sort of presentation package or presentation to the minister of homelessness at that meeting. That is one of the reasons why she has been invited and why it is part of the agenda for that ministers' meeting.

Ms. Cerilli: That leads me to the question then: what would the Minister of Housing in Manitoba say? What kind of presentation or requests

would you be making to that new minister?—especially given your comments about B.C. You made some references there that suggest that, well, you did not sort of carry it through, but you were implying that because of these differences in the market between Manitoba and B.C., you were implying something. I do not know what you were implying. So that is what I am asking you is: what kind of message would you be taking to our new federal minister of homelessness?

Mr. Reimer: I think that one of the things, from what I am told on the senior level, is that the various levels of provinces across Canada are interested as to what this—we are also interested in—function or the parameters or the decision making that this person has in regard to addressing homelessness and whether it does have a possible allocation of funds or some sort of new direction to address the homelessness in Canada. I guess one of the reasons for the ministers' meeting is to try to get some sort of cohesiveness and everybody around the table at the same time so that there is this exchange of objectives that we expect from her and that would initiate some sort of movements on our part as to what we can address for considerations in trying to get some sort of movement towards homelessness that has been addressed as a problem by the federal government. I guess we would look to her to present her position, and then it is a response on our part as to how we can take advantage of that program.

* (1600)

Ms. Cerilli: Would you not be a little bit more proactive in the sense of saying to the federal government, okay, you have a new minister for homelessness. Here is the situation in Manitoba, and that is why I referenced. I understand it is different from B.C., but here is the situation in Manitoba. Here are some recommendations of how you can help, the kinds of programs that we think would meet the needs in Manitoba, the kinds of funding initiatives, that kind of thing. Have you not had the initiative to do that?

Mr. Reimer: The department is doing some background and some research as to what should be discussed in regard to homelessness, and areas that would be considered would be areas in

around the rural and native housing of homelessness in that particular area and also in Winnipeg. So there is some background. I know that there has been, as mentioned, work with CMHC in getting some of their materials together, and the department is working on briefings of that nature for presentation at this ministers' conference. So there is some research being carried out by the department on that right now, yes.

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Ms. Cerilli: I would like a little bit more detail on that. The minister has made reference to the situation in rural and northern Manitoba in respect to native people, I think you just said, and in terms of in Winnipeg. Can you be a bit more specific than that?

Mr. Reimer: I have been advised that the agenda is still being worked on. In fact, senior staff will be going down to Ottawa this weekend, I believe it is, or this week sometime to finalize an agenda on it. So these are in the planning stages. The information is looked at in a broad sense to be part of an agenda. It is on the agenda, but as to the specifics as to what is going to be part of it, I guess the staff is still working on that. When I say staff, I mean not only staff within here in Manitoba but staff right across Canada for the senior levels. When there is a ministers' meeting called, the senior staff get together and look at the various components of the agenda, and then that is what is finally brought forth for the meeting for the ministers for discussion. But the one item, like I mentioned, that is on the agenda is homelessness. As to what components it is, that is still being worked on with all the provinces.

Ms. Cerilli: And this meeting is this summer, at some point.

Mr. Reimer: No, it is okay.

Ms. Cerilli: I asked when the meeting was.

Mr. Reimer: Yes, it is this summer, in July.

Ms. Cerilli: Could I ask just for a short break so I could talk to my colleague here just for a second? Excuse us just for a minute.

Thanks for letting us take that quick break. Where were we? We were talking about the new federal minister for homelessness. I was trying to get a little bit more information about the way the minister would portray the needs of Manitoba with respect to housing and homelessness to this new minister. I can appreciate what he said, that the department is still sort of working on the specifics of their presentation, but I guess I just want to ask the minister generally the kind of message that he would take to the federal minister about the situation in Manitoba. What are our needs in Manitoba?

* (1610)

Mr. Reimer: I guess, as looking at housing as a Housing minister here in Manitoba, I can only relate to the fact that here in Manitoba we do have a fair amount of vacancies. We have vacancies throughout most of Manitoba for housing units. This housing is available for people of need, and we certainly do not have a waiting list like some areas, like some of the large metropolitan areas like Toronto or Vancouver, where there is no place for people of need to go to in a sense to try to find accommodations. Here in Winnipeg or here in Manitoba, even throughout all of Manitoba, in a lot of the small towns and small cities we do have public housing. Public housing is prevalent in the towns and in the villages and in the city here in Winnipeg, and there is generally a fair amount of vacant units available.

So, as Housing minister, I would say that we have units available. We have the ability to process claims in a very expedient manner. We have ability to assign people to try to help people fill out forms or to make sure that they have the access available, not only through our central offices or some of our site offices where we have people available to fill out forms. So, I would think that, if there is a need for someone who needs accommodations that we still have the ability within our Manitoba Housing portfolio to accommodate a fair amount of people still that need a place to stay here in Manitoba.

Ms. Cerilli: Okay. I wonder if the minister would not agree—and I appreciate what he said about the vacancy rates, and the fact that someone coming and looking into the situation

in Manitoba would see that there are vacancies not only in the public housing sector but also in the private market that are high compared to some of our other cities in Canada. So would the minister not agree that the problem in Manitoba then is more the quality of the housing and the affordability of those units vis-a-vis peoples' low income, vis-a-vis the people that are either on social allowance or that are working for minimum wage or so? Would he not agree then that would paint the picture of the housing need in Manitoba? It is more the fact that the quality of the housing, particularly on the private market, that is in the range of people who are lower income. Is the issue and the fact that because of the declining value of properties, the maintenance of a lot of the properties is an issue, that the quality of the stock of housing is declining and that is part of the picture in Manitoba?

Mr. Reimer: I think that if people are on social assistance or in a low paying or a low income situation, we still will accommodate them in public housing. We certainly do not discriminate against a person's economic position that we would not let them get into public housing. I think that we would always look at them in a manner for occupancy in one of our units. As to the conditions, I guess we always try to be very, very diligent in our maintenance and our upkeep of our buildings, and I would think that the conditions certainly should not be a detriment to moving into public housing.

Ms. Cerilli: The minister is not answering my question, and maybe he is not realizing my point. What I am trying to do is get the minister to explain to me his view of the situation in housing for low income people dealing with homelessness, as he would present it to the minister, federally, for homelessness. We are talking now about both private market housing where a lot of Manitobans who are living on those low incomes or welfare rates are living. They are living in rooming houses, they are living in properties that are not in very good repair in a lot of cases, and that is what I am asking you. Is that the kind of message you would take to this new federal minister to say, look it, the situation in Manitoba is not like it is in B.C. or Toronto? It is different here.

That is what I am wanting to get from you, is to describe how you see it. So what are the needs? What kinds of ways then would the federal minister for homelessness be able to make sure that there are programs that are going to meet the needs in Manitoba, that they do not design a program dealing with homelessness that is only going to meet the needs of Vancouver or Toronto, that we want something that is going to be available that is going to meet the needs of Winnipeggers, the people in Brandon or Flin Flon or Churchill where I understand there is a real shortage of housing as well.

Mr. Reimer: What the member is referring to, I think, is a fair amount of input or situations that are not necessarily under the jurisdiction of Housing because of the overlap with Family Services and social services and some of the problems that are associated with that, and it is hard for me to speculate too far in that particular area because they do not really cover my portfolio. My portfolio covers public housing and the supply of public housing to people that are in need and to make sure that the public housing is of a standard and a quality that is of acceptance by the people. A lot of the social aspects and the other aspects regarding homelessness are not necessarily tied to the affordability of housing. There are the other factors that are tied in to the social aspects and the social services that are possibly needed to address some of the problems that are in the homeless situation.

Our department is not equipped, not directed to that type of analysis in regard to the problems of homelessness. Our department is geared towards trying to supply the housing at a need-analysis basis for people who need public housing. But, as to the homelessness factor, I believe that there are a lot of other social factors that are involved with that that I do not feel our department is qualified to answer along those lines.

Ms. Cerilli: Just to clarify then, I am talking to the minister who is going to go to this meeting. Am I not talking to the minister that is going to go to the meeting of federal ministers of Housing where homelessness is on the agenda? The minister can talk about how there are other social issues related to homelessness. Yes, that

is true, but if you are the minister who is going to go, you are the minister who is going to have to have a pretty good sense of what the needs are.

* (1620)

Maybe there is a requirement for other departments to have input down the road, but it sounds to me like you are the minister who is going to have to come up with the plan through this meeting of other Housing ministers. So to suggest that you are the minister just for public housing and that is your mandate is not so. Your mandate also includes references right in the Estimates booklet about market housing. I do not think all that is going to be discussed is homelessness vis-a-vis sort of social housing and public housing.

So I do not know how to approach this any more with the minister in terms of asking him to put his own view of the situation in Manitoba forward in terms of what the needs are, and how can Manitoba take advantage of the opportunity now being presented by the federal government. Maybe they assigned this new minister purely for political reasons, and maybe they just saw that, yes, homelessness was becoming an issue. One of our federal M.P.s has done a cross-Canada campaign and has done a lot of work to try to raise the issue. Lo and behold, the federal government has now appointed this new minister. So I would think that Manitoba would want to be part of putting forward the needs that are across the country.

I am raising this because it is important, because Manitoba and the situation in Winnipeg and across the province is unique. It is different here. The fact that the property values in the core of Winnipeg have gone down so dramatically is a significant issue. The fact that the housing stock that your department manages has historically had a high rate of vacancies is significant. So how are you going to portray then the fact that there are still needs here, that there still is a problem here? The fact is that, you know, the situation is different here. So that is why this question is important, and why I have not just dropped the matter. I think this is serious.

The federal government has opened an opportunity here for the provinces, I think, to be

saying: Good, get the federal government back into this issue. Get the federal government back into providing some leadership and some dollars and some programs to deal with the fact that there are people across the country either living on the street or forced to live in housing situations that are dangerous to their health and their well-being.

So I am going to ask you one more time: what is the picture in Manitoba that you are going to present?

Mr. Reimer: I think one of the things that is going to come out of the meeting is inviting the minister of homelessness to this meeting to find out exactly what the federal government's criteria is and what its plans are and what its agenda is in addressing the situations that have been outlined in regard to homelessness.

We would look towards the federal government to define its role and its objectives and its criteria. From that, I think that we would be able to chart a course or chart some sort of direction or decision making as to the response that we feel is appropriate for Manitoba. It is more or less going down there to know the house rules and then coming up with a program that we can adapt for the best made-in-Manitoba type of solution. To go down there without the knowledge of exactly what the criteria is or what the federal government is possibly proposing is really the horse before the cart in a sense of trying to anticipate what the federal government may or may not be coming forth with.

So I think that there would be a more constructive approach to trying to come up with a program for addressing Manitoba's problem in regard to homelessness to know exactly what the federal government is proposing as to what they feel is a necessity and what they feel their direction should be. Maybe, as the member mentioned, maybe the federal government just appointed this person as window dressing and there is no meat there at all, and it may just be a fact-finding minister that has no clout. Nothing may even come out of it, but we will not know that until there is a meeting and a direction or intent comes out of that and then we can respond to it. So I think that that is the best way to approach any type of programming that

Manitoba wants to put forth to try to take advantage of any type of perceived or anticipated programs that may come out of the federal government.

Ms. Cerilli: Well, I think the minister and I are disagreeing on this, and it may seem like we are having a chicken or the egg kind of argument, what comes first. If you want to have a strong case presented, what do you do? Do you wait to see what the government federally is going to say, or do you go forward to them and say look it, here are what the needs are in Manitoba. Develop your criteria and your programs based on what we have to say that is going to deal with the situation in Manitoba. But your wait-and-see sort of take a position after the federal government has already come up with its program, I think that it is going then to be tailored not necessarily with Manitoba in mind.

So I am concerned about the approach that you are taking to this. I would think that we would want to go forward not as the minister is suggesting with the cart before the horse, but I think the minister is going to be closing the barn door when the horse is gone and that the minister is going to be trying to then fit into a federal program on homelessness that is not going to meet the situation in Manitoba. I am wondering if the minister is just not wanting to divulge his view of the situation in housing in Manitoba in Estimates now or if this is some other kind of strategy that he just does not want to have to come forward with what his view is. I mean, I am asking you for your own view here.

Mr. Reimer: I just did a double-check with the department again and they inform me, other than the announcement, nothing has come down in regard to criteria or direction in regard to this new ministry, and, in fact, I think it was mentioned that we do not even have a telephone number for this new department that the federal government is proposing. We look with anticipation to some of the things that might or might not transpire from meeting Madam Minister.

Ms. Cerilli: I am going to ask the minister if he will consider a proposal that is being made as we speak. Basically, this is a proposal that is being put forward by one of the M.P.s federally, and it

is going across the country, and basically they are asking for support. I just got it myself in the mail today, and I am pretty sure I brought it up with me.

I cannot find the sheet of paper. I will just have to go by memory. The proposal is being put forth by the M.P. for Vancouver East, Libby Davies, and she has conducted across Canada a consultation and has done a report calling an unnatural disaster, declaring homelessness a disaster across Canada. What she is calling for is for public support of a motion that would ask the federal government in the next budget to add an additional 1 percent of the overall federal budgetary expenditures into housing.

I am wondering if this is something that the minister is aware of yet. Again, it is a fairly new initiative. The motion is going to be debated this month in federal parliament, and if it does pass, then it would go forward to the government. The position would obviously require a large portion, I think—I am not even sure. I do not have the information in front of me, as I said, and I do not think it actually indicates then what 1 percent of the federal budget would mean. But I am going to follow this up myself, and I am wondering if the minister would agree to follow this up as well and consider supporting such a motion, if the Manitoba government would support the federal government allocating an additional 1 percent into housing for Canadians?

Mr. Reimer: I have not seen that proposal that the member is mentioning. Maybe it got put into the department. I will have the department look in their mailboxes and try to see what it is encompassing in regard to any type of proposal, but we would follow that with great interest.

* (1630)

Ms. Cerilli: This notice does have the Liberal homelessness minister as Claudette Bradshaw. We can solicit her support for motion M-604 by her e-mail. Her fax number is on here. I would be quite happy to get a copy of this to the minister, and I am interested in his getting back to me then on his consideration of support for this motion. I think it would be a good thing as well if this were discussed at your ministers' meeting, if this is the kind of thing that the federal minister should hear is that provincial

ministers are saying: you know, federal government, you have to start investing again into programs to house low-income people.

So I will make a copy of this for the minister. I am assuming the minister will wait for that, and he can, I guess, consult with his staff and figure if there would be consideration of Manitoba to endorse such a proposal.

There are a couple of specific issues that I want to get into from the devolution agreement while we are still talking about federal-provincial issues. Now, actually I have made a copy and I have circled the number on here, page 5. This is a document the minister gave to me quite a while ago, the social housing agreement. I will just pass that to the minister so he can look at it. Basically my question is to get an explanation of what this means, No. 6, Authorities and Responsibilities, (b)(2).

Mr. Reimer: What that is referring to is that when they are talking about targeted households, we are talking about households that are under the RGI designation and that they would be the ones that would receive any type of benefits that were realized and that the funding could only go to those and we could not change those, could not change or redirect funding that is under the existing, you know, to the targeted households in that designation.

Ms. Cerilli: I just want to have that explained to me again. I was not following you.

Mr. Reimer: What it means is that when you are talking about targeted households, targeted households are households that have been identified that get the RGI, that are on the RGI formula. Any monies that are realized from that cannot be retargeted or redirected to programs that are not under the RGI formula. So we cannot just put that money anywhere else. It has to stay within that program.

Ms. Cerilli: I understand. I appreciate that clarification. Similarly, you gave me back the copy, but I was going to give you another one on here. It is under Principals, Nontargeted Amounts, (e)(2). So that would be on the previous page to that. It would be page 4, the last item.

Mr. Reimer: I think in reading any type of legalese, you know, sometimes it is the wording itself that becomes quite compounding and disjointed, but that is why we have so many lawyers on staff.

But I am told that this particular paragraph, what it means is more or less what I mentioned right from the beginning, that any monies that are realized by any type of removal, sale or disposal, destruction and any funding that has been tied into that through CMHC funding, that funding has to be reallocated back into housing of either an RGI nature or under targeted programming. It cannot just be pulled out and not utilized back into the housing sector.

So I think it goes through here and it says that there may be different ways, but it all refers back to the idea of housing funding stays within housing. Any realization of surpluses stays within housing or is targeted for housing.

* (1640)

Ms. Cerilli: Well, I think one of the things we need to do then, and I do not think this is even in here, and that is deal with a definition for targeted, because that seems to be one of the things that is confusing. Some people might think that targeted means families or seniors or something like that, but what you are telling me is targeted means RGI units.

For example, we know—and this is an issue I am going to be dealing with soon because I have raised it with you before, is if you have a family that is paying of \$700 a month for an RGI unit, you are taking all that money in, but that money has to go back into the property. You cannot sort of take money out.

Can you take money out and sort of put it into a fund in the department that would still be designated for housing, or is this agreement saying it is even more specific than that, that it has to go back into sort of those RGI-targeted units?

Mr. Reimer: No, we cannot bank it or hold it. It has to be redirected back into the RGI or housing projects, yes.

Ms. Cerilli: Similarly, then, with respect to the other one, where if you sell a property, the revenues also have to go back into the existing portfolio. You cannot take money from the sale of one of the properties and put it into a fund that would even go to other new programs?

Mr. Reimer: Yes, you can, but as long as that funding is redirected towards a targeted nonprofit funding program. Possibly a new program, yes, but it has to be a targeted program. I should maybe refer back to page 2, the member may have there. There is a definition of what they mean by "targeted household," and I will maybe just read it into the record: a targeted household means a household which at the time of its entry into housing in the portfolio qualified or qualifies within the housing income limits referred to in paragraph 5(c) or at the time of its entry into housing in the portfolio before the effective date met income requirements for housing assistance then enforces established by CMHC and MHRC.

So when we are talking about targeted households, that is more or less what we are talking about.

Ms. Cerilli: Okay. That gets me into the other issue that I wanted to get into which is the housing income limits, and this is what I was referencing the other day as well. There is another part of the agreement. It is one of the schedules that now requires that you have to make sure there are housing income limits, so I want to find out what are the housing income limits for the RGI units, for bachelor, one bedroom, two bedroom, three bedroom?

Mr. Reimer: The member was referring to the income limits, this is for 1998; 1999 has not been set yet. But 1998, for example, here in Winnipeg, the one bedroom is \$18,500; the two bedroom is \$23,500; the three bedroom is \$29,000; and the four bedroom is \$32,500. It varies in different districts.

In the Thompson area it is a little bit lower right across the board on each one of the components. In Thompson it is \$18,000, \$20,000, \$27,000 and \$30,000. In the Selkirk area it is \$18,000, \$22,500, \$25,500 and \$29,000. In the towns of Beausejour, Dauphin,

Steinbach and Swan River, it is \$17,500, \$21,500, \$25,500 and \$29,000. Other rural areas, it is \$17,000, \$19,500, \$22,500, \$25,500. In the Brandon area, it is \$17,000, \$23,000, \$26,500 and \$29,000. So you can see that it varies from place to place.

Ms. Cerilli: I appreciate the minister reading that into the record. I can get the information from there. I stopped trying to write it all down. I will just work from the one that I did keep track of, which is Winnipeg, to start off with.

There are a number of questions I want to ask about this. It is a pretty serious issue because, as we know, we have got families that live in Manitoba Housing specifically because their income fluctuates. This provides a lot of labour requirements to the department to have to continually recalculate people's rent. It also means that there is the other job of trying to calculate the base rent, which goes on their lease.

I want to first of all ask the minister to explain—I will use the three-bedroom in Winnipeg example—\$29,000 is the housing income limit. I am assuming if someone applies to Manitoba Housing and, at the time they apply, their limit is exceeded, that they will just be told: I am sorry, you do not qualify, you are going to have to look in the market.

Mr. Reimer: Yes, that is true.

* (1650)

Ms. Cerilli: The problem we get into then is when people enter into public housing and their income is lower than the income limit but, while they are living there, their employment improves and their income goes up. That is the kind of situation that creates a difficulty then for the tenants in feeling like they are continually earning more money but 27 percent of it is going to Manitoba Housing and that total amount is continuing to rise. They feel like they cannot keep up. They feel like they cannot save enough to get out and they cannot continue to pay the increased amount because they just see it as raising money for Manitoba Housing, and quite legitimately. If our mortgage on our home continually went up, I think we would find that difficult.

I want to ask the minister if the department sees this as an issue. Do you see this as a problem in terms of people entering Manitoba Housing, particularly if they are on really low income? The family that I have been dealing with most recently entered at \$14,000. Their income went up, good for them, to \$26,000, and now it is at \$39,000, which is \$10,000 more than the housing income limit. Do you see this as an issue?

Mr. Reimer: I think we have to look back to the original concept of providing public housing. Public housing was initiated as a need to help people move up through their progression of not only life but also their work cycle and their income cycles and their improvement in their lot in life.

As was mentioned, there are a lot of people who come in way under the threshold. Then if they do improve their job prospects or their income level, they are tied in to a formula, but we do find that a lot of people, as they progress up the income level, they come to a point where they find that possibly they can get a better deal in the private market or into moving onto possibly even buying their own type of home.

With the attractiveness of some of the very, very low down payments now, sometimes it is more beneficial for the person to look at getting into their own home. I understand now that you can get into a home for less than 2.5 percent down payment when you take into account your 5 percent, and 2.5 percent I believe can be used as sweat equity, I believe, in some of these purchases.

So the purchase of homes is an option, but with the formula rent, as the person's income does rise and they do become, as the member mentioned, higher than the threshold, they will be paying more rent. There is no doubt about it, because it is on a formula.

Ms. Cerilli: So I will conclude from the minister's answer that this is not an issue for the department, that the formula is there, if people come in and they earn more money and if, then, in the case of this family, they are more than \$10,000. They have four kids, twins that are three. This family spends \$200 a month on

diapers. They are having difficulty saving money. They have Hydro bills that are incredible. They are having difficulty saving money living in Manitoba Housing so that they can get out.

I read the minister the quote from the downtown little paper—I do not know if he ever gets this. It is called the West End Streets. It calls Manitoba Housing Hotel California. You can check out but you can never leave. I will make the minister a copy of this too. It talks about how families feel trapped, how they can never get out of Manitoba Housing, because they either have—it is interesting the Minister of Family Services (Mrs. Mitchelson) is here. I will make her a copy of this too, because it involves social allowance in this particular case.

Maybe I will just read some of this: Manitoba Housing is like Hotel California. You can check out anytime, but you can never leave. That is, unless someone, a knight on white horse, comes along or you get evicted. The latter was my experience. I had been waiting to move away from Manitoba Housing for over a year. I had searched for a supportive community and believed I had found one. With a positive reference from Housing, I was accepted and ready to move. Then welfare stopped me dead in my tracks. You can move, they said, but you have to pay your own moving expenses and your damage deposit. So I stayed. There you have it. Hotel California.

So this is a situation where they felt like it was social allowance that was putting up the roadblocks, but in the case of this other family, which I have written to the minister about, it was actually Manitoba Housing that was continuing to raise the rent on the base of the formula.

So the question I want to ask the minister is, like I said, it sounds like you do not think that this is an issue, but how do you calculate the base rent for their lease? Because that is the problem here. In the case of this family, they are paying over \$700 a month for their rent. They have checked around the private market. They can get a similar three-bedroom townhouse now on the private market from between \$525 and \$560 a month.

So how is it that we have public housing leases that have a rent that is higher than the market? If someone has such a variance in their income that at one point then they are higher than the income limit, how does the department deal with that? I mean, if they are already a tenant there, but their income limit has gone beyond what your threshold is, how do you deal with that? How can you just work that into their lease and have them at some times paying such a high rent that they cannot save to move?

Mr. Reimer: The formula that is used, as we mentioned before, is a set formula. It is 27 percent. Just as we have a lot of people who live under the threshold, who live in these various units under the income thresholds and pay rent, we do have people who make over that threshold limit, who do pay rent that is, as the member mentioned, maybe more than what is in the immediate market.

But people have a choice. They can move to a different location. The member mentioned that these people say that there is a townhouse for I think she said \$550. People can move out, but some people stay within our Manitoba Housing complex and pay the rent, and they are quite happy because of friendships or community or an area that they feel that they want to stay in. So they have a choice.

Ms. Cerilli: Maybe the minister is not hearing or is not reading the mail he is getting, but the point is they do not have a choice, and they feel trapped because they are in this ever-escalating higher-rent payment to Manitoba Housing, that because they are making more money, 27 percent is an ever-increasing amount, and they cannot save enough to pay the down payment on a new place, plus make the month's payment to Manitoba Housing, to ever move. Or to move, sometimes it takes them years, especially if they are in a situation where they are seasonally employed.

* (1700)

I can appreciate that some of the tenants are, where they may be in a situation that for part of the year their income is below the income limit, but then for another part of the year, it is way higher than the income limit. In those kinds of

situations, the family may decide that they just want to stay in Manitoba Housing, and it sort of equals out over the whole year, but in other situations, they feel like they are locked in. They have signed a lease with you, and what I am trying to understand is the formula you use to calculate the rents that are so high, that are more than what is on the market.

First of all, the first question is do you understand that they do not really have a choice, that they have signed the lease? The lease says that they can pay as much as over \$700 a month if their income goes that high. The other question then following from that is what is the formula you use to calculate the rent for that base rent that goes on the lease? The other question is what is the formula for calculating the housing income unit?

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Arthur-Virden, on a point of order? [interjection] No, for clarification.

Mr. James Downey (Arthur-Virden): It is for clarification. I am having a hard time understanding, too. I guess the question is what stops the individuals who are renting the Manitoba public housing unit from giving notice? What is the time frame they would have to give notice and move into the less costly leased facility that the member is referring to?

When she says they are trapped, it seems to me that if they could give one month or two months or three months or six months notice—what is the time frame that they would have to give notice, so they could—

An Honourable Member: He is out of order.

Mr. Downey: Pardon me. I am just trying to get clarification because I am trying to get a better understanding of the problem that you are speaking to, but that is the question: how much time do they have to give notice, so they could rent this lower cost facility which is a bit different?

Mr. Reimer: In regard to the time frame, we give 90 days notice of any type of rent increase. The tenant then can give us 30 days notice that they want to move. So theoretically if we get their income statements, and we say: your rent

is now going to be going up because you have additional income, we give them 90 days notice that within 90 days your rent is going to be adjusted to this X amount more because your income has gone up. They can give us 30 days notice that they are going to move, and they are still paying the old rent, so it is not as if the rent increase becomes immediate. The tenant has an advantage of almost 60 days to get out of that additional rent that they are being asked to pay, so it works to the tenant's favour.

If they realize that when they come to us with their income statements, the calculation is done and it says, okay, we notice that your rent is going up, we are giving you effective the first of the month 90 days notice that in three months it is going up to this amount. That tenant then can say, well, I do not want to pay that rent, I am giving you 30 days notice, and I am moving out. Fair game and it happens.

Ms. Cerilli: Okay. Now we are getting somewhere. So the minister's position is that the family would have two months to save up the required moving cost, expenses, damage deposit on a new place, that they would have at least two to three months to make that decision and to sign a lease on a new place. I guess we will just have to sit down with some of these families and see how that actually works out in terms of the amount that they actually have to have.

I mean, again, I am raising this because I have had numerous families approach me and say this is a problem for them, that they are not making it up. Maybe the situation is occurring when the families are to a point, especially if they have a number of children, when they realize that if they can make the savings for a down payment on a home and that sort of changes everything, then that is the situation when, even though they only have to give you 30 days notice, it is going to take probably more than three months for them to actually save up to make a down payment on a home.

In the meantime, they go through this cycle of having their rent go up in three months and then again in another couple of months, and again over a period of time. So if I might just finish, how does the minister approach that, because we do have a lot of families with a number of children that are facing this situation?

Mr. Reimer: I should further clarify to the member that the rent does not go up all the time. It goes up only once during a 12-month period. However, if that person unexpectedly gets laid off or is terminated, they make immediate application to us and the rent goes down immediately. We take the rent down as fast as possible when a person comes into difficulties, but we give them 90 days notice when it goes up. It only goes up once during a lease period which is signed on a 12-month process.

I mean, we try to accommodate that tenant as much as we can. They come into a situation, laid off or seasonal or something like that, they come down to our office and say I got laid off Monday, boom, we adjust it.

Ms. Cerilli: I understand that in terms of what the minister said of how the rent goes down automatically. But I have sat down with tenants and I have seen their leases and I have seen the statements they get for the rent. I want to clarify that what you are telling me then is if the base rent—and I have seen some of them as high as \$900 a month. That is on their lease. That is the maximum that they could spend on rent on their lease. Are you telling me that if in a 12-month period, during that time of the lease, their income continues to go up, that they will only have one rent increase?

Mr. Reimer: That is right. When the lease comes up for renewal and they come to us with their income statements—and we take the numbers from Revenue Canada, that they report—and their income went up, their rent will go up then for the next 12-month period.

Ms. Cerilli: Then, perhaps, some of the people that—[interjection]

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister, to complete his answer.

Mr. Reimer: I am sorry. And there again, I am saying they have 90 days notice that the rent is going to go up again.

Ms. Cerilli: I know there is an appeal mechanism now, and they can go and see the property managers and staff, and they can have a

recalculation done, and I often recommend that people do that, but I am certain, as I have sat down with some of these tenants and looked at all their documents, that there have been times when their rent has gone up more than once in one lease agreement. So maybe it is just a case of an error being made in their situation, I am not sure. But it is good to have this policy clarified, and I will make sure the good folks who have contacted me are aware of that. I am surprised that they could not get that information just from your department.

We will see if that satisfies this family, if we sit down and look at what their budget is, if they are in a situation where maybe there are some other expenses or something that are not accounted for, that we are not considering. It just seems to me when you now have a family with four kids, their income is now that much more, \$10,000 more than what you would allow them to have when they moved in, and they are still paying 27 percent of that, you can see how they would feel like they are subsidizing Manitoba Housing. It is not subsidizing them. You are nodding. So I am feeling like we are making some progress here in the sense that we are maybe just understanding the situation more clearly that people are faced with.

* (1710)

I want to ask you then, though, because one of the criteria under the devolution agreement talks about how, and I am on page 4, Housing Income Limits (c)(1): housing income limits reflect the minimum income for households to afford appropriate accommodation without spending more than 30 percent of its income for shelter.

So I guess that is part of the consideration in developing your formula for the housing income limit, but that is the other point I have made a number of times, is that a number of these tenants who are living in public housing are paying way more than 30 percent. I mean, if you are calculating it based on 27 percent of their gross, not their net, then you are automatically—this does not even include hydro or other utilities. When CMHC came up with this figure of 30 percent, it was intended to include all those other housing costs.

So I do not understand how increasing the RGI to 27 percent could ever be in keeping with these housing income limits and the situation that we are placing low-income people in who are living in Manitoba Housing.

Mr. Reimer: Yes, I tried to get some clarification on this. Under the CMHC rules, to qualify for the housing income limits, the minimum income that the person has to qualify, has to be paying more than 30 percent of their income for shelter. If they are paying more than 30 percent for their shelter, then they can qualify under the CMHC rules if they meet this limit. That is the way it has been interpreted to me.

Ms. Cerilli: Let me check this out with the minister. You are interpreting this section as meaning that if the tenant, when they apply to Manitoba Housing, is paying more than 30 percent as they are renting or living when they apply, that means that they would qualify. Is that what you are saying?

Mr. Reimer: Provided they hit the income limits, yes.

Ms. Cerilli: I just want to try again to understand this because it is important. It says here the housing income limits reflect the minimum income for a household to afford appropriate accommodation without spending more than 30 percent of his income for shelter. To me, that would mean that housing provided by CMHC and Manitoba Housing would ensure that the tenants are not paying more than 30 percent. This does not say the people, as they apply when they are paying market rent, when they apply they qualify if they are paying more than 30 percent. I do not read that in here.

Mr. Reimer: One of the advantages of having staff with you is sometimes they are very knowledgeable about these things, and it takes a little bit of clarity to get it to the minister sometimes too. If the member is willing, I can have one of my staff try to explain it to her, if she is willing to let one of my staff talk through the Chair.

Mr. Chairperson: Does the committee agree to allow one of the staff to answer this particular question? [agreed]

Mr. Reimer: The lady will be Ms. Joan Miller.

Ms. Joan Miller (Research and Planning): Okay, there are two steps here. When they establish the hills first of all, they look at the income amounts in the province at which people would qualify using the 30 percent guideline. If they pay more than 30 percent in market rent, that is how they arrive at that income guideline. So that is step 1 for eligibility.

Step 2 is we look at what they are paying in their private market accommodation, and if they are paying over the 30 percent, no matter what their income is, as long as they are within the hills, they qualify. So there are the two steps there that have to be taken into consideration.

Ms. Cerilli: So it does not matter if, when they move into Manitoba Housing, they are paying more than 30 percent of their income to housing?

Ms. Miller: Yes it does matter. That is one of the eligibility criteria. There are the two criteria.

Ms. Cerilli: So how do you deal with folks that end up paying more than 30 percent of their income for Manitoba Housing once they are living there?

Ms. Miller: Once they are in housing, they pay at a 27 percent RGI level of their income.

Ms. Cerilli: But that is based on gross pay. Was this 30 percent criteria for CMHC also based on gross pay?

Ms. Miller: Yes, it is.

Ms. Cerilli: Would you not agree though that it was also to include utilities, and when you calculate your 27 percent, it does not include utilities for a lot of families?

Ms. Miller: When we calculate the 27 percent, that is for all utilities inclusive amount. Now, if they are paying utilities on their own, except for domestic electricity lights, they get an allowance that is a deduction from their rent to compensate for utility costs.

Ms. Cerilli: I notice that there were some exceptions there which are utilities, lights and

things like that. So, as I asked earlier, I am interested in seeing the formula. I have sat down with tenants, and I have looked at the form that they get that is part of their lease, but I am wondering if the department, to make this simpler, would provide me with the formula that is used for calculating the base rent for the lease, and if there is something different that is used in calculating the monthly rate and then whatever is used to calculate the housing income limits.

Mr. Reimer: Yes, we can make that available to the member.

Ms. Cerilli: Good. One of the other questions that I asked on behalf of this family had to do with the fact that they were told by the staffperson that was reviewing their rent calculation that their rent could go up again, and maybe that was meant that it would then go up the following year, because, as you have already said, you could only have one rent increase in a fiscal year.

Mr. Reimer: That is right.

Ms. Cerilli: Okay. I understand that there is a transfer freeze on in the department during the negotiation of the devolution agreement. Is that true that there was a freeze on transfers in Manitoba Housing?

Mr. Reimer: Maybe you could clarify what you mean by transfer. Of personnel or transfer of—

Ms. Cerilli: A transfer of tenants. The tenants requesting to move were told that there was a freeze on transfers.

Mr. Reimer: No, there was no such directive.

* (1720)

Ms. Cerilli: Is there a backlog on transfers?

Mr. Reimer: Yes, there is.

Ms. Cerilli: What does that look like?

Mr. Reimer: I have been informed that there are approximately about 300 on the transfer list. I guess there are a number of variables as to location, sizes and things of those sorts that

come into play as to the availability of transfers and how fast and how speedily they can be looked at. Also, in certain areas, there are certain waiting lists for certain types of accommodations also. So it is all brought into consideration when people are asking for moves or when they can be moved too.

Ms. Cerilli: So what are tenants told then when they want to transfer, because there is a waiting list for transfers and because there is a waiting list, I understand, for the larger units.

Mr. Reimer: I am informed that it is fairly hard to put a time frame as to the waiting list regarding requests for transfers. But, with anything, we are looking at trying to smooth that operation out and make it more efficient. One of the ways we are looking at is going to a computerized system to accommodate the waiting list. In fact, I believe the computer system is fairly close to being brought on-line shortly. One of the things we will be doing—because sometimes some of the transfers are for health reasons or for specific reasons of security or other things—there is a point system that will be assigned to the transfers for requests for transfers, so hopefully that can also put some bearing and meaning as to trying to accommodate these people as they look for different types of areas to move to or different types of accommodations. So we are trying to address it that way too.

Ms. Cerilli: I know in past years I have a list of the waiting times for the various regions. Can you provide me with that again?

Mr. Reimer: Yes, we can accommodate that.

Ms. Cerilli: How about in the seniors blocks? I have a note here from a woman who is living at Rotary Villa, and she wants to move. She wanted to get on the waiting list for all the different regions in the province that she had identified interest in. She was told that she could only go on one of the waiting lists at a time. Is that the policy of Manitoba Housing? What is the explanation for that?

Mr. Reimer: Again, looking at improvisation and the utilization of computers, one of the things that will be available is putting

individuals onto a vast amount of requests into various locations that can be accommodated. At the present time, it is done manually, and I guess the efficiency is not there. But, with the computerization coming on stream very shortly, this is one area where we feel that we can also address some of the problems that the people are experiencing.

Ms. Cerilli: How long has Manitoba Housing had computers? So it is the policy that they, in the past, have only been able to be on one waiting list and that is because it was just such an onerous job to keep track of the waiting list. Is that what you are saying?

Mr. Reimer: Yes, and we are looking for bigger and better ways of handling this and addressing this problem now with the advent of computers.

Ms. Cerilli: Just as an aside, I do not know if I ever told the minister this, but when I was a summer student one year I had one of the most boring jobs of my life at Manitoba Housing where my job was to put Cardex cards on a huge Rolodex for the SAFER and the SAFFR programs, and that is how they kept track of the applications. [interjection] I know that it has only been recently that you have made some changes to an ongoing application renewal process for SAFER and SAFFR, so I am wondering if that is the kind of system that Manitoba Housing is still using.

Mr. Reimer: I have not seen that big Rolodex there, but maybe it is hidden somewhere. Maybe there is someone up there still doing that. I do not think so, though.

Ms. Cerilli: I want to ask the minister, too, the policy in terms of providing a transfer for medical reasons. What is the requirement from a tenant in terms of a doctor's letter, and then how is consideration given in terms of the waiting lists?

Mr. Reimer: I think that that is one area where we try to accommodate. I think maybe I could mention, there is really a couple of areas that we work on a fairly high priority and that is in an abusive situation where a spouse is in an abusive situation. We will usually transfer that person in

a very, very short manner to get that person out of a situation, and in trying to accommodate someone who has a medical problem or a letter from the doctor saying that they should be closer to a certain facility or a certain area. We will try to accommodate them in a very expedient manner. The first priority has always been the abusive situation for movement in an expedient manner.

Ms. Cerilli: So what happens? Do they just get put on the top of the waiting list?

Mr. Reimer: An abusive situation, we can move people almost immediately, the same day.

Ms. Cerilli: You can move people into a vacant unit right away.

Mr. Reimer: If it is an abusive situation, we will act within hours. If it is brought to our attention, we can move someone, we will move someone. Witness protection programs, we work on those, too. It is a very, very expedient manner.

Ms. Cerilli: I know I have made that request on behalf of my constituents and people have been moved quite quickly, but I am just trying to understand if there is a waiting list and there are no vacant units, particularly if it is a family that has a couple of kids and they need a three-bedroom suite where there are waiting lists, where do you move them?

Mr. Reimer: Usually if it is an abusive situation, that person wants to get out of that situation, and we will move them into a—we have vacancies in certain areas that we will move them into, and as the situation unfolds they may be moved again. But the first priority is to get them out of that situation and into another accommodation. It may mean going to a different part of the city, but the priority is the safety and security of the spouse and the family, and then we will worry about possibly relocating them to a different area after that. But the priority is to move them, and we will always have space for that.

* (1730)

Ms. Cerilli: Okay. I wanted to ask some questions about Churchill. The minister has received a letter from one of my colleagues the MLA for Rupertsland (Mr. Robinson), and he

raised a pretty serious concern about the rate of rent there. One resident was paying more than \$1,100 per month for rent because he was behind in his rent, it says here, and Manitoba Housing is virtually a monopoly on all the housing in Churchill, and it is imperative that you ensure that it treats rents fairly. I know that generally the cost of living in the North is very high. How have you responded to this letter and the fact that this situation exists in Churchill where Manitoba Housing must have a lot of people who are beyond the housing income limit living in Churchill public housing, especially if they are paying rents that are that high?

Mr. Reimer: In regard to the individual, the one that the member is referring to in regard to the \$1,100, if we could get a little bit of further details on that, we can follow up on that one. Churchill, as I mentioned, is sort of a unique area in Manitoba regarding public housing. Most of the units in Churchill are on what we call RGI formula. However, there are, I believe, some complexes that are on market rent in that complex too, and then there is RGI up to a maximum also. So Churchill has some different and unique rules in comparison to the rest of Manitoba.

Ms. Cerilli: I would think that would be what the MLA for Rupertsland (Mr. Robinson) is looking for in this case, that there would be a ceiling, as the minister has suggested, and maybe the fellow who is paying \$1,100 per month for rent is in a unit that does not have a ceiling or is not on market rent. So I am wanting to see if you could get the information for me about the number of units in Churchill, the number that are on RGI with a ceiling, the number on the market. I would be interested in finding out the total revenue that is being collected in Churchill in Manitoba Housing properties and how that would compare with the cost for the mortgages and other maintenance and costs in Churchill. I mean, it sounds like they are more than paying their share if there are a number of people who are working and forced to live in Manitoba Housing properties simply because of the fact that there is no other housing being built in Churchill, there is no private market.

Mr. Reimer: I can assure the member that the rent that we realize out of Churchill certainly

does not cover the expenses of maintaining the stock and the heating and the condition of the housing units in Churchill. I do not know, but I think the heating alone is very expensive. I believe they have to use propane there. No, that is certainly not a positive cash flow coming out of Churchill.

Ms. Cerilli: But you provided me with that information. You have already answered my other question about the utilities and that it is not electric heat, which is also very expensive on the hydro bill, but it is actually propane. I am not aware of what it costs to heat, let us say, a two-bedroom home on propane.

Mr. Reimer: Yes, those are some of the things that I think we can get for the member.

Ms. Cerilli: One of the other concerns that has been raised with me is under the new policy at Manitoba Housing, there have been sort of get-tough rules in terms of gang activity and other criminal activity, but there has also been a notice that went to tenants telling them that you are going to start eviction proceedings if they do not pay their rent by the 3rd of the month, which is what The Residential Tenancies Act requires. But I am wondering if these policies have resulted in an increase in the number of evictions from Manitoba Housing. Can you give me a report over the last couple of years on the number of evictions that have occurred, the number of eviction proceedings that have even been initiated?

Mr. Reimer: In looking at the evictions, there has been no appreciable difference in numbers over the last couple of years even with the new house rules that we are applying and, as the member mentioned, the compliance with The Residential Tenancies Act in regard to the notice of evictions. We do not see any type of dramatic increase, but we have made a policy of working with the tenants if they do go in arrears. We do try to work with them in setting up a repayment program, but we monitor it very, very closely. I guess if it is two months, then unfortunately we have to give them an eviction notice and they have to vacate our premises. But as I mentioned, in general there is no great increase or noticeable difference in the last couple of years.

Ms. Cerilli: Well, I would appreciate getting those numbers. I am also interested then to see what the results of the new policy have been. Has it affected your arrears line in terms of having a benefit to your bottom line, this new policy of get tough on rents kind of approach?

Mr. Reimer: I have been informed that one of the things we are trying to work with very closely is the arrears and trying to monitor it very closely. As was pointed out, and I was just getting information, we have set up some site offices. In fact, just this afternoon or late this morning I was at the opening of our new office on Logan Avenue, Logan and Elgin. Then we have also opened one up on Blake Gardens. Then we are going to be opening one up on Panet Road. The idea behind that is to have some of our staff right on site, and the availability of the tenants and our staff to have a closer outreach to the communities in trying to encourage and to ensure that there is a compliance to the rent and working with them in trying to adjust to the rent. So these are some of the things that we are trying to work towards in working with our tenants.

But the Panet Road one, I guess we are looking at some time this summer.

* (1740)

Ms. Cerilli: Well, the Panet Road one may be in Radisson, actually. I am not sure what the cross street is or the address.

Mr. Reimer: I will make sure the member knows where it is.

Ms. Cerilli: Well, I appreciate finding out about the opening of these new offices. That may deal with some of the issues that have been raised by tenants in frustration with—if they want to go and have their rent recalculated, they often go and there is a notice on Manitoba Housing's door that they are closed, and they have taken the bus and carted their kids downtown, and that whole difficulty that they are presented with.

So maybe some of those issues will be improved for tenants, but I do not know if you addressed my question about the arrears and how it has affected your bottom line in terms of dealing with tenants as specified by The

Residential Tenancies Act where you can take this approach where they automatically—I am assuming you have this sort of computerized system where these letters get sent out of the computer if the rent has not been received, and they sort of go in the mail automatically. What tenants are finding is sometimes their pay stubs span a different period than the end of the month. I have raised this before with the minister. He is nodding his head. I am wondering if, you know, clear up how that process works and if you are going to give me an update on the arrears situation.

Mr. Reimer: The closest I can give the member is what we have until the end of April. If we look at our various district totals, just for example in Winnipeg, total of Winnipeg, April of '98 we had arrears of just over \$96,000. In April of '99 it was approximately \$93,000. So it has gone down a small amount there. If you take into account all of Manitoba, which includes the districts of Selkirk, Altona, Portage, Brandon, Dauphin, Roblin, The Pas, Churchill, and Winnipeg, the total of April '98 was almost \$189,000; in 1998 it was \$188,903. In 1999 it is \$182,226. So it has gone down.

Ms. Cerilli: I appreciate that, but it sounds like the rural areas are creating more arrears than the urban area, but I would think that there is more housing in the urban area.

Mr. Reimer: The total rural area in 1998 was \$92,574, and the total rural area in 1999 is \$89,162. So it is also down. So the rural is down and Winnipeg is down.

Ms. Cerilli: But my point is the division of where the properties are. Are there not more units in Winnipeg than the rest of the province?

Mr. Reimer: Yes, there are 7,600 units in Winnipeg, and in the rural it is 5,200.

Ms. Cerilli: So the trend is then, well, maybe it is not that much difference in terms of the collection rates, rural versus urban. At first I thought there was but it does not seem like. There may be a bit of a difference.

With only a little bit more time today, I actually want to ask some questions about the

Emergency Home Repair Program. When I was looking in the budget Estimates book, if I can find the page now. Maybe the minister and his staff can help me out. I am trying to find the page that references the responsibility of the department for the Emergency Home Repair Program. I am not sure if that is just in the objectives.

Basically, my first question is what is the budgeted allocation for that program this year?

Mr. Reimer: Mr. Chairperson, if I could refer the member to, if she has this book here, the annual report. [interjection] Oh, you do not. Okay. The Homeowner Emergency Loan Program, I can maybe explain it, or the member knows that it is a loan of up to \$3,000 to eligible homeowners for repairs of health, safety or emergency nature. They must meet low-income criteria.

* (1750)

Eligible repairs include emergency repairs to heating systems, foundations, plumbing, electrical, roofing, repairs to improve accessibility for disabled household members. The amount of the dollar assigned to this is \$250,000, and it is under The Loans Act authority which is part of the budget Estimates. We were trying to find exactly where it is in the book, but we have not been able to find it either. It is in The Loans Act authority part of the book. So that is why we could not find it, but the amount was \$250,000.

Ms. Cerilli: This is one of the reasons that I am raising this because maybe I am remembering reading it this year from the minister's opening statement. I am going to have to check that as well, but I thought I had flagged it in my Estimates book but I did not see it on page 35 which lists—35 and 34—all the other programs, so why is this repair program—I guess then it is in the Department of Finance Estimates book under The Loan Act, but have we not in the past had the former program that was based on Lotteries Funds? That also had a portion that was repayable, and there is the RRAP program as well, so first of all, clear up for me why some of the home loan programs are listed in the Housing Estimates and some are not.

Mr. Reimer: It has been explained this is a loan program, and this is why I imagine it may fall

under the Finance Department under The Loans Act authority. The Home Renovation Program I think that the member might be referring to regarding that \$10 million, we recovered that from Finance, the \$10 million on that program.

Ms. Cerilli: Okay, getting back to the current Emergency Home Repair. This program has been around for how many years?

Mr. Reimer: I think it has been around for at least four or five years. This has been around, I have been told, for quite a few years, but it was under different names, but the one that was referred to here, the Homeowner Emergency Loan Program, has only been around for four or five years. A program of this nature has been around for quite a few years under different names.

Ms. Cerilli: Okay. I am actually looking for a very old Manitoba Housing information sheet on the program that I know is from the 1980s, and what is interesting to me is the maximum grant amount for the last 20 years or so has been \$3,000. So does \$3,000 still buy you the same amount of emergency home repairs as it used to? What are the kinds of repairs that have been done under the program, and has that changed over the last number of years?

Mr. Reimer: Yes, I am just looking at some of the criteria here. What it is, as mentioned, is an interest-free loan, and the only thing it alludes to is repairs of a health, safety or emergency nature. Repairs include heating systems, plumbing, foundations, electrical, roofing, of that nature, but \$3,000 is what it is limited up to, so that has been the amount.

I would point out that the average loan during the year 1998 was just over \$2,000—\$2,113, instead of out of the three.

Ms. Cerilli: What is the uptake on the program? Is there a waiting list? Is there a delay in people accessing the program?

Mr. Reimer: The number of loans that were totalled from '94-95 through '97-98, the total has only been 317 loans.

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

HEALTH

Mr. Chairperson (Marcel Laurendeau): Order, please. The committee will come to order. We will ask the staff to enter the Chamber at this time. When the committee last sat we were dealing with the Estimates of the Department of Health. We were on line 21.2.(a)(1).

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): Again by way of information, what I am hoping today is to move right through to 2.(c) and to get into 2.(c) extensively during the course of this afternoon's session. Depending how we go, we may or may not continue that section tomorrow morning when we next meet.

During the course of last year, there were several problems with respect to the drug formulary as well as several problems with the therapeutics committee. The previous minister had indicated he was changing some of the methodologies and the approaches that were being undertaken by the department in this area. I wonder initially if the minister could outline for me whether that change has taken place and in fact what changes have taken place as it relates to effectively the process whereby drugs are put on and off of the formulary.

* (1440)

Hon. Eric Stefanson (Minister of Health): Mr. Chairman, I am prepared to, as well, forward, which the member may have seen before, copies of the terms of reference of the Manitoba Drug Standards and Therapeutics Committee outlining the objectives, the functions, the membership of the committee, the terms of office, the meetings of the committee, the reporting and so on. So I will certainly provide the member for Kildonan with a copy of that. Maybe just before I carry on, I should introduce Mr. Olaf Koester who is the director of provincial drug programs for the Province of Manitoba.

Some of the changes, I am told, that have been put in place are basically the opportunity for more input to the process from either the companies themselves or from stakeholders through the review of the process. It could be the companies, it could be an organization like

the Manitoba Society of Seniors or some organization making representation through the process, a faster process both at the front end and at the back end in terms of the approval process to shorten the time frame of the ability to deal with requests, I think giving companies the opportunity to resubmit, even encouraging if something may have changed or depending what is happening in other jurisdictions, to resubmit, and a willingness to look at a particular drug for a second time and so on.

So those are examples of some of the changes that have been put in place. I think the total review time has been reduced from an average time before of about 60 to 75 days, and now it is a range of about 30 to 60. So, certainly, the low end of it has gotten significantly lower, but it still I guess on some occasions can go as high as 60. So the overall time frames have been reduced as well, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, is it possible for the minister to provide us with information regarding the criteria and the formulae that are utilized in order to have a drug reviewed by the committee?

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, the criteria are outlined in the Manitoba Drug Benefits and Interchangeability Formulary document that is available, and there is a section here that deals with the criteria. It is about a page in length. I can either read them into the record, or I could provide the member a copy. [interjection] Copy? Okay, I will provide the member with a copy of that.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, I thank the minister for that response. Is there any kind of a ceiling that is placed on the committee with respect to drugs in general? In other words, is there a ceiling or is there a budgeted amount or is there a figure or a directive that is given that says that the drug benefits division shall not exceed expenditures of, say, \$50 million for this year? Is there any kind of a ceiling or criteria on a financial basis that is imposed on them?

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, maybe first it is worth just reminding the member for Kildonan, the make-up of the Manitoba Drug Standards

and Therapeutics Committee. I will just take a minute. It is S. Koven, the family practitioner recommended by the College of Physicians and Surgeons; W. Balacko, a community pharmacist; A. Eros, a hospital pharmacist, C. Yeung, assistant professor, Internal Medicine, University of Manitoba; G. Zhanel, Faculty of Pharmacy and Faculty of Medicine; and G. Doak, the Department of Anesthesia. These are the individuals on the committee.

The short answer to the question is, no, there is not a cap put on the overall program. When they do their review, they take into consideration—the word used here was "pharmaeconomics." Obviously, the cost of something versus the benefits and, as well, as is referred to in the criteria, the anticipated cost of a product of equivalent therapeutic effectiveness must offer a potential economic advantage over listed alternatives. So I gather they look at the product itself, what it has cost versus what the medical benefits would be. They also look at obviously other products that might be available to meet the same need as well.

* (1450)

Mr. Chomiak: I will be having more specifics on the Pharmacare program per se when we reach that item. I am going to try to stay toward the Drug Standards and Therapeutics Committee. Would it be save to say that if, for example, two new drugs came out, one for treatment of breast cancer and one for epilepsy per se, and if the costs were even, the cost effectiveness was shown to be very effective—is the minister then saying that, given those criteria that I have outlined, those drugs would be placed on the formulary?

Mr. Stefanson: I think, Mr. Chairman, I want to be clear here that there are no limitations put on the committee and no direction given to the committee in terms of how they function relative to the cost of any particular drug. They obviously make their recommendations based on the medical or clinical evidence, but they also would look at the whole issue, as I have already referred to, of a cost benefit analysis.

Just to give the member a sense of the net additions to the Pharmacare formulary over the

last few years: in '92-93, 122 net drugs were added; '93-94, another 26; '94-95, another 64; '95-96, another 127; '96-97, another 126; '97-98, another 148; '98-99, another 180, for a total over that roughly seven-year period of 793.

I think that certainly is evidence of obviously just the number of drugs that are coming on the market being made available for dealing with patients, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chomiak: Are we now part of the federal program where drugs are automatically listed based on a federal index? Does the minister know what I am referring to in terms of the program?

Mr. Stefanson: I am not sure I am answering the question, but maybe if I just outline the current process, I might. I think, as the member knows, for any new drug the first part of the process is to receive approval from Health Canada for its safety and efficacy in terms of its value. From there, they would make application within each individual province, and in the case of our province, go through the committee review process as to the recommendation of whether or not to include it in our formulary.

So that is the current process and that is the process that continues to be followed today, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chomiak: I stand to be corrected, but I thought we passed legislation that permitted us, by reference, to adopt the formularies on a national basis, which would by reference then include certain drugs that had been listed federally in other jurisdictions, that we would do it on a provincial basis, or did I misunderstand that?

Mr. Stefanson: I think the issue that the member is getting at is an issue that has been adopted by the Manitoba Pharmaceutical Association and, I am told, by pharmaceutical associations right across Canada. It has to do with the federal legislation in terms of what are prescription drugs. They are abiding by that, which then means that the prescription drugs are kept basically behind the counter by the pharmacist. There is national agreement on adopting basically the same approach to dealing

with prescription drugs within the pharmacies. I think that is the issue the member was referring to.

Mr. Chomiak: The minister is correct. That did jog my memory. Who administers DPIN now?

* (1500)

Mr. Stefanson: The DPIN system is managed by the Insured Benefits and basically under Mr. Koester's area of provincial drug program. That is where the DPIN is administered.

Mr. Chomiak: I have a whole series of Pharmacare and DPIN related questions. I think it would probably be better to deal with it under the Pharmacare portion, so perhaps, if that is the case, I am going to move on to another line of questioning at this point.

Mr. Chairperson: You will pass then?

Mr. Chomiak: No, I have a couple more questions. Insofar as this section administers the prosthetic and orthotics suppliers portion, can the minister outline, not today, but can he table information as to what the policy is with respect to orthopedic and prosthetic devices from the province? There have been some changes in the last two years, and I am wondering if the ministry can outline what the current policies are in those particular areas. I recognize the minister may not have it today, but I would like to have that information.

Mr. Stefanson: The member is right. We have a number of programs, which I know he is very familiar with, from prosthetic devices to orthotic devices to breast prostheses and surgical brassieres to telecommunications devices to orthopedic shoes, hearing aids for children, artificial eyes, eyeglasses for seniors, infant contact lenses. What I will do is I will provide the member with a summary of each of the programs and try to highlight some of the changes in the last few years. Certainly, one that comes to mind, which he would be well familiar with, the recent changes having to do with hearing aids for children, is one example. So I will provide a summary of the programs and highlight changes in the last few years, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chomiak: The other additional area that I will be interested in, although it is under another item, will be the home care equipment supplies and the like, but that falls under a separate category. So I will be querying the minister and letting him know in advance with respect to that item.

Mr. Stefanson: We will make note of that now to be sure to provide that information as well.

Mr. Chairperson: Item 21.2.(a) Insured Benefits Services (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$5,999,600—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$3,060,700—pass.

21.2.(b) Financial Services (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$1,282,000.

Mr. Chomiak: I do not have a lot of questions in this area on the assumption that the minister is going to be returning to this House with information as to the funding levels. I understand the ministry is going to be returning with funding levels for the various regions as well as where possible program breakdowns in the city of Winnipeg because that is basically what I would be interested in.

Mr. Stefanson: Well, again, just to clarify, yes, I did indicate to the member, providing the overall funding to the regional health authorities, we had a discussion about the shift to funding programs and, as I indicated yesterday, the system of funding is still very much based on the historical, the individual facility funding, but the shifts are occurring in terms of shifting to funding programs. Whatever information I can provide in that area I will, but I do not want him to be under the impression that I can provide detailed funding analyses based on all of the programs that our hospitals provide.

Mr. Chomiak: I thank the minister for that response. Traditionally we receive in the Estimates a listing of the funding to external agencies that the minister traditionally provides. Can I just by way of notice ask the minister to provide that?

Mr. Stefanson: Just to clarify, I basically had provided that. That really is the grant soliciting, which I did table. I might have tabled it. So I

have tabled the grant soliciting, and then the other part of it is really the funding to the authorities that we are talking about right now.

Mr. Chomiak: The other piece of information that I would like to see is the budgets for the—now, I know that the budgets have to be submitted from each regional authority to the provincial government. I am not asking for the budgets necessarily for next year, although if I can get them, that is fine. Is it possible to have the budgets and the expenditures for the various regional authorities for the past year?

* (1510)

Mr. Stefanson: I think, as the member knows, the process, RHAs now are in the process of concluding their year-ends. They also get an audit, and we certainly make all of that available. We are at that stage of the process. So I am not sure whether the member is asking me when that is concluded that I provide him a copy. Certainly I will.

Mr. Chomiak: Pass.

Mr. Chairperson: 21.2. Program Support Services (b) Financial Services (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$1,282,000—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$154,800—pass.

21.2.(c) Information Systems (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$4,452,100.

Did you catch all that, or do I have to repeat it? I did not have my mike on. Okay, it will just take me a second, guys, sorry about that.

21.2. Program Support Services (b) Financial Services (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$1,282,000—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$154,800—pass.

21.2.(c) Information Services (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$4,452,100.

Mr. Chomiak: Can the minister indicate (a) what the status is of the desktop initiative and what the costs are related to the desktop initiative?

Mr. Stefanson: I think, as the member probably knows, we are one of the last departments to

come fully on stream on the desktop initiative because of the move of the Department of Health to the old Free Press building. So once that move is completed we will be fully on stream with the desktop initiative. The Estimates for 1999-2000 include \$1,789,000 for our cost relative to desktop management and that represents, I believe, about 750 for seats in total for desktop.

Mr. Chomiak: Is it appropriate to discuss at this juncture, does the minister have the staff available, the issues surrounding Y2K?

Mr. Stefanson: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chomiak: Let me start by asking the minister if he is confident that the systems and the designs are in place to ensure that there is no significant difficulty in any area. Well, that is probably too broad a question, that there is no significant difficulty that will be faced by Manitoba Health with regard to Y2K.

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, as the former minister responsible for information technology when I was Minister of Finance, I used to get regular updates on how we were doing across government. Certainly, the last review across government that I had, I was very pleased with the progress that we are making on Y2K.

I am told that we are in very good shape in the Department of Health and in health in general, that in the department alone, our mainframe is now completely converted, and with the desktop changeover that we have already discussed, that the department itself will be 100 percent complete. Within the rest of health care, all of the equipment is being tested, Mr. Chairman, and, certainly, we expect to be 100 percent complete across all of the health areas by October of this year.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, is the minister indicating when he says 100 percent complete by the end of October across health, is he talking about as well the various institutions and all the operational equipment that is utilized in the system, or is he only confining those comments to the Department of Health per se?

* (1520)

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, when I said October '99 completion, that is across all of health, not only the department, but all of the other health delivery organizations.

But I do just want to clarify one. When I said 100 percent completion within the department and outside of the department, it will be all of the critical, all of the important. There might be some minor areas where there is no urgency or need to be making the Y2K convergence, but, certainly, in all of the important, all of the critical and urgent and so on, Mr. Chairman, and, again, as well, when it comes to the whole issue of medical equipment.

So the October '99 that I referred to is when basically everything that we feel we need to do across the entire health care system, and that we collectively need to do, to address the Y2000, will in fact be done.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, I believe what the minister is saying, then, is that, for example, at Health Sciences Centre or St. Boniface Hospital, we could have the assurances that by October all critical and significant equipment will be Y2K compliant and the public can have assurances, to the best of our ability, that there should not be a Y2K functional problem.

Mr. Stefanson: Absolutely correct.

Mr. Chomiak: Does the minister have any idea of the cost across the health care system, what the Y2K compliance process cost us?

Mr. Stefanson: I will return with the details. The reason that they are not readily available before us today is that the majority of our Y2K liability, I think, across government, as the member knows, has actually been booked in previous years.

Mr. Chomiak: The minister indicated that he would be providing me with the costs of how much money has been expended under the SmartHealth initiative in terms of the money that has been forwarded. Now I may have been out when that information was tabled, so if I was, I apologize. If not, can the minister inform us as to how much money has been extended in total to the SmartHealth initiative?

Mr. Peter Dyck, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, I think, as the member knows, in 1998-99, \$8.6 million was set aside for SmartHealth under the Health Information Systems management organization—Health Information Services Manitoba, HISM. This year, as I referred to the other day, we have set aside \$20.7 million, but you will not see it as an expenditure within the department because it is set up as a capital investment. What we will start to see through the department over time is the amortization of that investment, and we can certainly talk about how all of that works, and so on. If you are looking for a \$20.7-million direct expenditure in health, you will not see that amount. I think I pointed to the amortization portion when we first started discussing this issue a few days ago.

Mr. Chomiak: Can the minister indicate who is now on the board of directors of the HISM?

Mr. Stefanson: The only member of the board of directors today is Mr. Eric Rosenhek, who is the comptroller within the Department of Finance. The reason that we are not looking to reappoint, you know, whether it is an individual from Health or elsewhere, is that, I think, as the member for Kildonan knows, it is the intention to wind up the corporation and wind it basically back into government. That is why we do have the \$20.7 million set aside as a capital investment, but none of that can occur, I am told, until all of the appropriations are approved by the Legislature.

Mr. Chomiak: Can the minister therefore explain the amortization process and where the appropriations will be approved with respect to the \$20.7 million capital?

Mr. Stefanson: The actual expenditure side, the amortization side, as we discussed the other day, will come through on line account 21.7, actually on page 89 of this year's detailed Estimates of Expenditure. The accounting policy for capital expenditures actually is shown on page 163, again of the '99 expenditures. It gives examples of the estimated useful life of different types of equipment. One can see that if you look at computer hardware, mainframe and mini-

computers, that is a 10-year useful life. Computer hardware, personal computers are four year; computer, major applications, 15 years; computer software, other, four years, and so on. So that gives the member a sense of the amortization periods for those types of investments.

*(1530)

Mr. Chomiak: Does the minister have a figure on our total investment in the SmartHealth initiative?

Mr. Stefanson: It is the two amounts that I have provided, the 8.6 that was actually paid in '98-99, and then the amount that has been budgeted for this coming year. I think the member may just be thinking back. There was a period of time where payments did not have to be made, so it is a combination of those two amounts.

Mr. Chomiak: Is the minister saying that we have approximately an asset there of \$29 million?

Mr. Stefanson: I am saying basically by the end of '99-2000 we will. We will have an asset, a lot of it deferred development costs but, yes, that is exactly right. It will be an asset of roughly \$29 million by the end of '99-2000.

Mr. Chomiak: Can the minister give us a listing as to what comprises those assets?

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, I will provide a listing of basically what will have been done and what some of the major projects are within the roughly \$29 million.

Mr. Chomiak: Can the minister give us listing who is on the HIN steering committee?

Mr. Stefanson: The steering committee, Mr. Chairman, is the Minister of Finance; the Minister of Health; the acting Secretary to Treasury Board; the Deputy Minister of Health; Mr. Todd Herron, who I did not introduce, I apologize, who is from Information Systems, within the Department of Health; and the CIO, the Chief Information Officer, Mr. Kal Ruberg. So it would be those six individuals.

Mr. Chomiak: Does the provincial government, in any form, have a shareholding interest in SmartHealth, any interest as a shareholder? If they do, what percentage and what value?

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, the short answer is no. The provincial government has no ownership, no equity in SmartHealth.

Mr. Chomiak: Can the minister indicate what the relationship is between the Department of Health and SmartHealth in terms of projects and in terms of who is responsible from the Department of Health for activities that take place under SmartHealth or vice versa?

Mr. Stefanson: Within our government, the individual project analysts and so on report to Mr. Todd Herron, whom I introduced earlier. At the working level, those project analysts would interact with people from SmartHealth, obviously, working on the initiative.

But in terms of the overall initiative, those contacts are between Mr. Herron, and I believe the two main individuals with SmartHealth are Mr. Jim O'Leary and Mr. Al Hurd. I could certainly provide their appropriate titles within SmartHealth, but those are the names of the two main contacts on the overall project today, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, can the minister give us a listing of what projects have received prefunding in terms of the SmartHealth initiative?

Mr. Stefanson: Well, Mr. Chairman, as part of returning with the status on the \$29 million roughly, I will also return with the details on the various elements of the plan that have basically received approval today.

Mr. Chomiak: When last we met in Estimates or perhaps it was the time before, the years do seem to flow into each other—

An Honourable Member: You are due for a shift to a different portfolio, David. Finance. Try Finance.

Mr. Chomiak: I bet. We received a project forecast. Do we have a similar update document that the minister can provide?

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Stefanson: Well, Mr. Chairman, I have just seen a copy. I gather it was last provided to the member back on June 4, '97. I gather one was not produced in 1998, but I am told we can certainly produce a current forecast, so we will do that.

Mr. Chomiak: A number of my questions are going to be related to the documentation that we are going to be provided. It may be difficult to provide that documentation today. I assume we are meeting tomorrow morning at 10 a.m. Do you think that documentation can be provided? If not, that is no problem, we can simply defer those questions, I guess, until another period, but does the minister have any idea?

* (1540)

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, the last I heard is I was told tomorrow morning we are dealing with private members' resolutions, unless that is changed, that we might be into Estimates in the afternoon. What I would suggest is we will undertake to try and make it available, but I guess if we do not, we have a couple of options. I think it already is obvious we could certainly deal with it under the section Amortization of Capital Assets. I know it is at the end of the detail lines, but we could certainly deal with this section again there if we are going to need more time.

So we will undertake to provide it. If we can, we can deal with it tomorrow. If not, we could just move on to other lines.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, that seems to make sense. The issue always comes up every time we deal with Information Systems with respect to the card. I wonder if the minister might update us as to what the status is for the card and what the plans are, if at all.

Mr. Stefanson: I had an opportunity to look back at some of the questions last year. I see this was discussed at that time. The member for Kildonan was asking about encrypted cards. The response at that time was that we were not looking at a smart card for the health cards. It would be like a mag striped card, not a smart

card, was the response. Even that is being revisited today, recognizing that mag striped cards in many cases are not being used or are being taken out of circulation. The real key is your number, for all intents and purposes. Having said that, we are looking at a card relative to that kind of utilization. We have had a chance to look at other jurisdictions. I think there is only about one or two other jurisdictions in Canada that still use a paper card today.

Having said that, some still have the mag stripe. Some just have the registration number. We are actually in the process right now of looking at that entire issue, the timing of implementation, of ultimately moving to a hard card here in the province of Manitoba. I think it has been, what, 1993 or thereabouts, which was the last time our current paper card was replaced in Manitoba. So we are looking at it, but also in light of some of these changes in terms of the type of card, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chomiak: I was going to indicate that I actually wanted to reflect on discussions that occurred in this Chamber between the former, former, former minister and ourselves and the former Liberals with respect to the card. It is interesting how technology has changed because the former, former, former minister had extolled the virtues given the technological points at the time in terms of the virtues of an all-inclusive, all-encompassing card, and it is interesting how quickly the technological application changes. At that time it looked like it was going to be the be-all and the end-all, which is just one of the difficulties that the opposition New Democrats had warned the government of in the first instance as it relates to that kind of technology.

Having made those comments, the government, when they announced this SmartHealth, put out an estimated five-year cumulative benefits and an estimated five-year cumulative implementation cost. I know that may be forthcoming with respect to the information the minister is going to provide, but every year in Estimates I tend to take the ministers through each of the component parts of the projected plan for SmartHealth to try to determine where the initiative is in each of those areas. What I have discovered is that the long-term initiatives that were touted in the initial phase of the

program have been dramatically scaled back and that the projections for developments in terms of SmartHealth are far more modest than originally projected.

Having said that, I would like to have some idea, and it does not have to be today because it is a complicated issue, as to where we are in terms of the basic three major areas under which SmartHealth was launched—that is, the administrative initiatives, the tactical initiatives and the strategic initiatives—and where we are on each of those particular components.

Now I stand to be corrected, but I believe the only real initiative that has been launched is the drug utilization or the drug component, the DPIN component, and that would be under the tactical initiatives. I wonder if I can get a specific point-by-point analysis of where each of those initiatives is, keeping in mind that the minister has already indicated that he is going to be returning with some of the asset costs or the costs that have been expended, which may give us some of that information. Notwithstanding that, I am looking for the specific point by point of where we are at in terms of the plan for SmartHealth. Or has the plan been revised dramatically so that it no longer is considering those initiatives that were initially announced?

* (1550)

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, I will return with a point-by-point analysis for the member. I do want to indicate that the overall areas have not changed. The member is correct that certain aspects have been scaled back. He is also correct that it has taken a little longer than was probably originally anticipated, but I would make the case that I do not think that has turned out to be a bad thing at all in the sense of what we have already touched on, the technological changes, the degree of competition that is out there, and so on.

So I think the end result will be that we will be well served by that in terms of service and product that we ultimately put in place. The whole focus has now shifted to the whole broader issue of the entire health information network that would meet the needs of Manitobans, of which SmartHealth has been one component. So I will return with a point-by-point analysis status report for the member.

Mr. Chomiak: I look forward to that analysis and that opportunity to review it.

The CEO of the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority has been quoted as requiring \$60 million for computer upgrades. Can the minister outline for me the ramifications and purposes of that and how that relates to SmartHealth, if in fact it does?

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, I think what the member refers to is the whole issue of the information systems related to the WHA, and even the WCA, really outside of the SmartHealth initiative. It is really the whole integration of their financial information, their patient information, whether it be clinical or admission/discharge and so on, that to date that has all been done on an individual basis, in some cases with different systems, different technology, and so on. In keeping with the whole approach of regionalization, shifting of programs and best utilization of buildings, equipment and people, certainly the heads of those organizations are looking at their information systems as it relates to doing that, as they should be.

What we will be doing as a government is obviously looking at that initiative as it compares to the many IT initiatives that we either have on the go or that we are looking at as a government, Mr. Chairman. Within the Department of Health, it is one of the IT issues that certainly I will be looking at as Minister of Health, but it also then needs to be basically put into the whole review of all of our IT requirements across government in determining the priorities and, ultimately, the staging of implementation. So I do not want to leave the impression it is not important because we all know to make appropriate decisions it is important to have quality, reliable, timely information. It is an issue that we will be looking at in terms of that entire integration within Winnipeg and, in fact, throughout the province ultimately as well.

Mr. Chomiak: I ask this question every year, and I realize it is not a simple task, but if the WHA is going to be expending \$60 million on programs and computers—that is not just hardware, I assume that is hardware and

software—if the government of Manitoba is potentially spending \$100 million, \$125 million on our SmartHealth initiative to do some of the things that are going to be undertaken by the WHA, how do the two relate, do the two relate, and what co-ordination is made available to ensure that those services are compatible and indeed not duplicated and that the best value and the best programs are provided?

Mr. Stefanson: Well, Mr. Chairman, I share the caution that the member has raised, but I think it is important to recognize they are entirely different functions. Right now that information is being brought forward by WHA, WCA to the Department of Health, to Todd Herron's department on our behalf, and we will be doing that entire review. We will be taking appropriate steps to ensure that there is no overlap between the two systems. But I think it is important to recognize, by and large, they are different functions, but the caution is an appropriate one. That is certainly why it is all being co-ordinated in terms of the health aspect within the Department of Health under Mr. Herron's department. As well, we will then be going forward within the entire IT initiatives of government through the chief information officer, Mr. Kal Ruberg, and his shop in terms of the priorities across government. So I would suggest and argue we are taking steps to be sure we do not end up with any duplication.

Mr. Chomiak: Just further on that, let me give the minister an example. I hesitate to almost use the example because it is working really well. But, out of the Health Sciences Centre, there is an initiative—as usual, during the course of Estimates, the word escapes me—that entails information with respect to lab tests and information with respect to diagnoses, X-rays, et cetera. It is transported via telecommunications, or via some form, from other hospitals to the Health Sciences Centre for diagnosis, for consultation, et cetera. That is an initiative of the Health Sciences Centre run on a shoestring budget that, to my mind, as a layperson, makes a lot of sense and is actually well done.

Let me then jump to SmartHealth where this kind of activity was promised, was to be put in place, was to be systemwide. Health Sciences Centre is doing it; they are doing it by necessity;

and they are doing it on a shoestring budget. SmartHealth is developing some scheme, I presume, to do it or maybe not to do it, although it was promised initially in the SmartHealth initiative that that was going to be one of the main components of the SmartHealth program. Now I know that the WHA is trying to allocate funding for software and hardware.

* (1600)

Now, if I am the WHA, I am going to say we have got a good little initiative here. Let us put the capital into this, and let us expand this program and perhaps do it in other jurisdictions, which then runs—does it run contrary to or does it run into the mandate of SmartHealth?

This is not a new issue. This has been going on for some time, and this is where I think it breaks down, to tell you the truth. So I am wondering if the minister might have comments on that.

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, I am told that what the member is referring to is teleradiology at HSC. Again, we would encourage individual facilities to be taking these kinds of steps because it is not going to end up being duplication, and it is not going to end up being wasted investment. The intention would be that ultimately these can roll into the system-wide Health Information Network and have the capacity to service the entire province.

So, again, within reason, some of these initiatives are in keeping completely with the kinds of initiatives under the Health Information Network. This is one example. There are probably a few other examples out there in RHAs or whatever, where they are taking some steps to deal with their immediate issues, but, again, they will and can be rolled into the overall Health Information Network.

Mr. Chomiak: And therein lies the rub. If a regional health authority should come to government and say we would like a \$2.5-million allocation to develop this system, where do they go and what is the government's response in that regard?

Mr. Stefanson: I am not sure that there is a "therein lies the rub" here, Mr. Chairman. I

think, first of all, RHAs, as part of our capital plans, are providing us with their information system plans within their region. We are also making them aware that they should not be going ahead with any information system development without obviously co-ordinating with us, with the provincial government, for the obvious reasons, so that it is not sunk costs. Having said that, if we see an RHA wanting to develop a pilot within their region that is in keeping with the overall direction of the Health Information Network, we would encourage that that makes sense. It obviously gives that RHA an opportunity to have that service. It gives us collectively an opportunity to assess the performance, and so long as it can be adapted and rolled into the broader network, it is an appropriate way to deal with technology.

So, I guess, I just want to assure the member that through our department now, all of these initiatives under the combination of SmartHealth and the Health Information Network are being prioritized. We are working with regional health authorities, and we are looking for a broader province-wide system. At the same time, we are having individual initiatives go forward that are in keeping with the overall direction of technology.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, this is where it gets very confusing. Now it might become clear when the minister tables those documents, but in 1995 when SmartHealth was first announced, if I were involved in the development of teleradiology, I would have said, well, I am not expending my institution's funding on developing a project because it is clear from the initiative that is being undertaken by the government that the government is going to be developing a province-wide teleradiology program. It is 1999. There is not a province-wide teleradiology program. I do not believe it is in the immediate short term. So I, as an individual institution, may very well throw up my hands and say, I am going to budget for that and to meet my own needs, because it is clear it has not been developed in the past five years as was projected, how can I have any confidence that it will be on line in the next five years?

Now this may become clear when the minister tables the information he is going to

table, but as far as I could see the only area that we are actually moving on in terms of SmartHealth is in the DPIN approach. Unless the minister is indicating that this particular rollout will allow us to piggyback all kinds of information, all kinds of assistance on the back of it, I am not sure, I do not see why anyone would have any confidence in going to the provincial government and saying, well, we are going to wait for you to develop a system. It just would not make sense given what the history is.

* (1610)

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, the challenge, whether there is '95 or 1999, is always one of having had individual facilities, where now we have regional health authorities, so you have a decentralized delivery system, but you are going to have a centralized Health Information Network and certainly most in the system are well aware of the SmartHealth initiative in its general sense, that it is an initiative of government.

Therefore I do not see a problem with individual RHAs or even individual facilities, if they see a need that they want to meet today, taking those steps to meet that need, whether it is teleradiology or elsewhere so long as it is being co-ordinated with us in terms of the potential for ultimate rollout province-wide. I guess that is what I am suggesting that we have examples where RHAs are doing that and so long as it can be rolled into the Health Information Network and delivered province-wide, I do not see that as a bad thing at all. Rather than wait for an entire system and an entire province-wide rollout, if one facility or one region deems it to be a priority to put the system in place earlier, then we should be encouraging that as long as it is going to improve service and better meet the needs of patients.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, that in fact has been the crux of our criticism of the process for the past five years and it is still. I do not want to relive history here, but I think there is a major confidence problem here, and it is one thing for the minister to say there is a co-ordination function, but it is another thing to say that—I mean I think we are really in some difficulty with respect to moving ahead on some initiatives because of the initiative that was entered into

previously. Having said that, I am not going to flog this. I mean I want to, but I am not going to because I do want to get onto other topics, but it is more fun to flog things when you think you are right because that does not happen that often but I am not going to.

I do want to ask the minister if he can give us an understanding of what SmartHealth is all about, how many employees they have. Are they still 51 percent owned by EDS and 49 percent by Royal Bank and can you give us some details of the SmartHealth operation?

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, I hope I understood the member correctly that he was suggesting he did not get many areas to flog so when he finally had one he thought he might want to stay on it for a while and so on. But to me the issue is one that I readily acknowledge that the whole rollout has taken longer, but I will argue that that has served us and will serve us well and better in the end because added to all of this as well is now we are having even more dialogue with provinces, particularly the western provinces. Because again, I think, as the member for Kildonan knows, that to varying degrees, provinces are all going through this. Again, they are at various stages. I think we can collectively benefit from each other.

So I would accept criticism that it has taken longer. I think, if I recall correctly, the member and his colleagues were critical of the whole initiative back in '95, but I still believe, at the end of the day, we will end up with a system that will better serve patients and create efficiencies in the system and basically be able to pay for itself from efficiencies created in the system because we are all aware of some of the duplication and overlap that still does exist in the system.

In terms of the specific question about SmartHealth, we will obtain those details and return with them as quickly as we can, both in terms of the current ownership make-up of the SmartHealth organization and its current status here in Manitoba in terms of numbers of employees and so on.

Mr. Chomiak: Well, it is one of these issues where we are going to have to roughly agree to

disagree, but we did indicate in '95 and since then that the problem with the system was that we thought that this was an attempt to develop a Cadillac, when perhaps we should be working more on an Impala. I am tempted to carry that metaphor further, but I am not going to.

When the minister returns with information about SmartHealth, SmartHealth also indicated, when their 51 percent was bought out by EDS, that there were also going to be 50 permanent positions created in Winnipeg. I wonder if the minister can confirm that as well.

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, I will return with those details as part of the status of SmartHealth that I referred to.

Mr. Chomiak: Last year, in the Estimates book, and the year before, the number of EFTs in the department was 98, and now we are down to 83. Can the minister outline what the divergence is or why we have this divergence?

Mr. Stefanson: The difference is that one division that was under Information Systems, the division called Decision Support Services, has been moved over to Corporate Services. We discussed Corporate Services the other day. It is an accumulation of a number of—I think that area, Decision Support Services, has I believe about nine employees, so that should work out about right, I think.

Mr. Chomiak: At some point, can the minister provide us with details as to what these people do? I mean, is there some kind of breakdown, because I never really have understood generally where their breakdowns were. So just general information would be helpful for the 84-odd positions, or at least the EFTs.

Mr. Stefanson: I will provide a more detailed breakdown, but just to give him a quick sense of really six key areas: the executive consists of three FTEs, operations 35, application 24, integration 7.9, technology 8 and business relations 6, for a total of 83.9. I can probably provide a more detailed breakdown and description of some of the functions within those areas.

* (1620)

Mr. Chomiak: I would appreciate that just for our own understanding's sake, because one can usually ascertain the roles and functions in other areas. In this area, it is sometimes hard to ascertain the roles and functions.

I do want to spend some time on the DPIN process. I would like to know, it does indicate in the Supplementary Estimates book that there is going to be completion of the role of the Drug Program Information Network medication dispensing history at the hospital admitting and emergency rooms in 81 sites. I wonder if we have a list of the 81 sites and the status of all of those sites as well as an analysis of if any major difficulties and problems have been encountered.

Mr. Chairperson: Maybe we should give them a break.

Mr. Chomiak: Do you want to do it now?

Mr. Chairperson: Yes, we will do it now. Mr. Minister, we are going to give you a little break. Is that okay? [agreed] Let us take five, okay, guys.

The committee recessed at 4:22 p.m.

After Recess

The committee resumed at 4:33 p.m.

Mr. Peter Dyck, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Mr. Stefanson: I can certainly return and provide the member with the 81 sites referred to in the detailed Estimates. This is obviously part of the 1999-2000 work that is being done as a rollout to these 81 sites. I am told we are not anticipating any problems with that. Obviously this becomes a very important part for the whole diagnostic side of things in terms of being able to pull up the history of an individual in terms of what medication they might be on or have been taking or whatever, and of course vice versa to put on the system whatever is being utilized at hospitals. So I can return with the 81 sites, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chomiak: Can the minister also provide us with information as to the status of the various

rollout projects on DPIN that have already been announced? In other words, locations and the status, for example, Beausejour, Seven Oaks, et cetera. Is it functional? Where are we going on it, et cetera?

Mr. Stefanson: Yes, I can. I think the member is referring to the five pilots which preceded the rollout of the 81. Again, I gather that has all gone well, but, yes, I can provide the five sites and just some details on how the rollout has gone.

Mr. Chomiak: Can I take it that if the 81 sites are established and functional and the drug information is provided to the 81 sites, then notwithstanding what the plan is, that the same technology and the same methodology could be utilized to provide patient information, medical information, lab results, et cetera? In other words, is this the groundwork for the expansion of the program beyond drug profiles or not?

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, what we will ultimately have is really a series of programs on the same infrastructure. So they will not be fully integrated, as we had questions the other day about the human resource application system, the SAP system, and so on. So, if you have access to the DPIN, it will not automatically give you access to the entire patient history, be it lab tests or a number of others. So I am told it is the same infrastructure but basically different programs that will be run in all of these different areas. I will be returning with more details in terms of the various areas that are being focused on over the next period of time.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, when the minister provides information with respect to DPIN, I wonder if he might indicate whether or not DPIN is interactive in the sense of—maybe he can just explain it now, but if the drug profile is provided at the particular site, at one of the sites, and then the drug information changes at that particular site, does it then get entered at that site and changes on the entire system? That is what I mean by that.

Mr. Stefanson: Right now the only updating under the DPIN of an individual's situation is through the pharmacy. Once these 81 sites come on stream in terms of the emergency rooms, that

will be another source of updating if any drug is used in that environment. Another step along the path is to also include the pharmacies within the hospitals. So right now the only information basically on a patient file or an individual file is information that is put on by the pharmacist and that, I am told, happens immediately. As soon as the prescription is filled and entered, the file becomes current, obviously.

* (1640)

Mr. Chomiak: I might be going further ahead than the information that is going to be provided, but I thought that was my understanding. The minister is saying that, when the 81 sites are rolled out, presumably this year, then not only will the data be that that is onsite from the pharmacies but that the data can be entered at various sites and there will be the ability to enter a change in data either at the emergency room or presumably through the pharmacy location at the facility. So am I correct in that assumption?

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, the member is correct, but what I want to clarify is it is being done in steps. As these 81 sites roll out, the first access at the ER will be accessing the individual's file from the DPIN. A subsequent step, not initially, a subsequent step will be able to be inputting from the ER room so that we keep an individual profile of drugs, and then a subsequent step will also be the implementation in the pharmacies in the hospitals. So the member was correct. I just do not want to have the impression that all three components of that are happening all at once. They are going to be done in various stages.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, so the description in the Supplementary Estimates books which says completion of the DPIN program medication dispensing history into hospital admitting and emergency rooms in 81 sites, what we are talking about is the present pilot project being expanded to 81 facilities with at some point subsequent steps to follow step 2 and step 3 in terms of the input. Is that correct?

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, yes, that is correct.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, now I really would like to understand the second part of the

statement on page 38 of the Supplementary Estimates book where it says, and I am quoting: "Establishment of the primary and back up processing sites, the HIN operations and maintenance environment, and establishment of the communications network infrastructure." Perhaps we can just break it down and the minister can describe to me what is meant by establishment of the primary and backup processing sites.

Mr. Stefanson: The primary site will be at the new location at 300 Carlton Street, and the backup site will be at Health Sciences Centre. So the primary site will have the computer access to all of the data, the processing and so on. HSC, I am told, is really just that, a backup site in case there are any problems, any difficulties, basically a protection for all of that information.

Mr. Chomiak: So the actual hardware will be located at 300 Carlton, if I am correct, if that is what the minister is saying, the hardware and the software input. Is that correct? Also can the minister indicate where it is located right now?

Mr. Stefanson: I am told that both sites, 300 Carlton and HSC, will have hardware and software, and that the HSC has a complete backup of the data, and that currently the system is at the Empress Street location.

Mr. Chomiak: The HIN operations and maintenance environment will be located where? At the primary site, is that what that statement is? HIN operations and maintenance environment. Is that what is meant by that statement?

Mr. Stefanson: The member is correct. That will be at 300 Carlton, yes.

Mr. Chomiak: And how about the establishment of the communications network infrastructure? What is meant by the establishment of the communications network infrastructure?

* (1650)

Mr. Stefanson: That really is the expansion and opening up of the provincial backbone network to all of the regional health authorities. That is done basically through Government Services, so

that is what this will allow. The provincial backbone network is a provincial data network which has traditionally been just within government. This is allowing it to be expanded to access the regional health authorities and obviously these individual sites.

Mr. Chomiak: So the provincial communication network is now being expanded to include all of the regional sites. If that is correct, who is co-ordinating that, and under whose auspices does that fall?

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Stefanson: That issue is being co-ordinated by Mr. Todd Herron, but it is also with Government Services. Government Services administers the provincial backbone network. They have the contract and so on. It really is the network that is used for information technology government-wide for all of the various departments. But it is also secure. There is not a cross-pollination or whatever, or access. It is really the network that is currently in place that is built upon or expanded to access these sites and the RHAs.

Mr. Chomiak: These issues we have just been talking about since the break relating to HIN, can we have any idea of the cost of these initiatives and where in the budget these costs are coming from? The appropriation under this item is \$8.1 million. If you take salaries out of that, we are only talking about \$3.6 million. Is it coming out of this component of the budget, or is it coming out of the capital allocations for SmartHealth or a combination of both? What are the costs for these various operations that the minister has now described?

Mr. Stefanson: I will return with the best estimate we have on these 81 sites recognizing that they are going to be rolling out in 1999-2000. What that investment is you will not see, just like we discussed earlier, an operating expenditure for that, because the policy is you do not start amortizing any of these investments until they start to basically deliver the service. I would expect that that will not happen until roughly the end of the year, beginning of next year, by the time they are fully functional, but the investment will be made through capital

investment. So I can return with the best estimate we have as of right now of the rollout of those 81 sites recognizing, just so it is clear, that is not an operating expenditure. It is a capital investment.

* (1700)

Mr. Chomiak: Can I assume that the establishment of the primary backup process sites maintenance environment and the communications network infrastructure, those expenses will come out of this appropriation of \$8.1 million?

Mr. Stefanson: It is the same answer as the previous question. Again, the initial expenditures from capital investments and these will be amortized once they come on line which I am told will be roughly the end of the year. At that point in time on a go-forward basis, there will be some operating costs attached but we are really talking in both of these cases about additional operating costs for the year 2000-2001.

Mr. Chomiak: Those particular costs will be allocated through the 26-odd million allocated to the HIN, or will they be included on the Supplementary Estimates allocation contained on this document? I am trying to find out exactly where the expenditures come from.

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, I think the member was basically correct. Once these systems are operational, the operating cost will come through from one of two areas, either through the Information Systems that we are looking through now or potentially through operating costs of the regional health authorities and that will be dealt with through the funding to the regional health authorities, so that is the operating side of the system.

In terms of the implementation of this system that we have talked about, the establishment of this, the capital, the hardware and so on, that will come through our capital investment. We will ultimately see the impact of that through the amortization. Once it is up and functioning it will be amortized, depending on what all the components are, how much is hardware, how much is software. It will be amortized based on that schedule of useful life

that I referred to earlier on page 163. So the operations are separate. The capital comes from capital investment, and we really will start to see the amortization of the capital probably starting next year once these systems are completely up and functioning and operational.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, can the minister indicate whether or not any of the nursing stations will be part of the 81 sites that the DPIN is going to be rolled out to?

Mr. Stefanson: I would just like some clarification first, whether the member is talking about nursing stations within the hospitals or nursing stations like on our reserves?

Mr. Chomiak: Northern reserves.

Mr. Stefanson: Northern reserves. I am told that of the 81 sites, none of them currently are for nursing stations on our reserves or in remote communities. We are certainly interested and are prepared to look at providing this at the nursing stations. I am told part of the difficulty to date has been lack of co-operation from the federal government, but we will continue to pursue the issue. We are certainly open to look at providing these services at nursing stations in our province.

Mr. Chomiak: In previous references to the Health Information Systems in the supplementary Estimates books, one of the activities was listed as protection of the department's health databases from unauthorized organizations or individuals. That is not included in here, and I am just wondering why it is not included in here and, secondly, what provisions are in place to continue this developing field.

Mr. Stefanson: Certainly that important service is still being done. What has happened in the last year, under the chief information officer there actually is a security officer who was retained several months ago who has the overall responsibility for security government-wide. Within this division in Health, there is an individual who has the function of also being responsible for security within Health who interacts and liaises with that central system. So it is being done. It is being done on a corporate basis, but we also have dedicated a person within

Health to deal with the issues. I think the removal of reference is the fact that the overall function, the overall co-ordination, is now under the chief information officer, which is, from my perspective, needed and appropriate. Certainly the feedback that I have had in terms of the job that this individual is doing, it is excellent.

Mr. Chomiak: It seems to me in terms of a proactive or prophylactic function, would not there be an expanded role here at Information Services as more data are being put on file rather than a more restricted role? I am just looking for an opinion. I have no reason for knowing that is not the case. It seems to me logically, that is the case. In fact, it would be more of an expanded role, given that the plan is to expand the amount of data and the kind of data and the forms of data. I just throw that out for comment from the minister.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

* (1710)

Mr. Stefanson: The member is right in terms of the heightened need for security just from the combination of the volume of activity and the nature of the activity. I do not want him in any way to have the impression that because there is not a line item reference to it, whether it was under activities or wherever it was listed last year, that it is in any way less important this year.

In fact, I would argue quite the opposite. I am told that the person we now have dedicated, that that did not exist before. That is just within the Department of Health, but even more so, it has been elevated in terms of the government view by the hiring of an individual who, certainly, I recall in his credentials comes highly regarded in this whole area of security for information technology. The feedback I have had from our CIO is that he has already done an outstanding job of identifying areas that need to be addressed and should be addressed.

The member is right on the one hand to say there is a heightened need for security, and I would indicate to him that that has, in fact, been identified and addressed by the hiring of a

security officer from the corporate point of view and by the dedicating of a person within Health to deal specifically with the security issue.

Mr. Chomiak: I want to go back to an issue that we addressed earlier because of its importance in this area. I will start out with another example. The minister may have had occasion to attend at Concordia Hospital, I know the previous minister did, to look at the Drug Program Information System that they provided at Concordia Hospital which was independently produced. In fact, the developers of the program at Concordia Hospital were actually giving tours and lectures in terms of the effectiveness.

What it was was a drug information program that provided patients and others with profiles of drugs, interactions, et cetera. In fact, I indicated to the previous minister that I thought he should attend at Concordia to have a review of this program because it made sense to me in terms of functioning at all of our facilities, or finding some way of putting it on-line.

Having said that, is the department aware of that initiative, for example, and has it been reviewed? Again, in terms of this co-ordinating function, how does it fit in with the department's information initiative, because it seems to me it should fit, and, if it should fit, where does it fit?

Mr. Stefanson: Madam Chair, again, I know the member is very familiar with the DPIN, the provincial DPIN program, starting with pharmacies, rolling out to ERs, rolling out to pharmacies within hospitals, with the ultimate objective being that everything to do with the prescribing of drugs would ultimately end up on the system.

I believe what has been referred to at Concordia is a drug dispensing system and information system, so ultimately that system would be incorporated in the DPIN. I am certainly prepared to look in more detail at what they are currently doing and how it can be integrated in the future with the DPIN network. So that is where DPIN will end up; it is not there yet. If individual hospitals have seen some merit to introducing a system like this in terms of dispensing and providing information, again, that is not something we would oppose, in fact,

we would support. But the key would be that hopefully it has either been done, or, if it is going to be done that it can be fully integrated with the DPIN network. That is the end objective of DPIN.

Mr. Chomiak: I agree with the minister's response, and I guess that is my point that this project also was developed independently. Again, I do not know what initiatives or what contacts were made, but it seems to me that part of DPIN is drug interaction and drug relationships and drug education. This program actually went further than the DPIN, as far as I am aware, and it is much more user friendly than DPIN. Not only did I think it would be more effective in terms of providing information, but it should have been integrated. I agree, it should be integrated with DPIN. The question is how do we get there from here?

The second point is that it seems to me that it would be of extreme importance to have that information not available just to institutions but to other care providers through Home Care, et cetera, because one of the very important functions of nurses and Home Care, for example, is to ensure that—or to evaluate the drug situation particularly by the elderly. So, again, it is a frustration in the system, it is a frustration of mine, and I do not know how one—I mean, it is a very complex area. Short of putting everyone into a room for three weeks and letting them come out with co-ordinate ideas, I do not know how exactly to do it, but there must be a way to do it. I had assumed, and I would assume, that if the department is taking leadership, then the department ought to be aware of all of these activities and ought to have a response or some kind of input into these activities. Maybe that is asking for too much in a system, but it seems to me that if we are spending hundreds of millions of dollars on this, we could do it a lot better.

* (1720)

Mr. Stefanson: Madam Chair, well, again, recognizing the magnitude of this undertaking alone—we have discussed HIN and these initiatives for the last couple of hours—this is being done in stages. It is being rolled out in stages. I think one can argue this both ways and say, sure, we want to see all of our hospitals

completely on it, not only their ER but everything; we want to see all of our physicians on it.

That is the end objective. Do you wait until you have a system completely designed that can accomplish all of that throughout the entire system, or do you start doing it in steps? I guess I would argue you usually do it in steps. Certainly, that would be my preferred approach in most cases, both in terms of starting to reap some benefits, but also it is in many ways a more cautious approach. As you are doing it in various steps, you can take advantage of the changes that are occurring, the latest technology and so on. If you spend many years building one entire system, then technology can pass you by or you can miss other opportunities.

So I am not disagreeing with the overall objective that the member is talking about. Certainly, we want to see Concordia on this as deeply and fully integrated as we do all the hospitals, but I would argue we are heading in that direction and we are taking it a step at a time.

Mr. Chomiak: See, I would almost suggest or recommend a technological development fund independent of SmartHealth that would allow for innovation. That would be one way of perhaps monitoring or accessing so that the various institutions or regional authorities could access that fund, and that would allow one to have control over some of the ideas and some of the processes and, at the same time, provide some funding to launch some of these projects. I think that would make some sense.

You are right; I mean, you could argue this both ways, but I am concerned because I have talked to people in the field, and they have told me this, you know, across the board. There is a frustration with the process and with the fact that while the structure may be built here and there may be ideas proceeding, projects that could be very functional are not moving ahead. There is never a simple solution in complex organizations, but I think a better job can be done with it, for what it is worth.

Mr. Stefanson: Madam Chair, I am told that the Concordia system is basically a patient medication history, has limited use. It was

initially funded, I believe, by the pharmaceutical industry. It hooks up to the hospital discharge, doctors' offices and retail and pharmacy, and it really is, in many ways, an interim program. So, again, I think we have already agreed in terms of the end objective, but it is probably important to remind ourselves of the first stages of DPIN. It was a combination of patient profile but also the whole issue of the payment system.

If you think back not many years ago where Manitobans used to have to save their prescriptions, stick them or glue them to a pad of paper and send them in for their payments and so on, it was a very cumbersome, paper-intensive system, whereas now, in many cases, once individuals hit their deductible, the payments are made by Manitoba Health. It is certainly much more user friendly to the person using the pharmacy and so on.

If you look at the prioritization of which one should you do first, I think the motivation was to do the pharmacies first for a number of reasons in terms of that whole issue of the payment and the benefits to the users, and obviously just the fact that the pharmacies are a large source of access to prescription drugs. So I am sure one could work on an entire system and work towards that, but I think in this particular case to do it a step at a time has been the right approach.

Mr. Chomiak: Of course, we should not forget in this process that this is one of the big new hobby horses of the federal government and the present minister, and I am sure they have all kinds of ideas in this area and may or may not be willing to afford the capital. It might be an interesting area of discussion in terms of allocating funds from the federal government to do some of these initiatives and/or to pilot some projects.

I do not have any more questions in this area pending information probably, I would assume, tomorrow afternoon, so I am wondering if maybe we should move on without passing this item, move on to the next item. See how far we can get just on the other items. I have not prepared specifically, but let us see how far we can get. Then we can come back to this tomorrow, but in terms of the interest of time let us perhaps move on.

* (1730)

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Mr. Stefanson: Maybe just on that, I am still not certain I can have the information tomorrow. It is my intention, and if we can, we can come back to it, but if not, we talked about how there is another opportunity to deal with SmartHealth and the Health Information Network under the Amortization of Capital Assets. So unless there is a concern about passing this and recognizing we will have an opportunity there to deal with it, we can either just come back to it tomorrow if the information is available. [interjection]

The department seems awfully nervous about having all of it ready for tomorrow, so I guess I am saying it might well be that it will take a couple of days, and then it might be more appropriate to deal with it under that section of Estimates.

Mr. Chomiak: Well, perhaps we will pass it. I am fine. We can deal with it under Amortization of Capital Assets, and then we will just go on. Let us assume that tomorrow it will not be ready. We will just move on tomorrow and try to deal with all of the other items and get as far as we can the rest of today and tomorrow, and then when we reach the amortization section, we will deal with it.

Mr. Chairperson: Sounds like a deal. Item 21.2.(c) Information Systems (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$4,452,100—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$3,615,300—pass; (3) External Agencies \$33,800—pass.

21.2.(d) Capital Planning (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$698,600.

Mr. Chomiak: Do we have a capital plan that outlines, that links the provincial strategic priorities, regional health plans and capital requirements?

Mr. Stefanson: Yes, we do. I was pleased the member for Kildonan was able to join me at Concordia Hospital when we announced the 1999 capital program. It really was done on this basis. I think we have talked about this before, or I had responded to a question during Question

Period, that how the capital plans were developed, the RHAs put forward their capital plans. They also prioritize the projects in their regions. The Department of Health goes over those with the RHAs, and it is really on that collaborate and co-operative kind of approach that the ultimate capital plan was prepared for 1999-2000.

So the 1999-2000 capital plan that I announced a few weeks ago that I know the member has seen, that is exactly what is referred to here under Expected Results, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chomiak: Last year the Minister of Health described in detail the community contribution policy. Has it changed, and if it has changed, where has it changed?

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, I will try to return with that tomorrow and I will highlight any changes from a year ago. There may have been some minor changes. I will certainly highlight any changes from a year ago.

Mr. Chomiak: If X, Y, or Z organization wishes to construct a personal care home, for example, and they require information as to capital, what is approved, what is not approved, what is required and what is not required, presumably there are departmental outlines and departmental guides to provide them with that. Can we get a copy of those, please?

Mr. Stefanson: Yes, Mr. Chairman, I can return with a copy of that document for the member tomorrow as well.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, I thank the minister for that. Does the capital planning section here also include capital equipment planning?

Mr. Stefanson: No, the equipment side of capital is not under the capital planning. This is really the facility side, the building side, but I think, as the member knows, in this budget we allocated, I believe, \$27.5 million for equipment, about \$8.5 million goes really unconditionally to the RHAs to use for some of their basic equipment needs. The remaining \$19 million is allocated on the basis of, first of all, all of the RHAs as part of their capital submissions; they

do submit an equipment listing request. That equipment listing request is then reviewed by a department equipment committee, which is across the various divisions of the department. Depending on the nature of the equipment, some of the equipment requests might be referred to the Provincial Imaging Advisory Committee, which deals with CT scans and so on for their recommendations. Then all of that comes back into the department, and they bring the recommendations forward to myself. If it has to go into any other aspect of government, it is taken forward on that basis.

So the short answer is, no, it is not under here, but that is how the process of allocation works for equipment. The director of this section of the capital planning is a member of the department equipment committee, but it is not a function that falls directly under this section.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, this next request, since we just touched on this, this is sort of an advance notice to the minister. I am asking this because I know that it is available, because I know this is obviously a major undertaking that I am requesting, and that is, is it possible for us to get copies of the inventories of the capital equipment throughout the regions? Now, I understand it has been done for Y2K and it has been done for internal purposes as well, but that is a general listing of the equipment that is available in all of the regions. Is it possible to get copies of that information?

* (1740)

Mr. Stefanson: I will follow up on that. The member is correct that certainly from the Y2K and so on we have been inventorying equipment, so I am sure it is available to some extent. I am imagining it will be a fairly extensive list, but I will certainly undertake to provide that. If I have any problem or any reason, I will return and explain that.

Mr. Chomiak: The bulk of the capital questions that we have will deal with specifics on acute care and personal care homes, so I do not have any problem passing this section. We will have to come back to the specific capital projects when we go to another section.

Mr. Stefanson: That is fine, Mr. Chairman. If the member has anything in advance relative to any capital projects that he can provide me, I would welcome that too, and certainly help in terms of providing it, but that approach is fine.

Mr. Chairperson: Item 21.2. Program Support Services (d) Capital Planning (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$698,600—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$212,100—pass.

21.2.(e) Evaluation Monitoring and Appeals (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$486,700.

Mr. Chomiak: Do I understand this correctly to be a relatively new section that has sort of been a put together of a number of areas online with some administrative changes, which incidentally makes some sense from an administrative standpoint?

Mr. Stefanson: The member is correct and the staff thanks him for the compliment. He is right. These were housed in about three different divisions before, and they are now consolidated here.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, in the Expected Results it says: Initiate 1999/2000 evaluation projects, continue/complete 1998/99 evaluation projects. Is it possible, is there a listing of what the evaluation projects are and can we get copies of that?

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, just to give the member a sense, and I am certainly prepared to provide a listing under both of those, the '98-99 evaluation projects and '99-2000. But '98-99, some examples would be consultations on the supportive housing initiative, addiction service agencies, some external consultations regarding the St. Vital community nurse centre, the Aboriginal Health and Wellness facility, and as well to assist the diabetes centre in the Burntwood RHAs. Some current evaluation projects for '99-2000 would be some of the community nurse resource centres at Burntwood, The Pas, Ethelbert, the Francophone primary care centre, some other initiatives with the RHAs and some information system developments.

So those are some examples of some of the evaluation projects, but I will return with a listing both for '98-99 and '99-2000.

Mr. Chomiak: A receipt of that information would be most appreciated. Recently the minister provided me with information, in letter form that I had queried on, with respect to the Home Care Appeal Panel. I wonder if the minister can provide data on the functioning of the Manitoba Health Appeal Board and information regarding the items that have been brought to its attention, as well as, the volume and the types of issues that it has dealt with, if it has dealt with any recently.

Mr. Stefanson: The Manitoba Health Appeal Board really deals with, I guess, two or three areas of appeal that are responsible for hearing and determining appeals made under—I am told it really covers three areas. It covers an opportunity to appeal the residential rates being charged, for example, in our personal care homes; a chance to appeal anything an individual feels should be covered under insured benefits; and, it also can deal with any issue that the minister refers to the board.

I can certainly provide generic information on the nature of the appeals over the course of the last year to give the member a sense of the numbers of appeals and so on.

Mr. Chomiak: We have talked often about the regulations to implement changes at personal care homes. Does this evaluation monitoring appeal section have anything to do with the production of those regulations, that is, the regulations on standards and evaluation of personal care homes?

* (1750)

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, as the member knows, we are just finalizing, in fact we discussed that during Estimates, the whole issue of the standards and regulations, and I offered to arrange for a more comprehensive briefing for the member. At this particular point in time, it has not been finalized where the appeal mechanism will be lodged. Obviously, there will be the need for an opportunity to appeal from either perspective, I would imagine. If a facility feels that they have something to appeal relative to the standards and regulations or if an individual or a family member feels that something is not being properly addressed, it

might well be that it is one of these boards here. That has not been finalized yet, but that certainly will be a part of going forward with the revised standards and regulations.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, I do not really have a problem passing this subsection, but before that, just where we are heading again. I assume we will be at 2.(f) which is Human Resource Planning and Labour Relations. I anticipate some questions there. I also know the member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) wanted to ask nursing-related questions, as we do. I am looking to the minister for direction. Should it be here that those questions ought to be asked under 2.(f) or some other section?

Mr. Stefanson: Well, if the member is in agreement, this is probably the appropriate section. It makes sense to do it here. There would be others. Subsequently, we could probably find a way to do it, but this is as good as any.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable member for Kildonan, I will pass.

Mr. Chomiak: Pass it, and then I will talk to it.

Mr. Chairperson: Item 21.2.(e) Evaluation, Monitoring and Appeals (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$486,700—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$370,300—pass; (3) External Agencies \$88,000—pass.

21.2.(f) Human Resource Planning and Labour Relations (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$1,039,200.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, since it is rather late in the day, I do not think it is probably appropriate to start this section. Again, in terms of where we are going, tomorrow if the information is not completely available, then I presume we will go through this section and perhaps get into several other sections. I anticipate that aside from this section, all of the other sections leading up to Section 4 will not be overly lengthy in terms of questions.

I anticipate next week a fairly extensive review of Section 4, sections dealing with hospitals, dealing with physicians, dealing with

Pharmacare. I anticipate that to be fairly lengthy next week. Perhaps, we will even make it into Capital next week, but that is where I roughly see us going.

So tomorrow I guess we will deal with this section unless we come in with all kinds of information in return. Well, I guess that will be the minister's call. I will leave it to the minister to let us know if he wants to bring back the individual to deal with all of the Information Services questions or whether that is not the case, then we will just deal with the nursing and related labour questions.

Mr. Stefanson: Mr. Chairman, I think we should count on carrying on here. If something

changes, if the information were available, I would contact the member. If we are into Private Members' in the morning, I would contact the member before or afternoon, but as of now, I think we should just plan on doing—

Mr. Chairperson: Is it the will of the committee to call it six o'clock? [agreed] The hour being six o'clock, committee rise. Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Marcel Laurendeau): The hour being six o'clock, this House is now adjourned and stands adjourned until tomorrow (Thursday) 10 a.m.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 26, 1999

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