



Second Session - Thirty-Seventh Legislature

of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

**Official Report
(Hansard)**

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The Honourable George Hickes
Speaker*



MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Seventh Legislature

Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
AGLUGUB, Cris	The Maples	N.D.P.
ALLAN, Nancy	St. Vital	N.D.P.
ASHTON, Steve, Hon.	Thompson	N.D.P.
ASPER, Linda	Riel	N.D.P.
BARRETT, Becky, Hon.	Inkster	N.D.P.
CALDWELL, Drew, Hon.	Brandon East	N.D.P.
CERILLI, Marianne	Radisson	N.D.P.
CHOMIAK, Dave, Hon.	Kildonan	N.D.P.
CUMMINGS, Glen	St. Rose	P.C.
DACQUAY, Louise	Seine River	P.C.
DERKACH, Leonard	Russell	P.C.
DEWAR, Gregory	Selkirk	N.D.P.
DOER, Gary, Hon.	Concordia	N.D.P.
DRIEDGER, Myrna	Charleswood	P.C.
DYCK, Peter	Pembina	P.C.
ENNS, Harry	Lakeside	P.C.
FAURSCHOU, David	Portage la Prairie	P.C.
FRIESEN, Jean, Hon.	Wolseley	N.D.P.
GERRARD, Jon, Hon.	River Heights	Lib.
GILLESHAMMER, Harold	Minnedosa	P.C.
HELWER, Edward	Gimli	P.C.
HICKES, George	Point Douglas	N.D.P.
JENNISSEN, Gerard	Flin Flon	N.D.P.
KORZENIOWSKI, Bonnie	St. James	N.D.P.
LATHLIN, Oscar, Hon.	The Pas	N.D.P.
LAURENDEAU, Marcel	St. Norbert	P.C.
LEMIEUX, Ron, Hon.	La Verendrye	N.D.P.
LOEWEN, John	Fort Whyte	P.C.
MACKINTOSH, Gord, Hon.	St. Johns	N.D.P.
MAGUIRE, Larry	Arthur-Virden	P.C.
MALOWAY, Jim	Elmwood	N.D.P.
MARTINDALE, Doug	Burrows	N.D.P.
McGIFFORD, Diane, Hon.	Lord Roberts	N.D.P.
MIIYCHUK, MaryAnn, Hon.	Minto	N.D.P.
MITCHELSON, Bonnie	River East	P.C.
MURRAY, Stuart	Kirkfield Park	P.C.
NEVAKSHONOFF, Tom	Interlake	N.D.P.
PENNER, Jack	Emerson	P.C.
PENNER, Jim	Steinbach	P.C.
PITURA, Frank	Morris	P.C.
PRAZNIK, Darren	Lac du Bonnet	P.C.
REID, Daryl	Transcona	N.D.P.
REIMER, Jack	Southdale	P.C.
ROBINSON, Eric, Hon.	Rupertsland	N.D.P.
ROCAN, Denis	Carman	P.C.
RONDEAU, Jim	Assiniboia	N.D.P.
SALE, Tim, Hon.	Fort Rouge	N.D.P.
SANTOS, Conrad	Wellington	N.D.P.
SCHIELLENBERG, Harry	Rossmere	N.D.P.
SCHULER, Ron	Springfield	P.C.
SELINGER, Greg, Hon.	St. Boniface	N.D.P.
SMITH, Joy	Fort Garry	P.C.
SMITH, Scott, Hon.	Brandon West	N.D.P.
STEFANSON, Heather	Tuxedo	P.C.
STRUTHIERS, Stan	Dauphin-Roblin	N.D.P.
TWEED, Mervin	Turtle Mountain	P.C.
WOWCHUK, Rosann, Hon.	Swan River	N.D.P.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 23, 2001

The House met at 1:30 p.m.

PRAYERS

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Manitoba Hydro Lines Routes

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Mr. Speaker, I beg to present the petition of J. Cornwall, D. Cornwall, J. Butler and others, praying that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba request that the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro (Mr. Selinger) consider alternative routes for the additional 230kV and 500kV lines proposed for the R.M. of East St. Paul.

Kenaston Underpass

Mr. Frank Pitura (Morris): Mr. Speaker, I beg to present the petition of Chad Wrixon, Darlene Tallaire, Linda Manson and others, praying that the Premier of Manitoba (Mr. Doer) consider reversing his decision to not support construction of an underpass at Kenaston and Wilkes.

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): Mr. Speaker, I beg to present the petition of Norma Carswell, Doug Carswell, Louise Van De Mossler and others, praying that the Premier of Manitoba consider reversing his decision to not support construction of an underpass at Kenaston and Wilkes.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, I beg to present the petition of Vivian Barbour, Irene Karr, Pat Dunmall and others, praying that the Premier of Manitoba consider reversing his decision to not support construction of an underpass at Kenaston and Wilkes.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Manitoba Hydro Lines Routes

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler), I have reviewed the petition and it complies with the rules and

practices of the House. Is it the will of the House to have the petition read?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Clerk, please read.

Madam Clerk (Patricia Chaychuk): The petition of the undersigned citizens of the province of Manitoba humbly sheweth:

THAT the R.M. of East St. Paul has the highest concentration of high voltage power lines in a residential area in Manitoba; and

THAT the R.M. of East St. Paul is the only jurisdiction in Manitoba that has both a 500kV and a 230kV line directly behind residences; and

THAT numerous studies have linked cancer, in particular childhood leukemia, to the proximity of power lines.

WHEREFORE YOUR PETITIONERS HUMBLY PRAY THAT the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba request that the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro consider alternative routes for the additional 230kV and 500kV lines proposed for the R.M. of East St. Paul.

* (13:35)

Kenaston Underpass

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Morris (Mr. Pitura), I have reviewed the petition and it complies with the rules and practices of the House. Is it the will of the House to have the petition read?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Clerk, please read.

Madam Clerk (Patricia Chaychuk): The petition of the undersigned citizens of the province of Manitoba humbly sheweth:

THAT the intersection at Wilkes and Kenaston has grown to become the largest unseparated crossing in Canada; and

THAT the volume of traffic for this railroad crossing is twelve times the acceptable limit as set out by Transport Canada; and

THAT vehicles which have to wait for trains at this intersection burn up approximately \$1.4 million in fuel, pollute the environment with over 8 tons of emissions and cause approximately \$7.3 million in motorist delays every year.

WHEREFORE YOUR PETITIONERS HUMBLY PRAY THAT the Premier of Manitoba consider reversing his decision to not support construction of an underpass at Kenaston and Wilkes.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Loewen), I have reviewed the petition and it complies with the rules and practices of the House. Is it the will of the House to have the petition read?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Clerk, please read.

Madam Clerk: The petition of the undersigned citizens of the province of Manitoba humbly sheweth:

THAT the intersection at Wilkes and Kenaston has grown to become the largest unseparated crossing in Canada; and

THAT the volume of traffic for this railroad crossing is twelve times the acceptable limit as set out by Transport Canada; and

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WHEREFORE YOUR PETITIONERS HUMBLY PRAY THAT the Premier of Manitoba consider reversing his decision to not

support construction of an underpass at Kenaston and Wilkes.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Bill 18—The Teachers' Pensions Amendment Act

Hon. Drew Caldwell (Minister of Education, Training and Youth): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Smith), that leave be given to introduce Bill 18, The Teachers' Pensions Amendment Act (Loi modifiant la Loi sur la pension de retraite des enseignants), and the same be now received and read a first time.

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

Motion presented.

Mr. Caldwell: Just briefly, this bill amends The Teachers' Pensions Act in several ways, including clarification of periods of part- and full-time employment for purposes of pension eligibility, limiting the period during which a retired teacher under the age of 65 can teach while receiving a pension, adding a provision to allow a teacher or a former teacher to purchase at full actuarial costs the period of past service, providing for a one-time transfer from account A to the pension adjustment account, and gives the Teachers' Retirement Allowance Fund board the authority to invest funds on behalf of the Government. Thank you.

Motion agreed to.

* (13:40)

Bill 25—The Health Services Insurance Amendment and Consequential Amendments Act

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the honourable Minister of Finance (Mr. Selinger), that leave be given to introduce Bill 25, The Health Services Insurance Amendment and Consequential Amendments Act; Loi modifiant la Loi sur

l'assurance-maladie et modifications corrélatives, and that the same be now received and read a first time.

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

Motion presented.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, this bill amends The Health Services Insurance Act with respect to surgical facilities and makes changes to the law dealing with the Government's ability to recover the cost of insured services from negligent third parties.

Motion agreed to.

Bill 30—The Securities Amendment Act

Hon. Scott Smith (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): I move, seconded by the Minister of Education, Training and Youth (Mr. Caldwell), that leave be given to introduce Bill 30, The Securities Amendment Act (Loi modifiant la Loi sur les valeurs mobilières), and that the same be now received and read a first time.

Motion presented.

Mr. Smith: The amendments of The Securities Act proposed in this bill fall into two broad categories. First are the amendments that will harmonize our securities legislation with that of other provinces, including changes and changing time requirements to file insider trading reports, increasing the notice period for takeover bids, adding the concept of reporting issuer and providing the Manitoba Securities Commission with authority to recognize self-regulatory organizations, just to name a few.

Other proposed amendments relate to the hearings and remedies and include providing the Manitoba Securities Commission with the ability to level financial administrative penalties and costs after the hearing.

Motion agreed to.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members to the gallery where we have with us from Darwin School, 19 Grade 3 students under the direction of Ms. Madeline Noyes. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Member for Riel (Ms. Asper).

Also seated in the gallery we have, from Red River College, Intensive English Program, 13 English as a Second Language students under the direction of Ms. Kristina Gryz. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Member for Wellington (Mr. Santos).

Also in the gallery we have from Rock Lake School 17 Grades 4 to 8 students under the direction of Mr. Charles Friesen. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Tweed).

On behalf of all honourable members, I welcome you here today.

* (13:45)

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

**Regional Health Authorities
Budgets**

Mr. Stuart Murray (Leader of the Official Opposition): Mr. Speaker, the Premier has stated on many occasions in this House that the regional health authorities, including the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, must live within their budgets. Those are the budgets that were allocated to them by his Government and that this year's Budget is sufficient to provide health services to all Manitobans.

Now that the RHAs have had a chance to examine their budgets for this year, they are finding that they do not even have the money to provide the current level of services. They are indicating that to live within the Premier's Budget they are going to have to close facilities, lay off staff and rotation of services. Which cuts in services will the Premier allow the RHAs to make in order to live within his Budget?

Hon. Gary Doer (Premier): The allocations in the Budget have been fully outlined by the Minister of Health (Mr. Chomiak). The member opposite should know that I believe three or four of the health authorities last year did stay within their budgets. Some of them did not. The member opposite should also know that this year's funding provided for basic health services, patient services in the regional health authorities. It provided for, I believe, an 8% increase in the personal care homes which had been underfunded for 10 years.

In Winnipeg, for example, the community-based health clinics, which we hope will provide more and more preventative health care and wellness attention as well as other needed medical services, received a substantial increase. We are trying to see a shift, we are trying over time to not only increase the number of trained staff we have but to see a bit of a shift from the higher-cost acute care programs to some of the more cost-effective community-based programs in the province.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, we have already heard from South Eastman that they may have to close a hospital to meet the Premier's Budget. We have also heard from Marquette that they also may have to close a hospital. Which other hospitals are the RHAs telling the Premier they will have to close in order to meet the Premier's bottom line?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, the members opposite fired a thousand nurses and still had—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

Mr. Marcel Laurendeau (Opposition House Leader): On a point of order. *Beauschene's* clearly shows us that we should not mislead the people of Manitoba. This Premier continues to mislead, like his Minister of Health (Mr. Chomiak), because there were no thousand nurses fired. There was a reorganization within the health care system in Manitoba. All those nurses were rehired except for 33, Mr. Speaker, not like these members who fired 500 nurses.

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

Mr. Doer: On the same point of order, the documentation prepared by nurses not by political parties was tabled in the Legislature. They may try to run from the record, Mr. Speaker, but they cannot hide from it, and that is part of the reality when dealing with the members opposite.

Mr. Speaker: Order. On the point of order raised by the honourable Official Opposition House Leader, he does not have a point of order. It is a dispute over the facts.

* * *

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, they were reducing the size of the medical school in the early '90s, which has resulted in a shortage of doctors, reducing the salaries and equipment for diagnostic testing and at the same time—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Doer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At the same time that all these medical conditions and conditions for patient care were in the environment that we inherited, we also inherited the highest per capita spending of any province in Canada on health care services. Surely to goodness, if members want to suggest that the status quo is the way we should drift along, this is not a party that drifts along. This is a party and a Government that innovates and makes changes for the long-term sustainability for health care.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

* (13:50)

Mr. Speaker: Order. I would at this time ask the co-operation of all honourable members. In order for me to rule on breach of a rule or unparliamentary language, I have to be able to hear. It is very difficult to hear the questions and the answers. I would ask the co-operation of all honourable members, please.

Mr. Murray: Mr. Speaker, the Premier talks about innovation. Well, if their idea of

innovation is to close two hospitals and fire 600 nurses in the last two months, that is innovation that this province does not need.

Mr. Speaker, it is important that the public be involved in decisions. Communities have a right to know that their RHAs are looking at the closure of hospitals and cuts in services to patients. Since the Premier has already said in this Chamber many times, he has already said that the financial decisions of his Government rest on his desk, can he tell Manitobans what cuts will be allowed so that they will meet the Premier's Budget?

Mr. Doer: Mr. Speaker, the former government established the regional health authority system, and they are dealing with the financial resources that are well above inflation for purposes of health care delivery. They are dealing with their budgets. It is important, we believe, to applaud those regional health authorities that stayed within their budget in the last fiscal year.

Mr. Speaker, there were at least four health authorities that were able to achieve that, and we think that is positive. You cannot have, over the long run, balanced budget legislation and have no requirement of staying within budgets in the regional health authorities. Having said that, financial resources have to be balanced against patient care, and we have shown to date that there have been no hospitals closed. The argument about nurses, I think, is so silly it is not even worthy of paying it any attention.

Health Care Facilities Closures

Mr. Darren Praznik (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, the Premier has quickly forgotten that he promised Manitobans in the election to fix all of the health care problems for a measly \$15 million, and now the complexity and the realities are coming home to him.

I want to ask the First Minister: Given that he has expected regional health authorities to live within their budgets and given that regional health authorities are now telling him that to do that they will have to close hospitals, can the Premier now provide a list to Manitobans of the hospitals that are under consideration for closure?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, if the member wants to reference particular underutilized hospitals, he ought to reference the report that was commissioned by his government in 1995 and the report that was commissioned by his government in 1999 that outlined underutilized hospitals.

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the Minister of Health again: Given that we are not talking about utilization but lack of funding from his department, will he come clean today and provide the list of hospitals that regional health authorities are saying they will have to close to meet this Premier's (Mr. Doer) Budget targets?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, at the press conference that was held by the CEO and the chairperson for the South Eastman region recently when they were temporarily reconfiguring the region, they indicated that the reason they were in difficulty was because of constant government underfunding during the 1990s.

Mr. Praznik: Mr. Speaker, given that this minister and this Government have now been in power for two budgets and promised to solve all problems for \$15 million, I want to ask this Minister of Health and this Premier (Mr. Doer) if they will come clean and tell Manitobans today the list of hospitals that are under consideration for closure on his watch as Minister of Health, because he has not provided adequate funding to them.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, during the 1990s, the former government closed 1400 acute care beds. It is this Government's policy not to close hospitals.

* (13:55)

Pan Am Clinic Purchase-Property Taxes

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, yesterday in Estimates, the Minister of Health confirmed that Manitoba taxpayers are going to be paying the annual property taxes and huge annual repair costs on the Pan Am Clinic. Why did the Minister of Health hide this fact from Manitoba taxpayers, that they are going to be paying anywhere from \$53,000 to \$60,000 in

annual property taxes, when he made his announcement that when he bought the Pan Am Clinic all he was buying was the building and equipment? He never came clean on the fact that Manitobans are now paying huge property taxes on an annual basis.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sure we all want to hear the answer.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, the member referenced that in Estimates yesterday, and as I explained to the member in Estimates yesterday, she obtained the information from the report on due diligence that we provided publicly that indicated there are operating expenses in any capital project.

Mr. Speaker, as I indicated—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Chomiak: I will complete my answer in the second time.

Mrs. Driedger: He was squirming yesterday, and he is squirming again.

Purchase—Building Repairs

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Why did this Minister of Health hide the fact that by buying the Pan Am Clinic, Manitoba taxpayers are now also on the hook for anywhere between \$66,000 and \$74,000 every year for the next five years to pay for the repairs on this old building?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I remind all honourable members that there is a viewing public, there are children in the gallery and I would ask the co-operation of all honourable members.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated, it is hardly hiding when we provided the information to the member opposite in a report that was made public, firstly. Secondly, the absurdity of what the member is saying can be related to the fact that when we opened Boundary Trails hospital several weeks ago, something I guess members opposite were

opposed to too, we did not indicate what the operating costs were. If members did not know there is an operating cost associated with the capital project, then they have serious problems.

Purchase—Additional Expenses

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister of Health what other hidden costs there are for Manitoba taxpayers. We are talking here about a purchase of a clinic and nationalizing the clinic, not building a hospital. How much is NDP ideology going to cost Manitoba taxpayers?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, as the Pricewaterhouse report, which was an independent third-party review of the particular purchase agreement, had indicated, we would realize a net profit of \$1.2 million or \$1.5 million over a five-year period, returning money from the clinic to be reinvested in the clinic to do more surgeries, offer more services and keep more doctors here in Manitoba.

East St. Paul High Voltage Hydro Lines

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): Mr. Speaker, throughout their discussions with the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro, the residents of East St. Paul were never informed that there is not one but two 230kV lines running through their community on top of another 500kV line.

Can the Minister of Hydro confirm that the actual amount of power surging through East St. Paul is actually 960kV, rather than 730kV he has consistently told the residents?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): Mr. Speaker, I can confirm that, when the research was done on the impact of these hydro lines, the actual level of EMF that the residents would be experiencing would be less than many of the power lines that the Opposition installed in other communities during their term in office.

* (14:00)

Mr. Schuler: I would ask the minister: Given that he plans to add an additional 960kV of power through East St. Paul, bringing the total to

1920kV, can the minister provide this House with an urban example in North America which has 1920kV surging just metres from people's backyards?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, the critical variable installation of hydro lines is the distance from the residences, and in this case, the level of EMF that the residents will experience here is far less than lines that were installed by the previous government.

Mr. Schuler: Will the minister live up to his party's commitment from when they were in opposition to provide intervener funding for the residents of East St. Paul so they can provide a professional and well-researched perspective at the upcoming Clean Environment Commission meeting?

Mr. Selinger: Mr. Speaker, this project, which was initiated by the former government, went through an entire environmental impact study, initiated and carried out by the Department of Conservation. They also had a full opportunity for appeal which was conducted by the Department of Conservation.

In addition to that, unlike any other Hydro project in Manitoba, I asked the Clean Environment Commission to review the literature on EMF to see if there were any current risks to anybody in Manitoba from hydro lines. They concluded, using public health officials and CancerCare officials here in Manitoba, that there was no risk from EMF with hydro lines installed throughout Manitoba, and that has been a higher level of due diligence provided by any other government. In addition, the Clean Environment Commission is now prepared to meet with these residents and explain their findings and answer any remaining questions they may have.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Springfield, on a new question.

East St. Paul Cancer Rates

Mr. Ron Schuler (Springfield): On a new question. The Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro has continually stated in this House that there are no health risks associated with living

next to power lines. Is the minister aware that there is a Manitoba report that states East St. Paul has the highest cancer rates in the Winnipeg area?

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): Mr. Speaker, I have indicated in this House the research that was determined by public health officials and CancerCare officials with respect to EMF. If there is any additional evidence that the member wishes to present or the community wishes to present to the Department of Conservation so that they can review the environmental impacts, they have the full right to provide that information. They have had an appeal. They have had an environmental impact study. If they have additional information, they can present it to the Department of Conservation and ask for that additional information to be considered in the environmental impact review.

Mr. Schuler: Given obvious concerns of cancer rates in East St. Paul, it is my responsibility as their MLA to ask: Will the Minister of Hydro place a moratorium on further Hydro expansion in East St. Paul and provide intervener funding to the residents?

Mr. Selinger: If the member has additional information that the Department of Conservation should consider, I would encourage him to provide it at the earliest possible date. This environmental impact study was initiated by the former government. The appeals have been heard by the Department of Conservation. If there is any additional information that would in any way suggest that there is an additional health risk in this community that makes it extraordinary compared to any other community, I would encourage this member to table this information forthwith with the Department of Conservation, have the public health officials review it, and we will go forward from there.

Mr. Schuler: Mr. Speaker, I would like to table from the report that was presented in May, which actually comes from the Minister of Health's (Mr. Chomiak) department. The Minister of Health should know it, but I will table it in either case. I would ask the Minister of Hydro, with the highest concentration of power

lines in a residential community and the highest cancer rates in the city of Winnipeg, will the minister place a moratorium on Hydro expansion in East St. Paul and provide the residents with intervenor funding?

Mr. Selinger: Once again, Mr. Speaker, the process for handling an environmental impact review and the appeals are entirely handled by the Department of Conservation. If there is any information that should be considered with respect to this matter, I encourage him to table it immediately with the Department of Conservation, have that department review it and if this information is considered to be salient and relevant to this issue, I am certain that the Department of Conservation will take it under consideration.

Point of Order

Mrs. Bonnie Mitchelson (River East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, clearly the information that was just tabled by the member from Springfield was information that was provided to the Minister of Health (Mr. Chomiak) in this Government.

Mr. Speaker, if one colleague does not talk to another, that is their problem on that side of the House. The information is there, and it is incumbent upon the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Lathlin) and the Minister of Health to talk to each other and share information.

Mr. Selinger: The information that is provided here on cancer incidence rates was compiled between the years 1993 and 1995. I am surprised the members opposite when they were in government did not consider this information, and if they did not, they have made a huge mistake.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The honourable Member for Charleswood, on the same point of order.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): On the same point of order, Mr. Speaker, the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy and Evaluation just tabled that report within the last few weeks. They were looking at past data, but the report was compiled, the statistics were just compiled,

and the Minister of Health's office would have received the report at the same time I did.

If he had studied the report as well as I did, Mr. Speaker, he would know that this information should be dealt with by his Government.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Prior to recognizing the Minister of Health on the same point of order, may I remind all honourable members that a point of order should be a breach of the rules or unparliamentary language. I do not want it to turn into a debate.

Mr. Chomiak: The report in question I believe was commissioned by members opposite. They had access to this information. They had access to information to provide to the hearing and they did not.

Mr. Speaker: Order. On the point of order raised, it is not a point of order. It is a dispute over the facts.

East St. Paul Cancer Rates

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, my question to the Minister of Health. In the report in dispute, which was released May 4 from the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy and Evaluation, there is quite clearly the highest incidence of cancer in what is called River East North, East St. Paul, of any neighbourhood in Winnipeg, incidence of 7.8 compared to the rest of Winnipeg which is about 5.3. That increase is statistically significant. That means it is unlikely to have occurred by chance. It is clear, given the fact that the other health indicators for this neighbourhood suggest an above-average health index, that this cancer rate stands out as an anomaly.

I would ask the Minister of Health to ask for a research investigation, a scientific investigation as quickly as possible to sort out the reason for the high incidence of cancer.

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, the member makes a valid suggestion. The data was provided by Cancer Treatment Research Foundation in 1996. I think that it is fair, it is worthwhile to examine all of these

issues and all of the incidence and all of the factors as the member knows, that go into the determination of the risk factors regarding this particular type of incidence or this particular type of illness.

* (14:10)

Mr. Gerrard: My supplementary to the Minister responsible for Manitoba Hydro. Given the acute public concern over the high voltage power lines and some studies which suggest that there could be links to cancer, it would seem to me advisable for the minister to not proceed with this until we have the scientific investigation for the high cancer incidence. I would ask Minister responsible for Hydro if he will hold off until we have the results of the scientific investigation.

Hon. Greg Selinger (Minister charged with the administration of The Manitoba Hydro Act): We will take the question by the member opposite under advisement. We will investigate this data which was released by the Manitoba Cancer Treatment and Research Foundation in 1996, see if it has been reviewed during the environmental impact study review and get back to the member on whether or not it has been considered.

Mr. Gerrard: My supplementary to the minister. Given that the report in fact explains that sometimes it takes a while to analyze data, I suspect this is the first analysis of those data in this sort of fashion. So I would ask the minister: Given the precautionary principle that is involved in an environmental and health assessment, would he not commit to holding off on any new power line construction in that area until these data are thoroughly investigated?

Mr. Selinger: I think the data deserves careful consideration which is why we originally asked people that are experts in cancer care and public health to review the information on EMF, and included with that was Dr. Harry Johnson from CancerCare Manitoba, and he has given his opinion on the safety of EMF.

This information I will take under consideration, and I will ask it to be carefully reviewed. Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member opposite that we will not make any precipitous decisions

until we have a better understanding of what the implications of this data are for any neighbourhood in Manitoba.

Health Care System Emergency Services—Rural Manitoba

Mr. Harry Enns (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Health. I recognize that one of the constant challenges of this Government, any government, is to bring about a degree of equity and parity in the provision of public service, in this case, the services of an emergency medical service system. We had some of their members picketing the building here this morning. I am advised that the system is near collapse in rural Manitoba.

What is this minister doing to ensure sufficient personnel, sufficient numbers of EMS personnel so that that in fact does not happen?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, the member might be aware that his government commissioned a study of EMS in Manitoba, that when we assumed office arrived on our desk, that showed funding for EMS in Manitoba at the time we assumed office was the lowest in the country. Last Budget, we doubled the funding to rural EMS, the biggest increase in the history of EMS to the province of Manitoba. This year, we announced a replenishment of 80 new ambulances across the province.

I have explained this on many occasions to members opposite during the Estimates experience and during some of the other processes, that we have started from very far behind in terms of EMS in Manitoba, and it is going to take us awhile to build up from the legacy of what happened over the past decade.

Mr. Enns: Mr. Speaker, the rules prevent me from entering into a debate about it. There is a changing system out there, of course. EMS was largely delivered through volunteer services prior to the visionary and innovative measures the previous government introduced, which this minister is not changing, the putting together of the regional health districts.

My question is I am asking the minister to answer, if not for me then for the rural residents who depend on this kind of service: Will he

ensure that they are adequately staffed at Emergency Measures, the EMS people will be there to serve the rural people when called upon?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, as I have indicated, we recognized and we realized that EMS had been underresourced for over a decade, and everyone will admit it. Even when the EMS officials met with the Leader of the Opposition, they indicated that the problems occurred over the past decade. We recognized that, but we cannot in one or two years undo what happened over the past decade.

I can tell you that last year's Budget doubled the amount of resources to rural Manitoba, and we have increased it again this year, and we recognize that sufficient EMS purposes is central and necessary to rural Manitoba. It is far more necessary now than it was 20 years ago or 25 years ago, and there is no doubt that we have to enhance the resources to rural Manitoba in order to provide them adequate services. We are doing everything we can within our resources to do that.

Education Facilities Nursing Staff

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): During the 1999 election campaign, the current Premier (Mr. Doer) promised Manitobans that a Doer government would hire nurses to work in schools. He promised that schools would be, and I quote, a primary site for community-based child health programs. He told Manitobans that this would cost \$500,000.

Can the Minister of Health explain why the Doer government has, once again, broken their promises to Manitobans by failing to hire nurses to work in schools?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, as we indicated on many occasions, the numbers of nurses graduating, in fact, in 1999 and 2000 were the lowest in the history of Manitoba in the past 20 years in terms of nurses. It has been very difficult to find and maintain adequate nurses as a result of the cutbacks that occurred during the 1990s and the elimination of the nursing programs. We are on track for nursing programs in the schools.

Healthy Child Manitoba Nurses and Schools Initiative

Mrs. Heather Stefanson (Tuxedo): Mr. Speaker, can the minister explain why, following this year's budgets, the nurses in school initiatives is no longer outlined as a core commitment of Healthy Child Manitoba in the Doer government's press releases?

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Family Services and Housing): As the chairman of the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet, I can assure the member that nurses in schools are a core commitment of Healthy Child Manitoba and that work to implement that promise during the election is well underway at the present time.

Mrs. Stefanson: Mr. Speaker, will the minister just come clean and admit that the Doer government has once again broken yet another election promise?

Mr. Sale: No.

Health Care System MRI Waiting Lists

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): Mr. Speaker, on May 14 the Minister of Health would have received a letter from a father in Winnipeg about his son Steven [*phonetic*]. I will not use the family's name here in the House, but I am certainly prepared to discuss this with the minister. This father was concerned about his son having a fall in 1997 and having severe back pain right now, but he cannot get any treatment in Manitoba. He has been waiting very long for tests. He had to wait 13 weeks for an MRI test here, and he went to the United States to get the MRI in two days. Could the minister indicate why the tests for an MRI in the United States would only take two days, but in Manitoba it is taking 13 weeks for somebody in severe back pain?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): Mr. Speaker, as is always the occasion in this House, I would appreciate if the member would forward the specifics, and I will check it in my office with respect to the specifics of that case.

As it relates to the MRIs, if the members scrutinized some of our capital plans this year

they would note that there will be the installing of a new MRI. We will have more MRIs in Manitoba I think than at any other time in our history, and we will work towards a reduction that Manitobans deserve. We are going to try to do our best.

Mrs. Driedger: I would like to ask the Minister of Health, then, if he is talking about having more MRIs, if indeed he will commit to spending the \$18.6 million he is sitting on that the federal government gave him for this year for medical diagnostic equipment instead of sitting on it for next year's Budget? Will he commit now to spending it so we do not have these long, long waiting lists in Manitoba?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, I am glad the member referenced the program that Manitoba worked very hard to get the federal government to introduce. We are very pleased that Manitoba was one of the leaders in persuading the federal government to put in place an equipment program.

Mr. Speaker, we amassed \$22 million in equipment, which is far superior to anything that has happened in the last decade. We will continue. There are new CAT scans coming on. There are new MRIs. Unfortunately, we are paying the legacy of a neglect and a deterioration of this system that occurred over the past decade. It will take us some time, but we are continuing to improve the situation by new capital equipment, and we will continue to do that at a pace that has not happened in this province before.

* (14:20)

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the minister when he is going to make a commitment of funding for that \$18.6 million which was given to this Government by the federal government to be spent specifically on diagnostic equipment. Instead of having a young boy like this sitting in severe pain because he cannot get tests in Manitoba, when will this minister commit to spending that money, or is he going to save it for the next election and that becomes a slush fund?

Mr. Chomiak: When the member refers to slush fund, she is well experienced from the last

government's dealing with money, well experienced with that. That is not the policy that this Government adopts.

Yesterday, they were accusing us of spending too much money. Today, they say we are not spending enough money. They have to get off the fence, Mr. Speaker. Now we understand why health care was so badly managed in the 1990s. They did not know what they were doing. They could not make up their mind. One day it is spend. One day it is not spend. We have put in place more programs to train more nurses, to train more doctors, to train other health care professionals.

We have expanded initiatives in the community, Mr. Speaker, like the eating disorders, like the PACT program in the community that provides mental health services, like the primary care initiatives, first time in this province, and there is more to come in the next few months.

Health Care System Hallway Medicine

Mr. Frank Pitura (Morris): Mr. Speaker, a constituent of mine recently wrote to me about his deep concern with the present state of health care in Manitoba. He noted that his wife has been in the emergency rooms at two Winnipeg hospitals and was in hallway No. 3 once and in hallway No. 9 on her other visit. My constituent has no complaint with the health care professional with whom he and his wife were in contact. He does have a complaint about the way the health care system is being managed.

Why, if the minister kept his promise to end hallway medicine, was my constituent's wife in hospital hallways on two occasions this spring?

Hon. Dave Chomiak (Minister of Health): I happened to check the statistics for hallways today. On today's date two years ago, when members opposite were in power, there were 18 people in the hallways. Last year, after we put in place our hallway initiatives, there were 9 in the hallways. Today there are 2 in the hallways. While we have not been perfect, CIHI, a national report, said we had reduced it by 80 percent and we had done better in Manitoba than any other province, and we are continuing to do that.

Mr. Speaker, we are continuing to put in place initiatives because we realize it is not perfect. We realize there are still some problems, but we are not dealing with the 25, 30 and 40 in the hallways day after day, week after week, month after month that occurred when members opposite were in power.

Mr. Pitura: Mr. Speaker, why, when the Health budget was increased by 22 percent since the 1999 budget, are Manitoba patients still being treated in hospital hallways?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Speaker, there are a number of reasons. First off, CIHI indicated we have reduced the numbers by 80 percent, which is the best in Canada. Secondly, the closing of 1400 beds by members opposite in the '90s contributed to that. Thirdly, the firing of 1000 nurses by members opposite contributed to a nursing shortage. Fourth, the reduction of physicians in 1992 to reduce the number of physicians in Manitoba contributed.

When we came into office we announced on November 22, 1999, a comprehensive hallway plan that has been copied by other jurisdictions, including Ontario that almost exclusively adopted our plan to deal with hallway medicine. It is not perfect, Mr. Speaker. We are continuing to work at it and we will continue to work at it to improve the situation.

Mr. Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Carol Spain

Mrs. Joy Smith (Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate a talented and innovative woman by the name of Carol Spain, who resides in the Fort Garry constituency. Carol Spain was recently recognized by the Women's Business Owners of Manitoba for her outstanding entrepreneurship in starting her business, The Itty Bitty Baby Clothing Company.

The formation and development of small business is essential to maintaining a sound provincial economy. Innovations such as Ms. Spain's new clothing store diversify our economy and create new job opportunities for

hardworking Manitobans. Mr. Speaker, the entrepreneurs who take on these new endeavours deserve to be recognized as individuals who are truly making a difference in our communities and in our province. Events such as the recent gala put on by the Women's Business Owners of Manitoba are welcome events which help to highlight the important achievements of women in this province. As Eddie Calisto-Tavares, president of the WBOM stated, we are celebrating their courage, their passion, their vision and determination to create, sometimes from nothing, and to make their dreams a reality.

Also recognized by the WBOM were Roslyn Nugent of Bayridge Lumber and Forest Products who received the award for overall excellence and the innovator award, Janice Regehr, Louise Grouette Stockwell, Marlene Fast and Donna Lagopoulos.

So, Mr. Speaker, it is with great respect and admiration that I recognize the wonderful accomplishments of these women and to congratulate them on making their business dreams a reality in Manitoba.

Hyacinth Colomb

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): I want to take this opportunity to recognize an exemplary citizen, Mr. Hyacinth Colomb of Mathias Colomb Cree Nation at Pukatawagan who will be receiving the Order of Manitoba for his dedication and commitment to the local community. A former chief of the community, Mr. Colomb has also served as a band councillor, ambulance driver and fire chief for the community. He has undertaken various projects such as a wild rice operation. In fact, Mr. Colomb has explained to me clearly on several occasions how the fluctuating water levels on the river impact on wild rice growing in the region.

Mr. Colomb was Manitoba's first trapline officer and a community representative for the Natural Resources Department. As a result of his success, that program was expanded to other communities and remains a very important aspect of Department of Conservation programs in the North to this day. At over 80 years of age Mr. Colomb still traps his own fur and continues to work tirelessly with the youth of his

community to interest them in trapping and land-based lifestyles.

The Order of Manitoba, the province's highest honour, was established to recognize individuals who have demonstrated excellence and achievement in any field and who have contributed to the social, cultural or economic well-being of Manitoba and its residents. Mr. Hyacinth Colomb richly deserves this honour.

From all members of this Legislature I would like to congratulate Hyacinth Colomb. We applaud his commitment to helping people. We applaud him for being an outstanding role model for his community, for his positive influence on northern Manitoba, and for his contributions to all of Manitoba. Hy, we are proud of you; we thank you.

MARN Awards

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): On Wednesday, May 16, the Member for Kirkfield Park (Mr. Murray) and I had the pleasure of attending this year's Manitoba Association of Registered Nurses professional achievement awards dinner in Brandon. Each year a number of awards are distributed in recognition of outstanding dedication and contribution to the nursing profession. The reward recipients have demonstrated their commitment to improving health care for Manitobans and have truly enhanced the well-being of their patients, their colleagues and their communities.

I would like to take a moment to congratulate the following award winners. Susan Goodmanson and Vivien Painter both received awards for Excellence in Professional Nursing Administration. Caroline Lysack and Nora Schwetz received awards for Excellence in Professional Nursing Direct Care. Dr. Jo-Ann Sawatzky and Susan Stanton received awards for Excellence in Professional Nursing Education. Martin Gosselin, Mary-Alice Grassick and Alice Mancheese received the Community Caring Awards. Joann MacMorran received the Professional Lifetime Achievement Award and Diane Phippen was given the award for Outstanding Achievement.

Once again I would like to express my most sincere congratulations to all of the MARN

professional achievement award winners. Their numerous efforts and contributions have not gone unnoticed and their continued excellence serves as a great example to others and for others in the nursing profession. On behalf of all Manitobans, I thank them and I congratulate them on a job very well done. Thank you.

French Language Nursing Diploma Program

Ms. Linda Asper (Riel): Monsieur le président, j'ai eu le plaisir d'assister hier à l'annonce par la ministre de l'Enseignement postsecondaire (M^{me} McGifford) de l'octroi de 619 000 \$ à un programme en soins infirmiers offert en français au Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface. La ministre a annoncé à CUSB que ce programme sera financé dans le cadre de l'Initiative d'expansion des collèges communautaires.

M. David Dandeneau, responsable du prélèvement des fonds au Collège, a accueilli la ministre. Le docteur Paul Ruest, recteur, a souligné l'importance de ce programme dans les collectivités francophones de notre province et le véritable besoin de personnel infirmier francophone dans les établissements publics bilingues de soins de santé de la province.

En coopération avec l'Université d'Ottawa, le programme menant à un diplôme en soins infirmiers sera offert par l'École technique et professionnelle du CUSB. La formation durera 24 mois et sera échelonnée sur trois années scolaires. Le CUSB prévoit l'inscription de 25 élèves par an. C'est grâce surtout aux efforts de Raymonde Gagné, directrice des nouveaux programmes au Collège, que cette initiative sera en place pour septembre 2001.

Nous félicitons le personnel du Collège pour leur travail d'implantation du programme en soins infirmiers. Merci, M. le président.

Translation

Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure of being present yesterday for the announcement by the Minister of Advanced Education (Ms. McGifford) of the \$619,000 in funding for a French language nursing diploma program that will be offered at Collège universitaire de Saint-Boniface. The minister announced at CUSB that this program will be funded through the College Expansion Initiative.

Mr. David Dandeneau, who is responsible for fundraising activities at the Collège, welcomed the minister. Dr. Paul Ruest, the rector, emphasized the importance of this program in the Francophone communities of our province and the real need for French-speaking nursing staff in the bilingual public health institutions of this province.

In co-operation with the University of Ottawa, the nursing diploma program will be offered by the École technique et professionnelle of CUSB. Training will take 24 months and will be delivered over three academic years. CUSB anticipates an enrolment of 25 students per year. It is thanks above all to the efforts of Raymonde Gagné, the director of new programs at the Collège, that this initiative will be in place for September 2001.

We congratulate the staff of CUSB for their work in establishing the nursing program. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

* (14:30)

East St. Paul—Cancer Rates

Hon. Jon Gerrard (River Heights): Mr. Speaker, I rise to put an additional perspective on the high incidence of cancer in River East North which was reported in the May 4 issue of a report brought forward by the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy and Evaluation which is entitled "Indicators of Health Status and Health Service Use for the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority."

The incidence of cancer in what is referred to as River East North or East St. Paul was 7.8, which is considerably higher than the rate of 5.3, which is the average for all of Winnipeg. This difference is statistically significant, that is, that it is unlikely to have occurred by chance and the probability of it occurring by chance is less than one in twenty.

When one compares the incidence of cancer to the other disorders which were looked at and the life span of people in River East North, it is quite clear that in general the people in River East North are among the healthiest in Winnipeg, that is, that they have among the

lowest premature mortality rate, they have among the lowest incidence of hypertension and of diabetes. The women in fact have the longest life expectancy of any in the city of Winnipeg, and people in this area have low incidence of hip replacement.

Given this picture of a very healthy population, it is exceptionally striking that there should be a high incidence of cancer. It is clearly an anomaly. It could yet have occurred by chance or be an artifact. There are some logical investigations that could be done quite quickly to look at a window larger than that of '93 to '95, to look at what types of cancer are developing in this area, and whether these are typical of those found in association with power lines and what is the geographic distribution. It is important that this be done.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, it is the intention to deal with some bills initially, but first would you please canvass the House and determine if there is consent to vary the order of Estimates by moving Education, Training and Youth ahead of Agriculture and Food in 255 for today only?

Mr. Speaker: Is there unanimous consent of the House to vary the sequence for consideration of Estimates by moving the Department of Education, Training and Youth ahead of the Department of Agriculture and Food in Room 255 for today only. Is there unanimous consent?
[Agreed]

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, would you canvass the House to determine if there is leave to waive Committee of Supply sitting this Friday?

Mr. Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to waive the sitting of Committee of Supply for this Friday? [Agreed]

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, before moving Supply then, would you please call second readings in the order they appear except for Bill 20, and then would you please call debate on second readings on Bills 8 and 13?

SECOND READINGS

Bill No. 10—The Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods and Consequential Amendments Act

Hon. Gord Mackintosh (Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Labour (Ms. Barrett), that Bill 10, The Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods and Consequential Amendments Act (Loi visant à accroître la sécurité des collectivités et des quartiers et modifications corrélatives), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Mackintosh: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased today to introduce The Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods and Consequential Amendments Act, which will replace The Community Protection Act introduced by the previous government and passed by the Legislature in June 1999.

While I supported the general thrust of The Community Protection Act, I did so with serious reservations about its ability to be effective, the haste with which it had been prepared, and the apparent lack of consultations preceding its development. I urged the government of the day to amend the act so that it could achieve its stated purpose, that is, to relieve neighbourhoods from the adverse effect of drugs, prostitution and related activities, booze cans and solvent abuse from particular premises.

As Minister of Justice, I support and promote partnerships with the community to address the causes and effects of crime in our communities. However, a key requirement of any partnership is that the roles to be undertaken by each party must be realistic, Mr. Speaker. We cannot impose requirements or expectations which are unrealistic, which place the safety of the parties at risk and which cap the potential benefits of a new law by a citizen's fear of using it.

Upon taking office, I instructed departmental staff to conduct a comprehensive overhaul of The Community Protection Act to remove the

burden placed on the public to conduct their own investigations, gather evidence and present it in court; to streamline the entire process; to remove the burden on the public for the cost of obtaining legal counsel; to pursue orders under the act; and increase the role of the Department of Justice in seeking court orders against owners of property where the effects of specific activities pose a threat to the safety and security of Manitobans.

The Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods and Consequential Amendments Act, which I introduce today, is grounded in a more realistic partnership, one which does not burden the public but protects it, which removes fear as an impediment to the use of the law and replaces it with protections which citizens should expect from their government, and a law which removes the costly burden to the public for which they should be entitled to enjoy the safety and security of their neighbourhoods.

The new bill is based on many consultations, notably including with the Winnipeg Police Service, including vice officers, members of the Street Gang Unit and the outlaw motorcycle unit, and community and foot-patrol officers. The RCMP as well, Mr. Speaker, were consulted, along with the Brandon Police Service, the Aboriginal Court Worker Program, Family Services and Housing, and Residential Tenancies Branch fire department officials, Manitoba Housing, New Life Ministries, the non-potable alcohol and substance abuse committee leadership, and the Neighbourhoods Alive! steering committee. Departmental staff also went into the community with police to view first-hand properties which were the site of the very problems this legislation is designed to address.

* (14:40)

This bill continues to focus on the disruption of neighbourhoods which results from certain improper uses of property. The bill continues to target the use and sale of inhalants, prostitution and its related activities, the sale of controlled substances and breaches of The Liquor Control Act. Where there is reasonable inference that the property is being used on a habitual basis for a specified use and the activities are adversely affecting the neighbourhood, this bill will provide a remedy to the community.

While the target uses remain the same under this bill, the process has been significantly streamlined to provide for faster access to orders, and legal proceedings have been simplified. Proceedings will now be commenced in the Court of Queen's Bench rather than in Provincial Court. In addition, the Department of Justice will now have primary responsibility for investigating complaints and obtaining orders. The bill requires that any person who wishes to seek relief must first file a complaint with the director of Public Safety. This new procedure provides a greater management tool for the entire process. Moreover, this procedure addresses concerns raised regarding The Community Protection Act by law enforcement officials about the impact upon undercover operations if applications were made to court directly by the public.

By requiring complaints to be made first to the director, it is intended that accidental interference with undercover operations can be prevented. Once the complaint is filed, the director is then empowered to commence an investigation. The Director of Public Safety will have a range of options for dealing with complaints, including the ability to send warning letters to property owners and to engage in dispute resolution measures designed to resolve a dispute before court proceedings are invoked.

Following an investigation, the director will have the option of proceeding with a notice of application directly to the Court of Queen's Bench. Upon demonstrating that the property is being habitually used for one or more of the targeted uses and that these activities were adversely affecting the neighbourhood, the court may grant an order against the owner.

The bill vests a significant amount of discretion in the judge to fashion the appropriate remedy. Specifically the court may require the property to be vacated, close the property for up to 90 days, or make any other order which the court may feel is appropriate to remedy the problem. However, all community safety orders will have specific expiry dates and provisions prohibiting all persons from causing or contributing to the targeted activities.

The identity of the complainant will remain confidential throughout the process where the

director proceeds with an application to court. This process provides a protection for a complainant who is intimidated perhaps by persons engaged in the improper use of a neighbouring property. However, should the director decide not to proceed with an application to court, the director is required to advise the complainant in writing. The complainant will then have two months to proceed on his or her own with an application to court. Only in those circumstances where the complainant intends to proceed on his or her own will the identity of the complainant be known to the property owner.

While the community safety order remains in effect, motions can be brought for further closure orders where the activities have not ceased. The bill also creates new protections for occupants of the property who may have had no direct role in the activities which gave rise to the application. Such occupants may apply to the court for a right to reoccupy the property where the court has ordered the property closed or vacated. In addition the director is empowered to provide assistance to occupants in locating alternate accommodations.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, the people of Manitoba want their neighbourhoods and communities to be safe and peaceful places to live. They want to be able to protect their neighbourhoods and communities from disruptive activities. They want to be able to address the conditions which they see in their own communities and neighbourhoods which favour the development of crime. They want to be able to make them more peaceful and safer.

This bill provides Manitobans with tools to achieve these goals and provides assistance to them in the use of those tools. This bill, Mr. Speaker, empowers Manitobans to protect their neighbourhoods and communities, to protect them from activities incidental to certain uses of property which disturb their lives and the peace and safety of their neighbourhoods and communities.

This bill provides a stronger, more effective legislative tool to help communities. It is a bill which when proclaimed will augment other initiatives of this Government to increase the

safety and security of Manitobans. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Darren Praznik (Lac du Bonnet): Mr. Speaker, I would move, seconded by the Member for Lakeside (Mr. Enns), that debate be now adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

Bill 21—The Manitoba Ethnocultural Advisory and Advocacy Council Act

Hon. Becky Barrett (Minister responsible for Multiculturalism): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Smith), that Bill 21, The Manitoba Ethnocultural Advisory and Advocacy Council Act (Loi sur le Conseil ethnoculturel manitobain de consultation et de revendication), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Ms. Barrett: Mr. Speaker, there are not many times, I do not believe, in the life of a legislator where you can get up and actually make a big difference in peoples lives and also fulfil a personal dream, if you will.

Mr. Speaker, I think it was May 8, 1993, I was the official Opposition critic for multiculturalism, and I was given the opportunity to speak unlimitedly. I believe I spoke for over eight hours on several occasions on the demise, the bill that was going to, in effect, cause the demise of the Manitoba Intercultural Council.

Mr. Conrad Santos, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair

At that time, I do not know if I said it publicly in this House, but I certainly said it publicly to members of my caucus and my party, that it was a goal of mine to come back into government and have an NDP government reinstate a council that would provide advice and advocacy to the government of the day.

In 1995, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the election campaign, it was a commitment of our party that

we would do that very thing. In 1999, again, it was a commitment of our party that when we formed government we would bring back a council that would provide advice and advocacy on ethnocultural issues to the Government of Manitoba.

It is with an enormous amount of pride, both personal and on behalf of our party, our caucus, and our Government, that I am here today to speak to the bill that implements the Manitoba Ethnocultural Advisory and Advocacy Council. It is a big act in its name. It is a very short act, actually, but I think it will have large implications for the Government and for the ethnocultural community in Manitoba.

We are following today in a line that goes back in Manitoba for 31 years. In 1970, the then-Premier of the Province of Manitoba who had been premier for less than a year, the Honourable Edward Schreyer, put in place something called a mosaic congress in 1970, which was made up of representatives from the multicultural community in the province at the time. Mr. Deputy Speaker, one of the recommendations of this mosaic congress was that there be an advisory committee established on multicultural issues to advise the government of the day. In 1971, I believe it was, this council was put in place.

It acted very effectively for the government of the day from that time forward until 1977. Then, in 1977, Mr. Deputy Speaker, something happened. The government of the day changed, and so did the impact and the importance of the multicultural community, and the multicultural fact in the province of Manitoba changed too.

After 1997, the advisory committee on multiculturalism lapsed into inactivity. People's appointment dates came up, they expired, and they were not renewed. So that, in effect, for the four years of the Sterling Lyon government there was no advice given to the government, no advocacy provided to the government on multicultural issues.

* (14:50)

In 1981, when the NDP came back into power, one of the first things that the

government of the day did, even though it was in the middle of a deep recession, something that had not happened for a number of years, the Howard Pawley government put into place in early 1983, April 1983, after a year of consultation, again, following in the Schreyer form of consultation and then implementing recommendations out of consultation, the Manitoba Intercultural Council was born in 1983. It provided virtually a decade of good advice, wonderful papers, lots of information, and a forum for the multicultural community to speak among themselves and to government about issues that impacted on the multicultural, ethnocultural community in the province of Manitoba. Again, in late 1988 and early 1989, when the government changed, the Manitoba Intercultural Council started another withering away of its activities. By the time, I believe it was Bill 28 came in the spring of 1993, the Manitoba Intercultural Council was a shell of its former self, as the Member for Springfield (Mr. Schuler) would know, being a former chair of MIC. In 1993, the Minister of Culture and Heritage, the current Member for River East (Mrs. Mitchelson), brought in the bill that in effect killed the Manitoba Intercultural Council.

I do not want to go through the elements that led to the demise of MIC or revisit much of that history because it is certainly in Hansard. In my speech in Hansard, it talks about the wonderful work that MIC did in its tenure. As I stated we made an election commitment, not that we would return to the Manitoba Intercultural Council, because we recognize that things change, that what was appropriate and effective in 1983 may not be the appropriate effective way to handle advice and advocacy from the ethnocultural community in 2001. We did commit to a series of consultations to talk with the community, to find out what they wanted and to try and bring in a piece of legislation that would reflect what the community as a whole wanted. I believe with this legislation we have done that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this Government is not afraid of advice. This Government looks for advice from all parts of the community. This Government, unlike the former government, is definitely not afraid of advocacy. The former government did not only destroy the Manitoba Intercultural Council but in the same area, that

same time period, they cut the funding to the friendship centres, to all Indian and Métis friendship centres in the province of Manitoba.

What was the reason given? Because they provided advocacy. What a terrible, terrible thing for a community organization representing, in the case of the Indian and Métis friendship centres, one group of citizens in this province; and in the case of the Manitoba Intercultural Council, another group of citizens in this province. Historically, both groups, have been underrepresented, underappreciated, and in many cases, particularly with the Indian and Métis friendship centres in the Aboriginal community they represent, totally destroyed by some of the actions of provincial and federal governments.

These two groups should have advocacy as part of their ability to interact with government. They are the groups that need to have access to government, that need to have their views, their concerns, their problems addressed. Mr. Deputy Speaker, only through advice and advocacy can you manage to have that effectively happen. This Government, through the reinstatement of funding to Indian and Métis friendship centres and among many other actions on the part of the Government in the last two budgets and policy decisions that have been made and through the impact of Bill 21 that we are debating here today, will bring back the rights of all citizens in the province of Manitoba and recognize, as well, the responsibility that government has to all citizens in Manitoba.

Mr. Speaker in the Chair

So we, unlike the former government, are not afraid of various communities in our province. We want to listen to ideas. We want to hear ideas that may be uncomfortable for us to hear, but that is what government needs to do. Government needs to hear ideas that may not be comfortable for them at that time, and they may not act on all of the advice. They may not respond totally to all of the advocacy that is going on, but it is our responsibility as government to make sure that we are open and that we hear from every portion of our society.

Mr. Speaker, we believe that the Manitoba Ethnocultural Advisory and Advocacy Council,

or MEAAC for short, will provide that advice and that advocacy role to the Government that has been sorely lacking over more than a decade. We believe that the concept of multiculturalism, which is one of the basic foundations of Canada and Manitoba, is a critically important concept to retain.

As someone who grew up in the United States with the assimilation and melting pot concept, I embrace and endorse wholeheartedly the idea, the concept, the principle and, I hope, the actions of multiculturalism. Mr. Speaker, it has helped strengthen and diversify our province, our country, and it is an essential part of what makes us Canadians, what differentiates us from the rest of the North American continent and more particularly from the United States of America. It is essential that we strengthen that, that we water that concept all the time.

It is also important to recognize that multiculturalism is not an easy concept. It is a difficult concept. It is difficult for people to recognize and accept it. It is difficult for us, even if we are members of a theoretically multicultural or ethnocultural group sometimes to acknowledge and respect the ideas and the cultures of other people. So it is even more critical, if we believe, as we on this side of the House do, and I am hoping that those on the Opposition believe as well, that Manitoba and Canada have been strengthened by the concept of multiculturalism, No. 1, that it is critical to assist the difficult concept of multiculturalism to become part and parcel of the fabric of our society, then we need a council such as this that is being put together.

It is critical that we have, as government, as I said before, that we have what I call gadflies, that we listen to and have people who sit on our shoulder and say, no, no, we do not think you are doing it right. Have you thought about this? Do you recognize that the implications of what you are looking at doing will be for our communities? Why have you not looked at this possibility or that possibility? A government is only as good as the advice that it listens to and takes, and we need a council such as MEAAC to provide us with that kind of advice and that kind of advocacy.

Advocacy is slightly different than advice, Mr. Speaker. Advice says: Have you thought

about looking at it this way? Have you thought about looking at this problem from this point of view? Advocacy is a tougher, harder concept. Advocacy says: This is what you as a government should do. This is what you should be doing, and this group will advocate on behalf of the ethnocultural communities to us as government.

* (15:00)

I am delighted to be able to be the minister who is shepherding this piece of legislation through. I am hoping that it will be very quickly passed by the House, and then it will be unanimously passed by the House. I cannot imagine any reason why the Opposition would not support this piece of legislation. Mr. Speaker, I cannot imagine, unless they look down the road some day and think at some point in time we might be back in government, the Opposition says, and we do not want a council that is going to provide us with advice or advocacy. That could happen because that is what happened in 1993 when the former government, in effect, emasculated and killed the Manitoba Intercultural Council and thereby emasculated and killed the organization that could provide advice and advocacy to the Government.

We need to make sure that our laws, our policies and our society reflect the ability of individuals and communities to protect and cherish what makes them individuals and communities. In many cases, what makes individuals and communities unique is their culture, is where they come from or their religious beliefs, their cultural beliefs, their ethnic pride. Those are the things that we must protect for individuals, and we must protect them for communities. We must, as legislators who are in a dominant position in this society, protect the rights of all individuals and all communities.

Through organizations such as MEAAC, we believe on this side of the House, and I hope all members will believe and support, the concept that an organization such as MEAAC, which will represent all geographical parts of the province, which will have gender representation, and I am sure will have representation from many of the major ethnocultural groups in this province, which will be grassroots elected: 16 of

the 21 members of the council will be elected directly by the organizations that have been invited to send in nominations. Over 300 organizations have been asked to send in nominations and then will be asked to select 16 of the 21 members of MEAAC.

MEAAC members will meet with the minister on a regular basis, and reports of their activities, Mr. Speaker, will be made available annually through the departmental annual report.

In closing, I am very pleased and honoured to be able to not only honour a personal commitment of mine but a commitment of our Government, a commitment that goes back in the NDP government in Manitoba from the Schreyer years through the Pawley years and now through the Premier Doer years. It is a great honour for me to be the representative to bring this piece of legislation forward to reflect on 30 years of our commitment to the concepts of multiculturalism, advice and advocacy. I ask for all members' support in the House for this important piece of legislation. Thank you.

Mr. Harry Enns (Lakeside): Mr. Speaker, I do not know whether it was an hour, but whatever time it was, it was such utter nonsense, hogwash, patronizing, that I as a member of an ethnic community feel deeply insulted. I, as a result of the passage of this bill, can now speak to my government. I have not been able up to now. The Member for Wellington (Mr. Santos) has a smile on his face in anticipation, because if this bill passes he will, according to the minister, be able to speak to the Government.

I have to go and tell my good friends, the Icelanders up in Gimli, that they have not been able to speak to the Government before. They have not been able to interact with the Government before. But now, with the passage of this bill, this patronizing act, this compassion that the current Minister for Multiculturalism has, why they may even be able to carry on with their Icelandic Festival once more, or my good friends up in Dauphin, the Ukrainian community. What utter nonsense.

In passing, I know of her American roots. I am not going to suggest that everything in America is great, but if we want to hold up as an example of what strengthens a country, you know, the tragedy in Canada is and with

Canadians is we spend so much of our time contemplating our navel on just who we are. What are we? What do we stand for? We go through every decade with 25 percent of our nation wanting to separate and holding formal referendums on it. We have a whole western part of the country alienated from the current government with one member of Parliament representing us in the state of power. What great contribution. In fact, there are grounds, Mr. Speaker, there is a compelling argument to be made that this kind of legislated nonsense that we are talking about here has contributed to that problem that Canadians have.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let me put it on the record, I am a very proud ethnic person, extremely proud of the Mennonite heritage that I come from, extremely proud of the language that my parents passed on to me, extremely proud of the accomplishments artistically that the Winnipeg Mennonite Theatre Society provides to the greater community, extremely proud of the chorales and the music contributions that our system provides to me. One of the more successful amateur theatre organizations is run by the Winnipeg Mennonite Theatre organization. I can speak the same for every other cultural group in this society. What we are being spoon-fed here is that we can only express our ethnicity or take pride in our heritage if, somewhere, it is prescribed in a silly piece of legislation that the minister is presenting to this Chamber at this time. Well, as she chides the former government on abandoning these advocacy groups, let us understand exactly what we are seeing here. This is old-fashioned pork-barreling at its best. It is buying votes and nothing else.

Of course, there is always groups in something like that, and they shovel out the money. That is what it is, pork-barreling, and this coming from a party that thought they re-invented themselves. They are not the old democrat; they are the new, Today's New Democrats, and I find it demeaning. I find it demeaning that I have to be singled out. I have to be singled out in legislation because of my background, that there are other members in this Chamber that have to be singled out because of their background.

You know, I look at my Anglo friends and Scottish friends. They are okay. They do not

need special legislation, so, you know, if my friend the member from Turtle Mountain (Mr. Tweed) has a problem with one of his roads that is falling away, he can go directly to the minister of highways and put in his request, but I cannot do it for my constituents because I come from Mennonites. But soon I will be, when this bill passes. So, Mr. Speaker, I may get chastised by my caucus. You know, caucus can be pretty tough on a member. I may get chastised by my caucus. They may rein me into line, and I may have to support this bill, but just sitting here listening to that nonsense coming out of the mouth of the Minister of Labour (Ms. Barrett), it offended me. It simply offended me. I do not need special legislation to recognize, to honour the heritage that I come from.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Point of Order

Ms. Barrett: Yes, Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, and I am not sure what part of *Beauchesne's* it is in, but I am sure that there is a reference in *Beauchesne's* to the fact that, when a minister is referred to, the minister's entire title should be used. I am certainly not going to have any personal aspersions cast on my full title, which I would like to remind the member is Minister of Labour and Immigration.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Lakeside, on the same point of order.

Mr. Enns: You know, Mr. Speaker, that you and I have a bit of a compact, like, I always accept your admonishments and always accept your guidance. I do my very best to walk the straight and narrow in this House, and I will certainly apologize on this instance and refer, now and in the future, to my, well, just about, deskmate or seatmate as the honourable Minister of Labour and Immigration.

Mr. Speaker: On the point of order raised by the honourable Minister of Labour and Immigration, I thank the honourable Member for Lakeside. That should end the matter.

* * *

Mr. Speaker: The honourable Member for Lakeside still has time remaining. You still have time remaining.

Mr. Enns: I have concluded my remarks. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: The honourable member has concluded his remarks.

Mr. Edward Helwer (Gimli): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Member for Steinbach (Mr. Jim Penner), that the debate now be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

Bill 26—The Winnipeg Commodity Exchange Restructuring Act

Hon. Scott Smith (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Labour and Immigration (Ms. Barrett), that Bill 26, The Winnipeg Commodity Exchange Restructuring Act (Loi sur la réorganisation de la Bourse des marchandises de Winnipeg), be now read a second time and be referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

* (15:10)

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, Bill 26 will allow the Winnipeg Commodity Exchange to apply to continue under The Corporations Act as a share capital corporation. In so doing, a member's interest will be converted into shares. Status as a share capital corporation will provide the Exchange with a more flexible framework for management and decision making. It will allow for needed capital raising and will demutualize the Exchange. A large majority of the members of the Exchange voted in support of this demutualization.

Mr. Speaker, the economic benefits, both direct and indirect, of the Winnipeg Commodity Exchange to the city of Winnipeg and to the province of Manitoba are well known. The Exchange feels strongly that this bill is needed to allow it to seek valuable alliances with other exchanges, update its trading system and generally to move forward on a viable basis. Legislation having similar effect has been enacted in the province of Ontario to allow for

the demutualization of the Toronto Stock Exchange.

Mr. Speaker, I move and recommend this bill for consideration.

Mr. Jim Penner (Steinbach): I am sure that much could be said about this bill. Having listened to both sides of the argument, those who form a minority number but also are a majority in the trading, and then there are those who are a majority number who are a minority in the trading, it is kind of like the old 80-20 adage: 20 percent of the people do 80 percent of the business, and 80 percent of the representatives on the Exchange do 20 percent of the business. Now the small people, the group that does the smaller amount of business, the 80 percent of the members that do 20 percent of the business, are threatened by this bill and wish to be heard, so it behooves me at this time to move, seconded by the Member for Fort Garry—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The member has a choice when rising to either adjourn debate or to speak to the bill. You cannot do both. I am going to seek some advice here, just to be sure.

It is not our usual practice to start speaking to a bill and then move to adjourn debate, but the honourable member still has time remaining to speak to the bill.

Mr. Mervin Tweed (Turtle Mountain): I move, seconded by the Member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Loewen), that debate now be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

Bill 29—The Residential Tenancies Amendment Act

Hon. Scott Smith (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Labour and Immigration (Ms. Barrett), that Bill 29, The Residential Tenancies Amendment Act (Loi modifiant la Loi sur la location à usage d'habitation), be read a second time and referred to a committee of this House.

Motion presented.

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, Bill 29 amends The Residential Tenancies Act to extend the

exemption period for new rental construction from rent regulation from five years to 15 years.

Mr. Speaker, this was announced in the 2001 Budget speech. The lack of new construction in private rental housing is an issue throughout Canada. Out of 146 000 housing starts in Canada in 1999, fewer than 5000 were in private rental housing. Here in Manitoba, it is estimated by CMHC that between the years 2001 and 2016, there will be a need for 600 to 700 additional rental units annually. This is needed to house the empty-nesters and new Manitobans. With the exemption of life-lease complexes, there has been no new construction in Winnipeg for more than 10 years.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is evidence of our commitment to the development of quality, affordable rental accommodation. I recommend this bill for consideration.

Mr. Jim Penner (Steinbach): I move, seconded by the Member for Fort Garry (Mrs. Smith), that debate on this bill be adjourned.

Motion agreed to.

Mr. Marcel Laurendeau (Opposition House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if I might seek leave of the House to allow the honourable member leave at a further date to speak on Bill 26. He was under the—[interjection] Okay. So I will not even finish asking, Mr. Speaker. We expect Mr. Doer in the House next Wednesday.

DEBATE ON SECOND READINGS

Bill 8--The Mines and Minerals Amendment Act

Mr. Speaker: On the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Industry, Trade and Mines, Bill 8, The Mines and Minerals Amendment Act (Loi modifiant la Loi sur les mines et les minéraux), standing in the name of the honourable Member for Turtle Mountain.

Mr. Mervin Tweed (Turtle Mountain): Mr. Speaker, just a few comments on the record. I want to thank the minister for arranging an informational meeting where the reasons for the act to be brought forward were explained in great detail.

The only thing I would suggest, and I would suggest it to the Government, I mean, all the bills that they bring forward, is that there should be a review process in three to five years. If bills become outdated or no longer valuable they can be eliminated without going through the process of hunting them down and finding out where they are.

So, with those few comments, Mr. Speaker, we are prepared to let this move to committee.

Mr. Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

An Honourable Member: Question.

Mr. Speaker: The question before the House is second reading of Bill 8, The Mines and Minerals Amendment Act. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion? Agreed?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Mr. Speaker: Agreed and so ordered.

Bill 13—The Social Services Appeal Board and Consequential Amendments Act

Mr. Speaker: On the proposed motion of the honourable Minister of Family Services and Housing (Mr. Sale), Bill 13, The Social Services Appeal Board and Consequential Amendments Act (Loi sur la Commission d'appel des services sociaux et modifications corrélatives), standing in the name of the honourable Member for Ste. Rose.

Mr. Glen Cummings (Ste. Rose): Was the minister intending to speak to the bill or close debate? Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to move this bill through to committee. I will have some questions for the minister at that time about some of the impacts of the changes that he is proposing, but, by and large, the tenets of this bill seem to be appropriate in making the Social Services Advisory Committee, or the former Social Services Advisory Committee, function in an appropriate manner. Some of the mechanics of some of the details I look forward to discussing in committee.

* (15:20)

Mr. Speaker: Prior to recognizing the Minister of Family Services and Housing, because if the

honourable minister speaks he will be closing debate, are there any other members who wish to speak to this bill?

Hon. Tim Sale (Minister of Family Services and Housing): Mr. Speaker, I just want to express my appreciation to my honourable critic for his support in principle for this legislation. I look forward to examining the details of the legislation in committee and hearing from the public in regard to this bill.

I should tell the members of the House that we did have a fairly extensive community hearing process. We had input from a wide number of groups, including members of the legal community. So I hope this bill does bring this legislation up to date and allow the Social Services Appeal Committee, which it now will be known as, to function effectively into the 21st century. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some Honourable Members: Question.

Mr. Speaker: The question before the House is second reading of Bill 13, The Social Services Appeal Board and Consequential Amendments Act. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Mr. Speaker: Agreed and so ordered.

* (15:30)

* * *

Hon. Tim Sale (Acting Government House Leader): Mr. Speaker, I move, seconded by the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Smith), that Mr. Speaker do now leave the Chair and the House resolve itself into a committee to consider of the Supply to be granted to Her Majesty.

Motion agreed to.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

HEALTH

* (15:40)

Mr. Chairperson (Harry Schellenberg): Good afternoon. Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of

Supply is considering the Estimates of the Department of Health. There was a previous agreement of this committee to have a global discussion of the entire department and after completion of all questioning, pass all resolutions. We will continue with the global discussion. We are open for questions.

Mrs. Myrna Driedger (Charleswood): I just want to touch briefly on the topic that was raised in question period today about this father who had written a letter, actually to me on May 14, and I believe it was cc'd to the Minister of Health (Mr. Chomiak). I will pass this on to the minister right now.

It is a situation where this father has written about his son Steven [*phonetic*] I will not use the last name, who suffered a serious back injury when he fell at a cottage in May of '97. Since then he has been experiencing chronic back pain with gradually increasing severity. He has ended up having a number of different tests. His pain continues to increase. It does not appear that he is able to get the treatments he needs in Manitoba, and it does not appear that he has timely access to care here in Manitoba. He had to wait for an MRI, he was told here last summer, for 13 weeks.

Because of that, they went to Grafton, North Dakota where he had an MRI in two days. Manitoba Health would not cover this MRI as it was available in Manitoba, despite the fact they had to wait months for it. The family ended up paying \$2400. Mr. Chair, during this time Steven [*phonetic*] was using Tylenol 3s to help him deal with pain. I note that he has now escalated in terms of the kind of medication he has to take for his pain, and if I can find that again I will indicate what it was.

The MRI in the States did not reveal any conclusive evidence. When he came back to Winnipeg, they wanted the doctors in Winnipeg to look at the MRI that had been done in the States, and the radiologist here refused to look at it because it had been done in the States.

This, of course, shocked the family. It does beg the questions. I know this happens from time to time, probably more often than not, in terms of one doctor not wanting to, or radiologist not

wanting to look at and use other tests that were done. Instead they get repeated.

Now, they did discover a procedure that was called decompression therapy that was available in Vancouver. That was discussed. Doctors here thought it might be something that could be done, and it was done in Vancouver. The family again paid \$2,400, but unfortunately there was little relief from that. A bone scan did not reveal the source of the problem and doctors were indicating there was nothing more that they could do.

The boy then went for 29 physiotherapy visits and, of course, none of these is covered by Manitoba Health. They tried acupuncture to no avail. It just keeps going on and on. They wanted to see a neurosurgeon, I guess, but were taken aback when they were told that it would take 13 months before they could ever get in to see a neurosurgeon. They then were exploring other therapies—and I will not get into all of it—but it does not look like he was getting any satisfactory responses from many of the people that they were talking to.

By this point in time, Steven's [*phonetic*] pain has increased to the point where a fentanyl patch was now needed along with codeine. Fentanyl is highly addictive according to the data here, and that is true. Steven [*phonetic*] is needing more and more of it to deal with the pain which by now has gone down his legs as well. Again, they went to the States in desperation.

He also started having adverse reactions to all his drugs. He was kept in Grace Hospital for about six days because of all these adverse reactions to the drugs. He did go down to the States for a discogram. That did finally reveal that four discs are torn. There is a recommendation for surgery, but this all has to be a decision, I guess, as to whether or not Manitoba Health is going to cover any of this.

According to the dad, who indicates our current problem is the refusal of Manitoba Health to cover the cost of a much-needed discogram in Grand Forks, North Dakota, in spite of a lengthy report sent to Manitoba Health from Steven's [*phonetic*] pain specialist in

Winnipeg, Doctor Hoy of Winnipeg, outlining the need for the discogram and surgery. Doctor Damle, the pain specialist in Grand Forks, is also sending a letter to Doctor Hoy outlining the necessity of this operation and the urgency of Steven's [phonetic] situation.

This father says: I am not a wealthy man, just a retired railroad clerk. I never dreamed that there would be such little support available when any citizen of this country or province would require medical attention. We have watched our son's condition deteriorate over the last year and must proceed with this surgery whether we can afford it or not. My family and I are so frustrated with the health system in Manitoba that we are now prepared to go public, starting with this letter to you.

I am going to pass this on. I know it was sent to the minister's office. I will pass on a copy of it anyway, and I would hope that some attention could be paid in terms of checking into this further to see if there is anything further that can be done with this particular case in Manitoba.

Mr. Chomiak: Certainly, Manitoba Health will look into this situation, as we often do. I know, over the years I was critic, there were hundreds, if not thousands, of cases like this that I generally would write letters to the Minister of Health and ask the minister to look after. The standard practice in Manitoba is that the minister generally and the department go out of their way. That was the past practice, and it continues to be the practice to try to deal with the situation and remedy the situation for particular individuals. I note the member brought it up in the House, and now she has brought it up in Estimates. I have got a copy of the letter, and I will have the matter reviewed with respect to this particular situation, to review the situation for the purposes of the family and the other matters relating to it.

The member almost completely read the entire letter into the record. I am just looking at the particular record. I guess I am just reading now. There is a letter February 27 from the Health Sciences Centre from Doctor Sutherland to Doctor Hoy saying: Thank you for your letter of January 22. Doctor Gordon and I have

discussed the request for discogram on this patient. We feel that discogram is not indicated in this case and will not perform much. In our experience, the test of discography is very controversial with confusing results and a very limited clinical indication. In our practice, the only indication that we consider valid for discogram is to assist in evaluation disc, morphology and at above levels of planned spinal fusion. We only perform discogram when it has been requested by the spine surgeon with whom we work most closely at the Health Sciences Centre. Even in these cases, we are very selective as to the application of this procedure. With the available information provided on this patient, we do not feel this discogram is indicated.

Mr. Chairperson, I note that is appended to the letter, and we will take all of these matters into consideration when reviewing this matter. I, of course, cannot comment. I am always concerned when families raise issues, and obviously we are concerned with the particular circumstances and revealing issues in this regard. Of course, I rely upon the expertise of medical staff and the very efficient people in the department.

* (15:50)

The member well knows that we do have a more significant coverage. It is not full coverage clearly. It may be adequate for some purposes. It clearly is not, but we actually offer more by way of out-of-province coverage than I think any other jurisdiction in the country. So we do try to accommodate needs. Of course, we also promised a critical care fund, a shortages fund, which we put in place after the election, and it is specifically gone because of the acuity and difficulty of the situation to cancer patients to provide more timely access to radiation therapy, which we have put in place dealing with this issue. I will have to have it addressed by the department and staff. The member raised it with me today. Today I noticed I was cc'd on this letter dated May 14. The member raised it in the House today, and now she has raised it in Estimates. For the record, she has passed on a copy of the letter to me. I will have the department review it and we will try to deal with it as expeditiously as we can.

Mrs. Driedger: I thank the minister for that commitment. I will let the dad know that the

minister has given it his attention. I think the letter may even indicate that there is a procedure scheduled for maybe the end of this month, which is only a few more days. I guess the financial hardship they are enduring is one of their concerns, but also the escalating pain. Having had a ruptured disk myself, I have a sense of what it is like to have back pain like that. It sounds like with this person's escalating pain over the years since 1997 that there certainly must be something there. I note that the discogram that was done in the States has indicated that there are four areas along the spine where there is showing a problem. So I appreciate the fact that the department will look further into this particular issue.

I would like to now get back on a few more questions related to where we finished off yesterday with the Pan Am Clinic. I am not going to get into as many questions as I have, because I will probably save some for Concurrence because of all of the other questions that I have. But there are a few that I would like to address today.

One of them, I guess we go back to probably where we left off yesterday in terms of facility fees. I wonder if the minister could indicate for me, the amount of money that is being put forward for facility fees for the clinic that are identified in the Pricewaterhouse report go from something like \$1.1 million to \$1.7 million over the five-year period, if the minister could provide some detail as to what the facility fees are made up of.

Mr. Chomiak: I believe it is an estimate based on potential volume of service at the clinic. The major advantage to the facility fees, of course, is that the investment will go back into the clinic and stay in the clinic for the purposes of reinvestment and enhanced work at that particular clinic.

Mrs. Driedger: Do the facility fees also cover the million-or-so dollars of operating costs, all the overhead costs, nurses' salaries? When one looks at the financial statement for the clinic, it appears that there is a substantial amount of overhead costs. I am wondering if these overhead costs are what constitute part of the facility fees.

Mr. Chomiak: The specifics in regard to that are delineated, as I understand it, in terms of

projections in the report. Clearly there are ongoing overhead costs. I know the member had questioned whether or not a clinic could have overhead costs, but there are overhead and operating costs that continue for the operation of a clinic.

Mrs. Driedger: Could the minister tell me if those overhead costs are incorporated into the facility fees that the Government pays to the clinic?

Mr. Chomiak: The revenue and expenses, as outlined in the report, were based on the projections, I believe based on past practice and anticipation of future services. A specific delineation between whether or not portions of the facility fees go to specific aspects of the operating costs I am not certain of at this point.

Mrs. Driedger: On April 26 the minister indicated that over the past two years we paid \$7.4 million in facility fees to rent the facilities. That is where he was indicating that is where the \$7.4 million, that figure, came from in establishing the price that the Government was going to pay for the clinic. That is in Hansard. That is where I am seeking the minister's clarification, because it is in Hansard, and that is the exact statement of the minister. That is why I am asking him. That is exactly why I am asking him what he meant and what is included in these particular facility fees. In fact, I am trying to find it exactly right now so that I could read it back. Perhaps the minister wants to comment on that while I search for this.

Mr. Chomiak: I will have to see the specific reference in Hansard before commenting.

Mrs. Driedger: While I am searching for this, the statement, would the minister confirm that rent was part of what is included in facility fees?

Mr. Chomiak: I do not know if the member understands. I do not know what reference the member is making to facility fees or where the member is going with this, but the member should be aware that certain centres, surgical centres, charged facility fees that comprised some portions of their overhead costs and related services to provide medical services. These facility fees are comprised of different

components for different centres, as I understand, but they are a cost that was borne by patients.

The former government changed the legislation to deal with this issue because the charging of facility fees on insured services is in contravention of the Canada Health Act and Manitoba was being fined thousands of dollars a month for allowing this to occur. Consequently, the former Minister of Health amended the act to designate certain places as surgical centres under contract to the Government of Manitoba, where effectively the facility fees were contained within a contracted relationship between Manitoba Health and the particular surgical centre.

As I recall, the reference to rental is a comparison I think to the effect that when one is operating in a place that one does not own a facility and as one is paying a portion of facility fees, that can be construed as a form of rent payment for use of that facility. It could be construed as various other things, but one does not get an asset, one does not retain any equity in that particular structure. The difference when one purchases one, one has equity and one has an asset. That is the difference between owning something and renting something.

Effectively, the analogy that I believe I was drawing was between paying for a facility that one does not own and paying for the ongoing operating cost of that facility, as well as the leaseholder improvements, as well as the cost borne by the particular owner, you are effectively paying, or it effectively amounts to rent versus actually owning a facility. So that was, as I recall, the particular reference and the analogy that I was drawing between rent and ownership. Facility fees comprise a number of costs and were, as I understand it, a variety of different costs for different centres.

* (16:00)

Mrs. Driedger: The comment that the minister made actually in Question Period on April 26 was: "When members opposite were in government they were paying \$68,000 a month in penalties to the federal government for private clinics. They entered into agreements with private clinics that have paid \$7.4 million in

facility fees for two years to rent those private clinics."

That is the end of the quote in this particular part where the minister was making reference to facility fees and rent.

I would wonder if the minister, in what his previous answer was, whether he was indicating that fee for service is also part of the facility fee.

Mr. Chomiak: I think I was fairly clear in my comments in terms of what I just stated, both in my previous answer and in the House.

Mrs. Driedger: I will leave this part of it. As I indicated, once I have a chance to peruse this, I will certainly be bringing this issue back up in concurrence, because I think there certainly are some more questions to be asked around the issue of facility fees, but I do not want to get really bogged down at this point in time.

I do want to ask the minister, still staying on the topic of the Pan Am Clinic: Is the minister aware that patients do not pay user fees at private clinics for insured services?

Mr. Chomiak: I am not sure what the member is asking in that question.

Mrs. Driedger: I think the question is very straightforward. Is the minister aware that patients who go to private clinics for insured services do not pay user fees for those services?

Mr. Chomiak: You know, I do not know what line of questioning the member is going down, but there is provision in the Canada Health Act that outlines the fact that if an insured service is provided in an appropriate facility additional user fees should not be charged.

Mrs. Driedger: Is the minister aware for the last several years user fees for insured services were not charged to patients at any of the three private clinics that were publicly funded?

Mr. Chomiak: There were arrangements entered into between the former government, arrangements that we continued ourselves, with surgical centres to pay a contractual price for a number of services that were offered to patients.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister seems to be a little bit evasive with answering this question. I think it is a very straightforward question. Is the minister aware that patients do not pay user fees at private clinics such as Western, Pan Am when it was private, Midland, for services that were covered under the insured services aspect of what government pays for?

Mr. Chomiak: I just want to correct the member. Pan Am still is private.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister is continuing to avoid the question. Yes, Mr. Chairperson, I am assuming, I suppose, that Pan Am, until the deal is signed, is probably as he says. Certainly it would be something that we think Manitobans would be better served if it stayed that way, so the Government did not come in and buy bricks and mortar and not in any way ensure or guarantee that we are going to have any better service or more procedures done.

I think all the stars in heaven are going to have to line up absolutely perfectly before we are going to see this \$1.2-million profit or savings they are talking about over five years. I think that chances of that seem to be very, very slim, and I think the stars are all going to have to line up perfectly before that is ever going to happen. So I am a bit sceptical about that. That is going to be a wish that this Government is going to wish does come true, but I do have some scepticism about that because there are too many variables that can impact on that, particularly over five years, and particularly with the fact we are seeing a huge amount of money going into repair costs on an annual basis, which really begs the question of why one would want to buy a building that appears to be crumbling when we are seeing almost \$70,000 a year going into repair costs. That seems a bit strange.

The minister is doing a really, really good job of avoiding answering this one particular question. I would like to ask him again: Is the minister aware that patients do not pay user fees at private clinics for insured services?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, I am surprised the member considers herself a better expert in terms of financial analysis than Pricewaterhouse that reviewed this in an independent third-party

review of this operation and indicated that profit would be realized after five years. This is the same member who said somehow we were hiding information when in fact information was provided publicly that she is quoting from. So I am a little bit sceptical of some of the predictions from the member opposite with respect to the future of Pan Am Clinic.

We have indicated that we are not going to stand pat. We are going to have to change the health care system. I know the member has particular ideological positions that she wants to take in terms of where we should go. Our position is that we want to be pragmatic and we want to see what we can do to try to improve the situation and to try to provide for more expansive and more appropriate service. All of the indicators are, from all of the reports, that we have to move more to day surgeries. We should do it in the least expensive alternatives in order to maximize the number of surgeries and to decrease the cost, and by virtue of decreasing the cost you can maximize more surgeries.

The members opposite seem stuck in the 1960s, either the 1960s where it all has to be done in a hospital, or secondly just wants it to be done in private clinics. I do not know exactly. The member seems to swing back and forth between the two extremes. This is an innovative approach; it is a different approach. Like all things that are innovative, there is controversy and there is difficulty. For the member to outright attack holus-bolus and not consider the options is certainly something that is her prerogative. But I just point that out because the member continues to put on the record information about a "crumbling building", et cetera about costs. A lot of information that was put on the record by members opposite has been proved to be inaccurate.

Let me outline it. The Premier went fishing with Brian Postl. Wrong. That the Premier went fishing with Wayne Hildahl. Wrong. That the costs for the repairs were not removed from the purchase price. Wrong.

That we did not talk about the surgical partnership and, Mr. Chairperson, the member stood up and did a point, did a matter of privilege on an interpretation. The member stood

up and did a point of privilege or the member's colleague, on an interpretation on my comments in the House saying somehow I had misled the House when I did not say—and there was a newspaper article from the very day that it happened reporting the very point that members said, reporting the very point that the member opposite had declared.

* (16:10)

So the member opposite has been off target quite a bit on this particular item. Way off target, Mr. Chairperson, so I have to take with a boulder of salt a lot of the comments, the offhand comments.

But I am trying to stay on point because I know the member wants to ask a lot of questions, and I am trying to stay on point and so I will at this point return to the specific question the member asked. I would like the member to let me know if she is aware of any instances where those particular clinics charge user fees, we would like to know that.

Mrs. Driedger: For some reason the minister is really reluctant to answer the question. There is no ulterior motive in asking it, it is actually just a straightforward question. I am not going to spring anything on him or surprise him with any sideswipe of any kind. It is just pure and simple. Is the minister aware that patients do not pay user fees at private clinics for insured services?

Mr. Chomiak: Arrangements have been entered into between private clinics and the Government of Manitoba where a contractual number of services are provided between the private clinic and the Government of Manitoba. Those arrangements were put in place by the previous government. We continue those arrangements at present.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Chairman, he did it again. He is avoiding answering my question. We may have to do this for the rest of the afternoon. I am very curious I guess as to why something as straightforward as this question does not bring a straightforward answer from the minister. It is, I am sure, it is something he is totally familiar with. I will ask it again. Is the minister aware that patients do not pay user fees at private clinics for insured services?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, under the Canada Health Act, if insured services have a facility fee or a payment attached to it, the Province is liable for penalty as was the previous government that was penalized \$68,000 a month for permitting facility fees to be charged for insured services.

Mrs. Driedger: If the minister is aware that patients do not pay user fees at private clinics for insured services, why would he still use that information when he speaks to the media on the topic?

Mr. Chomiak: I do not know what reference the member is specifically making, and I would appreciate it if she could point me to a specific reference, Mr. Chair, because I want to comment accurately.

Mrs. Driedger: I would hope that the minister would want to comment accurately, too, because there have been a number of instances where the minister throws out the fact that they are going to eliminate user fees from being charged at private clinics. He knows full well that user fees are not charged at private clinics for insured services. Yet I think in a fearmongering way in order to try to maybe sell his ideology a little bit better in terms of supporting why the purchase of the Pan Am Clinic happened, it helps him politically. I think he feels, to throw out the fact that he will try to make it look like they are going to be the good guys and get rid of user fees at private clinics when, in fact, user fees for insured services have not been charged at private clinics for some number of years.

I would ask the minister then, is he aware there is no queue jumping at private clinics because, for instance, with cataract surgery there is a centralized waiting list, and it is managed by the Misericordia Health Centre? In fact, that actually obliterates queue jumping. Mr. Chair, is the minister aware that there is no queue jumping?

Mr. Chomiak: Yes, Mr. Chairperson. One of the advantages of the public system is that it does allow you to maintain a particular waiting list, centralized and that one of the advantages of the public health care system is that the system provides on the basis of need and requirement.

That has always been a feature of the system, and it is certainly something that we want to continue to encourage.

Mrs. Driedger: Certainly centralized waiting lists could be beneficial to patients in many ways, but again we have heard a number of times the minister throwing out whether it is publicly in one place or another that they are going to get rid of this opportunity for people to pay for service faster, that if you pay money you are going to be able to get service quicker and he wants to get rid of all that, when in fact, for insured services there are no user fees, there is no queue jumping. So, in fact, when he is making those comments publicly he is actually misleading the public and inciting fear in the public by indicating that these even exist. I would wonder why he is throwing out this information when he knows that it is deliberately misleading to the whole argument.

Mr. Chomiak: Well, Mr. Chairperson, we are dealing with a fairly fundamental issue. I know the member has called for a re-opening of the Canada Health Act. I know the member and her Alliance colleagues have talked about having a two-tier system, so I understand that that is their philosophy and that is their ideology. That certainly is something that we do not adhere to, and I just return the member to the fact that when studies were done in Manitoba by the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy and Evaluation, an organization that was put in place by a Conservative Minister of Health, an organization that studied the issue of waiting lists, it found that when you operate a private health care system beside a public health care system what happened was the waiting lists went longer, they went up. That was attributed to the fact that when a private system operated beside a public system and there was dual waiting lists, the ability to receive numeration in the private system is higher. Obviously there is more of an incentive to do surgeries in the private system when in fact in most cases it was the same physician who did services in both systems.

Now, I know the member is taking great exception to my indication that she wanted to open the Canada Health Act and her support for the Alliance, but it is very clear from discussions and from the position they are taking with

respect to this that the privatization mantra that has been brought forward is clearly the goal of the Opposition party. That is their right, but the fact is we are trying to preserve a public system, as are all jurisdictions in the country. All provinces in the country are attempting to achieve the same goal and that is to maximize the amount of services provided while ensuring that health care funding does not go even higher than it already is.

In every jurisdiction they are taking different approaches and in Manitoba we think we have a mix and a meld between two kinds of approaches. Mr. Chairperson, we are not adopting this strict public model of the past, because we know we have to be innovative and at the same time we are not going holus-bolus full steam ahead to the privatization model that has been advocated by people, for example, that do research for the Conservative Party and wrote many articles advocating for that.

What we are trying to do is we are trying to move toward a mix that would maximize the benefits of both systems. We think it is a unique approach and we think that it is worth investing in and it is worth trying, because our health care system is so important to all of us and we know we cannot not change.

We also know that there have to be different approaches. As I have indicated on many occasions, Manitoba was a leader in a bunch of innovative areas of health care, be it home care, be it the personal care home construction, or be it Pharmacare, all initiatives brought into place by former governments and at the time, I think the Conservative oppositions opposed it as well. But, in retrospect, these programs have proved out and have been held out across the country as the best examples by all forms of government. What we are trying to do with this particular circumstance is to put in place a different approach and a different system. I understand the member opposite disagrees with that. That is certainly her right to criticize. I think the member opposite is inaccurate when she over and over and over again accuses us of being ideologically bound to a particular position. This I view as a relatively pragmatic approach and one that is a mix rather than an ideological approach that I believe is suggested by members

opposite that is a complete move to privatization, Mr. Chairperson.

* (16:20)

So we disagree. We disagree in philosophies. We are going to try this approach. The member opposite suggests that we do not try this approach. Clearly, we are going to have to agree to disagree because I do not think the member opposite is going to persuade me, and I do not think I am going to be able to persuade the member opposite, but perhaps. You know, stranger things have happened.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Chairman, the minister's words are exactly what I expected from the NDP, and I think it is very small-minded thinking. I think our politicians are feeling handcuffed about the issue of medicare because the moment anybody hints at any kind of modest reform, they are accused of wanting to unravel the fabric of Canada's most important social program.

But, you know, I have always felt that I have come into this, and as a politician, I think I have to have the courage and be bold enough and brave enough to invite the public into a debate on medicare. I think I am here representing people. I am not here just to have my own ideas on anything, and I am out there listening. I am talking to a lot of people, and I think that is my job as a politician. It is to encourage that, allow that, listen to it, and then make decisions. I am not going to draw a line in the sand, slam the door shut and not listen to what the public has to say.

The minister likes to put on the record that I am demanding that they open the Canada Health Act, that I support two-tier, that I support the Alliance. I am not sure where he ever got that one from, but it is certainly a perfect kind of fearmongering that I expect to hear from the NDP. Those are the kinds of words that come out of their mouths the moment anyone even suggests that we have an intelligent debate on medicare. I am not promoting private hospitals, two-tier medicine, queue jumping or any of the other mind-numbing buzzwords used to frighten people into accepting the status quo. You know, it takes nothing, nothing, to protect the status

quo. All I am advocating is self-examination, serious debate and, ultimately, some meaningful reform that is going to make some difference to patients.

The five principles of the Canada Health Act are well and good, but where is the one that talks about timeliness to care? There is not even a principle in there on timeliness to care or quality of care. Where are those principles within the Canada Health Act? I think those in the last few years have become very reasonable expectations we should be having within our legislation, and I do not understand why we cannot talk about it and try to find out how to make it happen. That certainly is not advocating a destruction of any part of the Canada Health Act. I would like to think it looks at enhancing our health care system today.

Certainly having been a person on a waiting list for four months and going through some very profound emotions because of that, I think I have a lot of justification and a lot of very good reason for wanting to see some changes made so that accessibility is something that is important. Instead, what happens? The federal government looks at punishing provinces for breaking parts of things that do not even have anything to do with good health care or good patient outcomes. I think we need to be looking at some of the very serious issues within health care and finding ways to make them better.

You know, if the NDP wants to go around accusing the Tories of promoting private hospitals, two-tier medicine, queue jumping because you can pay for it, I guess they are going to do that. I just do not think it takes very much courage to promote the status quo, and from the behaviour I have seen so far by the NDP, I do not think they have the courage and the vision for this debate. I think would it not be ironic that the NDP, who in their own minds think they are the saviour of health care, could eventually be the ones that actually destroy it or at least maim it pretty badly because they are so stuck in the status quo and outdated ideology?

I do not know why there is not courage amongst all politicians to be bold enough and brave enough to listen to the public. They are the taxpayers. For so long we have kept taxpayers

silent on this issue. Good heavens, you can go out there and you can have choices about just about everything. Yet, in health care, the one most valued social program we have, nobody has a say, and I will tell you, when you have been on a waiting list and you think you are going to die, that is wrong.

I think the whole issue with the Pan Am Clinic, the whole issue with The Maples Surgical Centre is certainly going to make for interesting further discussion before this session is over because I think there are a lot more questions in this area. I think the public has a right to have a say. I am going to work very hard to be sure that the public in Manitoba has an opportunity for a voice in this. I think that is my job.

In me asking questions because I think that is my job, to look for accountability in the system because I think that is my job, if the minister wants to go around labelling me one way or another, I guess that is his prerogative. I think that is small-minded thinking, but nothing much I can do about that. But having spent 23 years in the health care system, I think I have a pretty good sense of what people are feeling out there. I have experienced a lot of things with patients, and I am prepared to fight very, very hard for them and their families.

This whole issue of a medicare debate, I do think, takes courage, and I would hope that in Manitoba, in this Legislature, we might be able to see that. We might be able to see courage turn itself into action. There are a lot of elderly people out there who are being forced to be on waiting lists, in absolute pain and agony, for six months. Some people are on waiting lists waiting to see if they have cancer, and they are stuck on those waiting lists. They have no option. They have no other choice but to be on this waiting list. To me that is barbaric. That is absolutely cruel. I think it is something we have to move beyond.

I think I will move beyond this particular debate at the moment except for one little piece, and if the minister wants to look so ideologically at preserving medicare and this medicare system we have and this single payer, I would like to ask the minister if he is aware that 30 percent of

health care in Canada is already privately funded, has been for 40 years. If he is going to be so adamantly opposed to two-tier, how is he going to remove 40 years of history where right across this country 30 percent is already privately funded?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, I might suggest to the Member for Charleswood, we might have a better ability to have this debate if, in the past two hours, the member had not called me slimy, said I would mislead, said I was small-minded and said I was totally ideological-based. Perhaps if the member—

* (16:30)

Point of Order

Mrs. Driedger: I do not know where the minister is getting the word "slimy."

An Honourable Member: In the House. You said it in the House.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Chairman, the minister is saying that I said it in the House. I did not. That word, if he chooses to look through Hansard, is not a word I would use. It is not a word that was said in the House. *[interjection]*

No. I said the minister was squirming, and therefore I think it is totally inappropriate for the minister to start accusing me of calling him slimy. That, in fact, is not even where this was going, and I think that is really inappropriate for the minister—

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. On the point of order, honourable minister.

Mr. Chomiak: I will withdraw that. The member did not say "slimy." The member said I was squirmy, misled, small-minded and ideological, but I will withdraw the word "slimy." The member is correct.

Mr. Chairperson: The honourable minister has withdrawn those remarks. That will take care of the point of order. Thank you.

* * *

Mr. Chomiak: To return to my comments, Mr. Chairperson, I agree that there is a debate, but I

want to make one point clear. The member opposite and her party had management and leadership in the health care field for 11 to 12 years in this province. They had their chance. They had their opportunity. We have now been in office for 18 or 19 months in order to put a different face on the health care system. They had their chance and they did what they did. Some of it was correct. The member is always quoting me when I said before the election that 90 percent of things worked right.

I can tell you some of the things that worked wrong. Cutting the number of doctors educated was wrong. Cutting the number of nurses educated was wrong. Closing 1400 acute care beds was wrong. Letting the EMS system deteriorate and flail in the wind was wrong. Those were all wrong decisions.

Now the member turns around and accuses us of not adequately dealing with these issues on a day-to-day basis. Well, that is the way the system works. The member had 12 years. The member's government had 11, 12 years. In September of 1999, the people of Manitoba made a choice to go a different way. We are going a different way, and a pragmatic way.

The member seems fixated on privatization, hence the question: Is the minister aware that 30 percent of the medicare system is privatized? Does the member not understand that we can do things in the system to change things without necessarily going private? There is privatization. Of course there is privatization. We have acknowledged that. It is not the panacea. It is not the only solution to solve the problems, which seems to be the only thing we hear regularly from members opposite. Go private, go private, go private. That, coincidentally, is the same kind of mantra that we do hear from the Alliance, which is why I draw the conclusion. I know members opposite, many of them support the Alliance. Good heavens, how many ex-cabinet ministers ran for the Alliance? It is as interchangeable as different shirts. So I understand the right-wing philosophy, the Fraser Institute philosophy, is to privatize, and that is the panacea.

Mr. Chairperson, I look at what the Leader of the Conservative Party said, in a release

saying that we should look to the jurisdictions that have a private-public mix. Let me ask the Member for Charleswood this: Was the Leader of the Opposition not aware that we have a private-public mix already in Canada? Because that is what he said in a comment on the member's statement. So for the member to ask me whether or not I am aware of 30% privatization is trite. The fact is we have a mix in this country, but what we do not want to see is a total preoccupation and a move toward privatization.

Let me give you another example. When members were in office, there was some expansion of personal care homes, the majority of which were in the private sector, private for-profit personal care homes. That has not been necessarily a preference of where we have leaned, so there is a difference there. Members opposite went private for profit, private for profit. So clearly that was the direction.

We think that community, faith-based and other organizations are more appropriate vehicles to run personal care homes, Mr. Chairperson. That has always been a difference between the two political parties. It was demonstrated when your party was in government. Now we are in government with a bit of a different philosophy than members opposite.

We are also pragmatic. We are pragmatic enough. The member says we have to change. So every time we propose some changes the member says you cannot do that, that is wrong. For example, the Pan Am Clinic model the member says is wrong; it is a bad deal. A proposal from the WRHA to deal with some of the bad situation in Winnipeg and the establishment of a central registry that was promised in 1993 by members opposite is wrong. Members opposite are opposed to it, a mere proposal.

Point of Order

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Chairman, I think the minister is putting some incorrect information on the record. There is nowhere where we have criticized a centralized waiting list, or a centralized bed registry. I am not sure where the minister is getting that one from. He is not going to get away with putting inaccuracies like that on

the record. I am not sure where it is from, but certainly we have never said we are opposed to a centralized bed registry.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, in my whole statement I was dealing with a whole series of issues. I know the members opposite were not opposed to it because they promised it in 1993, '94, '95, '96, '97, '98, '99.

Mr. Chairperson: I will rule on the point of order. On the point of order raised by the honourable Member for Charleswood, I must advise there is no point of order. It is clearly a dispute over the facts. We are open for questions.

* * *

Mr. Chomiak: As I indicated, there is a mix. We are trying to be pragmatic in Manitoba, and we are trying to proceed on a pragmatic basis. If the member has suggestions, I would be happy to look towards them and hear what the member suggests that we should do for Maples clinic, or whatever other private clinics are opening up in Manitoba, as to what the member recommends that we should do if Maples or a series of other private clinics comes up to Manitoba and opens services.

Mrs. Driedger: Mr. Chairman, certainly there is room for a lot of debate in this whole issue, and there is going to be a considerable amount of disagreement, I am sure, on some issues and maybe some agreement on some other issues. I think I would be prepared to allow some of this to happen during concurrence when we do have a little bit more time to look at it. I know we are going to end up running out of hours probably in Estimates for some of the Health questions, so I would be prepared to, at this point in time, move on to some of the other questions that are there.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, I appreciate the comments of the member, and I do look forward to a concurrence debate. I do look forward to an opportunity where we could talk about different viewpoints in terms of different approaches as to how this issue has to be dealt with or could be dealt with.

Mrs. Driedger: Could the minister tell me, the last annual statistics I have are from 1998-1999,

and I wonder if the Minister of Health could indicate when the 1999-2000 report would be out.

Mr. Chomiak: I will endeavour to find out as soon as possible.

* (16:40)

Mrs. Driedger: I would think, in looking through some of the information here, that certainly when one looks at planning health care, some of the information in here would be really important. So I would ask the minister how a government can make good decisions when the statistical information on which some of those decisions would be made is quite outdated now.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, decisions made by government are based on a whole series of recommendations and inputs from various agencies and various groups. In fact, there is timely information that comes to the department from the regions with respect to actual figures and numbers. It is more timely than some of the annual statistics that are backdated and provided in the annual statistics report that goes out from the department. Some of the information is more timely; some of it is less timely.

In terms of operations, it is clear that, as we move to a regionalized health care system, as we continue the process of regionalization, I might suggest, the role and function of government in terms of gathering information and utilizing that information becomes more important. I alluded to this previously in my comments during these Estimates. One of the key factors relating to the department functioning and receiving information is the recommendations awaiting in the Thomas commission that is looking at the Sinclair report in terms of how the department should evolve.

The department looks at a variety of information, CIHI data, which is now more timely and up to date, a data for the Centre for Health Policy and Evaluation, a data received from each of the regions that is both timely, not only in their annual planning but in their post-budgetary analysis. One of the clear issues that have been identified over and over again in the department for at least the last five or six years is

the need for a better IT system, a better information system and a better ability to have more timely information.

It is true that it is more difficult to manage if one does not have the timely information vis-à-vis the information one is dealing with. Health has to move forward in terms of an IT plan in order to have the correct information in order to make the appropriate policy decisions. We are functioning with the information that was provided, and we are going to move forward on an IT plan in order to deal with information. We have moved in some areas in terms of acquiring information. We have done some collaborations with the federal government in terms of information collection data and analysis, and we are going to be doing more.

Mrs. Driedger: Certainly, I look forward to the minister being able to come back with a response on when the annual statistics, the latest report will be available.

It appears lately that, in me trying to seek information from the department, I am being denied information or stalled in certain instances. Things really have appeared to have tightened up in the last few months. In fact, I understand that some Manitoba Health staff have been told not to speak with my staff.

Can the minister please explain to me why this is happening and who might have issued these orders?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, I can attest to the fact that more information is provided to this critic and her office probably since we have been in office than cumulative was provided to me during the six or seven years that I was Health critic. I can attest to that, far more information, extensive information is provided.

Mrs. Driedger: It is because of new legislation.

An Honourable Member: We are more generous.

Mrs. Driedger: No, you are not. That is not what the Ombudsman said.

Mr. Chomiak: Well, Mr. Chairperson, the practice that I always followed when I was

Opposition Health critic generally was to route requests through the office of the minister. That was the policy that I adopted. I did not personally phone around to the department—

Mrs. Driedger: Yes, you did. That is what they told us. You did.

Mr. Chomiak: Well, Mr. Chairperson, if the member wants to comment, that was the practice that I followed. It was generally my practice. I can think of only a handful of times, and we are talking in six or seven years, that I did not go through the minister's office. I was asked by ministers to go through the office and I adhered to that policy from the time of Don Orchard, Jim McCrae, Darren Praznik and Eric Stefanson. In terms of my approaching information, I worked through the office of the minister, because that was requested of me from the ministers of Health. It was a process that I followed out of respect for the system and respect for the needs of the office of the minister.

Now, I do not know if all my colleagues followed that practice, but that certainly was the practice that I followed. I can think of only a handful of times in the six or seven years that I was critic that I did not go directly to the minister's office for information. If the member can state or indicate otherwise, then I would be surprised, because that was the pattern that I was asked to follow by ministers and that is the pattern that I followed.

Mrs. Driedger: Certainly since the minister was in opposition things have changed a little bit with the ability now through The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act where we fill in an application for information. I am not sure that was available to the minister in those days, but that is the process that we follow. We apply for access to information. We itemize it very carefully. We sometimes have to resubmit after a department might have had the information for a number of weeks or for 30 days. They may then come back to us and say, well, it was not quite clear. You have to resubmit again, so we do. We are following the process. Sometimes we get a phone call that we are told you do not have to go through this procedure. If you want, just make a phone call and we will provide you with that information. So in those

instances where we are invited to just call, we do that. Most of the time we have to go through the formal processes however of filling out the form. Occasionally, I have been denied information. In fact, I am going to ask about one of those right now.

I have also been told, in trying to get some information on the Pan Am Clinic purchase, that I am going to have to pay \$450. I am sure the minister realizes, when you are in opposition, to have a price tag slapped on you of \$450, it makes it really hard to find that kind of money to then try to get the information you feel that you should be able to get in order to ensure accountability in a particular line of questioning. Certainly, to be told that this particular bit of information that I am looking for is now all of a sudden going to cost me \$450, that is certainly going to put some question as to whether or not my caucus can afford to do something like that. So that kind of shuts you down a little bit in terms of your ability to get information. Sometimes for lesser amounts we have been able to pay and we have done that. Certainly, I know that my staff have been informed, they have been told, that Manitoba Health staff have been told not to speak to them. It makes me wonder why somebody might be trying to prevent me from getting information.

The minister talked about respect for the system. I am certainly following a process of respect. I am filling out the forms as I should. When we are invited to just phone then we do that so that we do not make people go through all kinds of paperwork if it is not necessary. In fact I am very cognizant, after trying to get a certain amount of information and I am finding that it has created a certain amount of work for a department, I will think very, very carefully about asking for it next time and maybe just zero in on specifics, because I do not want to create a workload for people in the department.

It is interesting, some of the things. I know we have had to complain to the Ombudsman a couple of times now. In fact this latest round we are going through, I am really wondering why there was information on various aspects related to doctors, physicians. It is unclear to me why that has been denied me, but we have taken our complaint to the Ombudsman. It is interesting to

note that on April 18, 2001, the Ombudsman's annual report pointed to a dramatic increase in complaints since 1999. I know that certainly a few of those complaints in there are from me because of the inability I have to get information.

* (16:50)

I am curious. There is one I was denied. I am not sure why I would have been denied this, because the minister has made some points of saying how he has rescued the frozen food situation. I am wondering if the minister could tell me, maybe he would like to answer this one here, seeing as he denied it to me before, a list of all the frozen food menu items that the Shared Food Services Working Group proposed to eliminate. There was another one—I might as well throw them all out here—a list of all frozen food menu items that the Shared Food Services Working Group proposed to keep; proposed percentage increase in use of Manitoba products. Why is that a big secret, about what the proposed percentage is of how much more of Manitoba products we are going to use and what a list of those products would be, proposed meal costs as outlined by the Shared Food Services Working Group?

I can see where the minister might be a little sensitive about that one, because maybe the cost of meals is now going to be a lot higher, and therefore wants to prevent me from getting that kind of information. I suppose that nobody wants to tell me how much frozen food is going to be eliminated, because then it would show that maybe there is still a large amount of it that is still going to be kept and nobody wants that kind of information out there.

So I find it kind of intriguing around these issues. If it was all straight up, not a problem. I do not understand why some of this could not just be given to me instead of being denied.

Mr. Chomiak: Well, Mr. Chairperson, I can reiterate that the member has received more information since the time we have been in office than I received cumulatively over the entire period of time that I was the critic. Second, I did not go under Freedom of Information anymore. I tried a few times when I was

critic, but it was always denied, so I did not even bother. I personally did not do any Freedom of Information requests the last few years because I would simply be rejected all the time. Now, the act changed since. I note the act and the cost the member is referring to was an act and cost that the member voted on as a government and put in place. The very act that the member is referencing now is the act that the member was supportive of and put in place. So I am not quite sure where that particular line of questioning is coming from or what the concern is in that regard.

The member has received more information than any other time since I have observed the situation. There was a time, Mr. Chairperson, when I would sit in debate for hours and hours to try to get the simplest fact or statistic that the member gets on a regular basis simply by inquiring. So we have gone well beyond past practice to provide information.

When it comes to, for example, the Pan Am deal, Mr. Chairperson, we made public the due diligence. Contrast that with the Centra Gas purchase, the \$65-million hidden fund that was not made public. Contrast that with some of the other boondoggles that we saw. Now I am going off. The point is we provided due diligence publicly that the member has access to and the member then utilizes, which is exactly why we provided it. With respect to the food, we provided publicly the report. We provided it. We did not provide it six months after it was done. We did not deep-six it somewhere else. We provided it to the member opposite for review and follow-up.

Mrs. Driedger: Would the minister be prepared to provide me a list of all the frozen food menu items that are eliminated and those that are going to be kept?

Mr. Chomiak: Well, the way I understand the process is, generally, under the frozen food experiment that was put in place by the previous government, most of the food items were frozen and brought to the RDF and unthawed and sort of heated and cooked and rethermalized, and, in some cases, moved back and forth. The majority of food, as I understand it going from memory, was frozen. It was frozen food, the majority. I

understand that we are not going to do that. We are going to go to a process where the food is cooked at the Health Sciences Centre and is distributed. It is going to be cooked in a kitchen, and then moved.

I suspect the member is going to suggest that because we might use frozen peas in Manitoba in wintertime, that means we are not adhering to the frozen food philosophy. I tell the member it is very hard to get peas in Manitoba in the wintertime unless they are frozen, because they do not do very well in our climate at that period of time.

Yes, there will be items on the menu, I suspect, like your items at home when you cook, that will be frozen. That generally is the philosophy. That generally is the way that we are proceeding to go on moving from a vast majority, a preponderance, a high percentage of frozen items, to a menu system that has items that are cooked in Winnipeg and then distributed.

Mrs. Driedger: Manitobans are really never going to know the whole story behind all of this, unless all of this information were to come forward. So it is going to be very easy to just bury this whole frozen food story, but the whole picture is not out there unless people have an opportunity to see a list of all the frozen food menu items that will be eliminated.

I do not understand, unless there is some reason the minister wants to be evasive, why this kind of information would not be put forward. He was on the case of frozen food for so long, one would think that he would be really happy to provide this information in order to substantiate everything he is saying. By holding back this information, I have to suspect that maybe there is more going on behind this than we really see.

All I would like to see is a list of all frozen food menu items that will be eliminated, frozen food menu items that will be kept, and I am sure this information is probably readily available. I would be very interested in the proposed percentage increase in the use of Manitoba products and a list of these products.

I know when we were looking at the whole food issue, we were very proud of the fact that a

lot of food was produced in Manitoba and supported jobs in Manitoba. It would be interesting to see what this list looked like. I would think that proposed meal costs, and a comparison of now versus then would be something that Manitobans should have an opportunity to see in order for them to then make up their mind about the whole food system, and whether the change is as dramatic as the minister wants to infer that it is.

Mr. Chomiak: Before I answer this question, I wonder if we could perhaps take a 10-minute break. I thank the member for her indulgence in this.

Mr. Chairperson: Is there agreement we take a 10-minute break? *[Agreed]*

The committee recessed at 4:59 p.m.

The committee resumed at 5:19 p.m.

Mr. Chairperson: We will convene now with our discussion on Estimates.

Mr. Chomiak: I thank the committee for permitting me the opportunity for a small break. I appreciate it. I am contrite in so far as I took longer than I planned. To that end, in order to make up for the time I am going to limit my next two comments to be very, very short to allow for more questioning time.

With respect to the frozen food, we have provided substantial information and we will continue. I should indicate to the member we provided the Auditor's report publicly, we provided the working group documentation publicly. We also made the contracts that had previously been under restriction in confidentiality clauses, we have also provided those publicly with respect to frozen food.

Mrs. Driedger: Would the minister like to go one step further and provide all of these bits that I have asked for that I have been denied?

Mr. Chomiak: We have tried to provide as much information and information that we can provide, we will try to provide.

* (17:20)

Mrs. Driedger: Could the minister admit that maybe it does look a little bit suspicious when I am being denied some of these? If it was really a straightforward situation—this is what I was denied. If it was really straightforward and there was nothing to hide, that would make a good argument to support the minister's decision. The way it sits right now, when some of this information is being kept back, it does make it look a little bit suspicious as to what could be hidden.

Mr. Chomiak: I do not know specifically what issues the member is referring to, in terms of why or why not the information is being provided. I am not familiar with the various aspects that she has outlined.

Mrs. Driedger: We had discussed this prior to the break. It was my request in October of last year for a listing of all frozen food menu items that were going to be eliminated, a list of all frozen food menu items that were going to be kept, a proposed percentage increase in the use of Manitoba products and a list of those products and meal costs now for meals in hospitals as compared to meal costs previously under the other system. It would seem to me that if there was nothing to hide, if there was no reason to be evasive, this kind of information would be readily made available because it would support the minister's direction in getting rid of what he labelled frozen food. It makes me wonder, by not providing me with this information, if maybe there is more frozen food being kept than we know.

Mr. Chomiak: Well the member is obviously naturally suspicious. I am not by nature.

What I can indicate is that the contracts on frozen food were kept confidential by members opposite when they were government and were not provided. They were kept confidential. All of the information concerning frozen food was kept under wraps. We opened up that dark chapter, that dank chapter, by the Provincial Auditor reviewing the information.

I do not have the Provincial Auditor's report in front of me today, but it certainly highlighted a whole series of deficiencies in the process put

in place, including the ability to determine the meal costs under the frozen food system and variations in terms of the meal costs under the frozen food system. We made that report public and we followed the recommendations of the Auditor and the establishment of a new system and a different system that would be beneficial to people in Winnipeg. We made the working group report public and we made a number of working documents public and contracts public. I do not know what more the member could want from us with regard to this. We have provided more information in 18 months in this area than was provided in three or four years by members opposite.

Mrs. Driedger: I think I am not going to leave this one. I am just going to defer it for another day, but I will go on to another issue and that is the Manitoba Health business plan. I wonder if the minister could tell me if there is a business plan for the fiscal year 2001-2002.

Mr. Chomiak: No, Mr. Chairperson.

Mrs. Driedger: Could the minister indicate why there would not be a business plan? The last one was put out by Manitoba Health, April 1, 2000. We are now into May, and I would wonder why there is not a business plan, which to me would be like a strategic plan that would guide you through the next year. Why is there not one for the year 2001-2002?

Mr. Chomiak: As I indicated earlier and during the course of the Estimates debate, Mr. Chairperson, there are a number of significant changes that are happening at Manitoba Health with respect to both structure and functioning of Manitoba Health. We have the recommendations of the Webster report. We have the Sinclair Commission and we are waiting the recommendations of the Thomas committee that will impact dramatically on the way that Health functions and the way that health care functions in Manitoba.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister's comments concern me a little bit, because he is indicating that changes are being made and so he does not want to have a plan in place. Would he not put a plan in place and would not that be guiding the changes that would be happening?

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, I can recall strategic documents that were put out by members opposite. The plan was never followed. The plan was never followed and there would be great fanfare. In fact there was an advertising campaign to the tune of \$700,000, and you know what the theme of the advertising campaign was? We have a plan. That was the theme. There was no plan, but there was simply that: We have a plan. \$700,000. They put civil servants in front of the cameras to say: We have a plan. They did a series of initiatives, and they did a series of mailouts saying: We have a plan.

So, Mr. Chairperson, the department is developing and is working on a strategic direction that is different in approach than in the past, as I indicated previously during the course of these Estimates debates, and that there are several events that are contingent, that will impact on this particular plan and that will be incorporated within the final strategic plan.

Mr. Mervin Tweed (Turtle Mountain): Just one question, Mr. Chairperson. I wonder if the minister, then, today, would commit, on behalf of Manitoba Health and the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, not to spend money on advertising in the health care field.

Mr. Chomiak: I think, and I said this both in opposition and as minister, that would be foolish to make that commitment, and I will tell you why. This is what I said as critic. I criticized your political advertising campaign when you were in government, and I said I am not against advertising, particularly health. We had one of the most successful advertising campaigns in the history of health when we did our child injury campaign to prevent childhood injuries. If the member is suggesting that we should not do that, then he is wrong. If the member is suggesting that we should not advertise about the hep C look-back, trace-back program, he is wrong. If the member is suggesting we should not advertise on the vaccination program, he is wrong. To make a point blank statement to not advertise would be foolhardy.

* (17:30)

I think the member would agree with that, Mr. Chairperson, that it is not an appropriate

statement. Now, I did differ with the political campaign that was launched in the dying days of the last regime that was broadcasting a political message that somehow things were, well, I will not go too far down the road, but the fact was it was a \$700,000 campaign that suggested to me that it was more aimed at politics than actual health care information. So I said, both as critic then and as minister now, there is a need for the Department of Health to inform; there is a need for the Department of Health to educate. For a minister to make a blanket statement would not be appropriate, and I will not make that statement.

Mr. Tweed: Well, then, would the minister commit to not advertising health in, say, the 90 days or the 120 days in the run-up to an election, which he seems to be zeroed in on. I mean, the minister stated, if he wants to talk about election campaigns, it was your Government and you as a person that committed to the people of Manitoba that you would spend \$15 million and solve hallway medicine. You have not. You knew you could not. Yet you are trying to lecture us on ethics of how we do business and everything. I am asking the minister, if he is so concerned about that being an issue and if it was an issue to him, to make a commitment that he would not do that, and then people can judge on what is being presented to them, I guess, more to what the realities are as opposed to what governments believe they are.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, you know, I am glad the member brought up a few points because it allows me the opportunity to discuss some of these issues. First, it would also not be prudent for the minister to say no advertising during a period leading up to an election for a variety of reasons. If we are to be in a health care crisis, a pandemic, for example, or a major vaccination campaign or a major health care crisis, it would be not appropriate to not advertise. I would not want to handcuff anyone who is sitting in the chair of the minister's role of responsibility by such a narrow and constrained view of the situation. It would not be appropriate. It would be poor health policy to do so.

On the issue of this claim, you know the members opposite have spent that \$15 million over and over and over again, Mr. Chairperson. I

can indicate the members opposite said: We did not believe we could end hallway medicine. You know what? We tried, and that is something that did not happen, that did not happen for year after year after year because, if you do not believe you can do it, which members opposite obviously did not believe, it could not be done.

You know, CIHI did a report and said that Manitoba had done the best job of hallway medicine of any jurisdiction in the country. Mr. Chairperson, I am the first to indicate that it is not perfect, but doing nothing would have been irresponsible. We put in place programs that reduced it, according to CIHI, by 80 percent. By any other measure, 80 percent would be considered a success, but by members opposite that is somehow a failure. Members opposite, who steadily had dozens and dozens of people in the hallways for days and even weeks, look back to the *Free Press* editorial about that poor woman who spent weeks and weeks in a hallway, and when I used to raise those issues, members opposite denied there was a problem. That was always the problem. If you deny there is a problem, you cannot fix the problem, so for the member opposite to claim somehow 80% improvement – 80% turnaround is by any other standard pretty darn good, and, you know, members opposite suggest somehow that this is a failure. Well, I would not go back to the days of members opposite denying the situation and not doing anything to deal with it. We dealt with it within weeks of coming into office. We put in place an elaborate five-point program on November 22, 1999. The five-point program, Mr. Chairperson, enhanced coverage, provided coverage. We worked further on that program. We continue to do variations on that particular program to deal with the situation.

For members to stand up and to suggest what the members opposite suggest I think is not accurate. It is not accurate. The member opposite raised this issue and I thought it was appropriate that I should deal with this issue appropriately, but on the issue of advertising I do not think it is appropriate to handcuff a department, particularly a Department of Health, on matters of this kind with respect to advertising, particularly when one never knows in the health care field what issue might arise and what information needs to be conveyed, or what kind of education is appropriate to the public.

Mr. Tweed: I know the minister may like to stand or sit before people and pound on his chest and pat himself on the back, but, again, I know what I heard, I know what I read, I know what I saw, and I know what people expect. People expect you to deliver on your promises.

One of the promises that you made was that you would eliminate hallway medicine. Now you have changed it by calling it different. It is a culture of hallway medicine. You have called it several things. I think you tried to probably eliminate hallways or at least the name hallways in the hospital jargon, and we now have corridors or avenues or whatever. I also know that you changed the qualifications of what was measured as hallway medicine. I mean you made changes in the expectations. You can show whatever number you want. The fact of the matter is there are still people sitting in the hallways.

In fact I am concerned that not only are we going to see future growth in the hallway medicine industry that you supposedly promised to eliminate but could not, and the fact is, with the pressure that is being put on our rural hospitals right now and the access to health care getting more and more limited, it is going to put more pressure on the City of Winnipeg. It is going to put more pressure on your major hospitals.

Unfortunately, we have to just keep changing the methods of delivery so that we can satisfy the numbers that we want to present to the public. You create such a double standard with what you say and what you do.

I think of the one example, we want to talk about hallway medicine, is we had a constituent sitting in an office in Winnipeg at his doctor's office and the doctor said, man, you are sick; you should be in the hospital. The guy said, well, I will make a few calls and I will make the arrangements to stay in. He said I cannot check you into the hospital, but if you return to your community, admit yourself to the hospital, get an ambulance, and come in by then, we will let you in, because they will give you a bed then. If I try to admit you now, you are probably going to end up in the hallway.

Therefore what is the situation? The man is sent home, told by his doctor that he should be in

the hospital. The guy waited four days, four days for them to clear a space in the hospital for him because you or your Government did not want somebody to say there was a guy in the hallway. The guy sat at home and worried and worried and worried, and that is his train of thought. That is how he relates it to me. He said they do not want any statistics, so guys like him and people in rural Manitoba have to pay the price. The price is we are not going to give you access to health care. We are not going to give you timely access to health care. We are just going to send you home.

The hospital there that he went to check into would not even admit him. Basically, they put him through the system. He walked into the ambulance. Their thinking was, I think, it is just another expense. It is a bed. It is care. Everything that is involved with admitting that person is just another expense to them at this point in time, and they are trying to shave quarters too.

My only comment is while you think you are solving these problems you are creating a lot more, and the situation, I think, is becoming worse, and it is going to become more noticeable as these people start to gain their voices and start being more aggressive. For too long we have sat out there and listened to excuses. I think people are at a point now where they are going to start being a little more aggressive in their issues in regards to health care. So I want to leave that with the minister. Hopefully he can see through some of what he is saying and actually do some of the things that he is suggesting he is capable of.

I guess I got into this when my colleague asked about a plan. We have said throughout the entire process, I mean, this Government has not had a plan on anything. I guess if that is your goal, if that is what you are presenting to the public, then I would suggest that we are concerned that we are not going down the right path.

* (17:40)

Yes, plans change. Plans change every day. I recognize that. I am not afraid to say that they change in every field. But you still have to have a plan to start from. You still need that base, that foundation to develop the programs that you need and that are added and deleted as we go

through the process. Without a plan you are just responding. You are not managing anything towards a goal or an objective, because the plan does not set anything out, because there is no plan.

I would encourage the minister, I mean, obviously kind enough to get us the plan last year, or however we got it. I guess if we have to go through the normal channels, then I guess we will. We would sure like to see a business plan for everything that the Department of Health does. Just like every other department in government, or, I should say, some are asked to do, it is presented to the people. People can see what the direction is and what the goals and the objectives of a government are and measure at the end of the day: Was it successful or was it not?

As long as you do not keep changing the measuring guidelines, then people will have a true picture of how everything is doing, how health care is doing and how government is doing. Again, I would ask for the plan on it. I think we need to see it, and I think the people of Manitoba deserve to see it.

Mr. Chomiak: Well, Mr. Chairperson, I specifically, when I came into office, asked that several things not change. One was the way we calculated hallway patients. Members opposite can say what they want, but we used the same calculations as occurred when members opposite were in power.

Let me talk, we put out a five-point nurses plan, Mr. Chairperson: diploma nurses, retention and recruitment, education, a nurses task force and a nurses advisory council. What did members opposite do? They opposed it. We then put in place a doctors resource plan, something that had been cut and whittled and eliminated over the past decade. Let me talk about the doctors plan, which had heavy emphasis on rural and northern Manitoba. Remember, the previous government had cut the number of doctors, cut, slashed, eliminated, removed.

We put in place a plan that saw the enrolment at the faculty of medicine increase for the first time in a decade. We put in place a foreign physician recruitment and retention initiative. We have put in place and will soon be

putting in place an office of northern and rural health care. We put in place, recently, Mr. Chairperson, a grant and loan system to physicians, a comprehensive plan.

Now, let us compare the previous government plan with our plan: substantive steps, increased enrolment, increased residency positions, office of rural and northern health, grants and loans, foreign physician recruitment. Previous government plan: cut, slash, eliminate.

You know, Mr. Chairperson, by comparison, let us look at the nurses plans. We have a five-point nurses plan. Previous government plan: zero; less nurses in training the last two years than any other time; Connie Curran; getting rid of nursing training programs and education programs.

I think by comparison it pales. Hallway medicine under the previous government. It does not exist under our Government; a specific plan, an ongoing plan, and a plan that has been duly recognized as having done the best job in the country dealing with the hallway situation.

The member talked about a better utilization of beds. We too wanted a better utilization of beds. That is why in 1993, when the then-minister, Don Orchard, promised a central bed registry, I went out publicly and supported him on that. I supported the subsequent minister in '94 and the minister in '95, '96 and '97, who also promised it, and the new minister in '97 and '98, who promised it, and then the new minister who promised it in '99.

That central bed plan and the utilization of beds, would have been helped had we not closed 1400 acute care beds, mostly in Winnipeg. Had that not happened, and had we had the physicians, and we had the human resources to staff those facilities, then we would have been in a much better position to deal with patients.

Having said that, the member opposite talks about a business plan. As I have indicated, we are working on a strategic plan. The members opposite often reference particular matters. I have already discussed the fact that there was an advertising campaign suggesting that a plan was in place, when in fact the advertising campaign

was only suggesting that there was a plan in place. But there was not a plan in place, quite clearly, other than the retrenchment and the slowing down and the cutting of services, followed by upswings just before elections and then retrenchment post elections. It was very clear from the pattern of spending. It was very clear from the pattern of provinces that that was the way it proceeded.

The Member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Tweed) talks about rural and northern Manitoba. Let us talk about EMS, which was timely and topical. EMS was studied and studied and studied. There are at least three reports that I am familiar with, of which at least one was not released.

This particular report, a report came public when we came into office that recommended about—I am going by memory—29 or 30—some-odd recommendations to improve EMS. After 10 years, we got a report that recommended all the things we should do for EMS.

So now members opposite ask us why we are not doing enough on EMS, even though last year in our Budget we doubled the amount of funding to EMS in Manitoba. We put in place a process to acquire 80 new ambulances. We are putting in place a better communication system as well as a centralised communication system for rural Manitoba, and there is much more to be done.

Members opposite indicate that there are problems in EMS. Yes there are problems in EMS. There have been problems in EMS for a decade. Unfortunately, they have only started to be tackled in the last 18 months. There have been specific programs in a wide variety of areas. There has been specific direction both from a budgetary and from a strategic standpoint both last year and this year, with respect to some of the significant areas that were not dealt with over the past decade.

Members opposite cite individual cases. There are individual cases. There always will be individual cases. We must strive at Manitoba Health to try to eliminate every one of those individual cases. Of course we will never achieve that. That does not mean we should not

try. Then members opposite might accuse me of promising too much.

Our goal is to try to make sure every single individual is treated compassionately, fairly, and appropriately in every instance. That should be our goal and that is our goal. Do we always achieve that? No. Should we strive to achieve that? Yes. That continues to be our goal.

I am sure members opposite will cite individual cases and will do follow-up on individual cases. In terms of the systematic approach to health care, there have been significant improvements over the past year and a half. We have now doubled the amount of nurses in education and training in the province of Manitoba from what was in place four years ago.

One of the favourite themes of members opposite is that there are more nurse vacancies. I did some enquiries in the department about vacancies. I did some enquiries about the adding up of vacancies. It was very, very interesting.

* (17:50)

As critic, I always used the government statistics. I always used the government statistics, even though I knew they were low. I continue to use the same statistics. I understand that there were a lot more extensive vacancies. The statistics are cited now by members opposite. Somehow they are suggesting we double the number of vacancies. For once, the member agrees with MNU numbers she is suggesting, which may be a significant conversion. The MNU also said a thousand nurses were fired during the 1990s, but the member says that is not true.

An Honourable Member: So that is where you got it from.

Mr. Chomiak: The member says that is where I got it from. In fact, there was a report tabled in the Legislature in 1998 that says specifically a thousand nurses, but we are going to continue to debate that particular point.

In terms of nurse vacancies, we have tried to be consistent, Mr. Chairperson, in terms of the

vacancies. We tried to use the same numbers. The one thing I do know is that we are educating and training more nurses, and we are putting more effort into a whole variety of functions in order to deal with the nurses situation that had not been adequately dealt with over the past decade.

Mrs. Driedger: The minister, in his comments, was making reference to beds and bed closures, and in his own Manitoba Health business plan for 2000-2001 it cites in there and it mentions: A recent study completed by Manitoba Centre for Health Policy and Evaluation in February 1999 found no evidence that bed closures in Winnipeg hospitals have had a negative impact on system-wide measures of quality of care. This study also showed that the same numbers of people were served in 1997 as were served before the bed reductions. The author suggests that this is attributable to changes in service delivery such as a shift from in-patient to out-patient surgery.

I know the minister is very fond recently of citing other studies by the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy and Evaluation, so I am assuming he is going to have equal respect for the findings of this particular study that found that there was no negative impact on system-wide measures of quality of care because of closures of beds in hospitals. I know the minister talks a lot about closing all these beds in hospitals, and while it makes for some good political commentary probably, according to this study—and I am assuming it is a group he respects a lot, because he certainly quotes their studies recently, and I am assuming he is going to support what their findings are there. *[interjection]* Manitoba Centre for Health Policy.

Also, just to take this a little bit further in terms of a trend across North America in moving care of patients to communities, which is really what this is all about, there is a person by the name of Dr. Tim Porter-O'Grady, who is respected certainly in the nursing field. He wrote an article in the *Canadian Operating Room Nursing Journal* and it is interesting. I am just going to read a couple of his paragraphs in this particular article that he wrote for them, and it talks about de-bedding health care.

He says: Why is the patient a co-dependent, late-stage, passive, participating, late engager,

too sick to do anything about a player in health care at a time when that is no longer a viable model for the future of health care? What if the patient is the last thing that we want to have in the emerging health care system? What if the dependency the patient has we created? Yes, we do sick good. We are very good at sick. Why? Because we wake up every morning, and we pray that those beds will be full so that we will have a job tomorrow. Now the opportunities, the options and technology is changing the bed as the basic unit of health care. What we are in the process of doing is de-bedding health care. You have watched it happen.

In North America by the year 2010, we will have reduced bed-based health care by 637 000 beds. That does not mean that people will not be sick. It just means that we will care for them differently. It does not mean that people will not need us. It just means that they will need us for different things. The age now demands a different frame of reference for who we are and what we do and calls us to a different place. The issue is to recognize that it is going to be noisy, it is going to be traumatic, it is going to be risk-based.

I heard a nurse speak the other night, and she talked about this particular article. She talked about the changing role of the nurse, but she also talked about what is happening to patients in the system. Certainly, when we look at bed closures in hospitals, it is certainly part of a much bigger picture. It is interesting that the minister chooses to criticize us about this, but what that tells me is he is really out of touch with the vision of health care that is happening right across North America because as they said by the year 2010 we will have reduced bed-based health care by 637 000 beds.

That is a good thing in terms of saving money, but it is even a good thing because if patients can get better and get treatment other than in a hospital—I mean, I can remember with cataract surgery, you were flat on your back with sandbags at the side of your head for two weeks, and you were not allowed to budge. At least we have progressed in terms of health care. We have looked at evidence-based care. We have looked at nursing research and medical research that has shown us there are other ways to do things.

So it is interesting that the minister would choose to criticize us for closing beds when in fact there appears to be a lot of support out there that that is a good thing to do. It does not mean that patients are not being cared for, but it does mean that a patient is being cared for in his community closer to home which is really what an intent of all the reform was. While reform may have been done in part to look at keeping and containing costs in health care, I think there are certainly some other values that come to a patient in terms of having themselves cared for in different ways.

I think the NDP have shown their lack of knowledge about health care changes when all they can think of is criticizing us for trying to be modern in our approach. Our approach is certainly based on what doctors and nurses have proven in their research that there certainly are better ways that can be utilized so that patients will get good care.

It is interesting that the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy and Evaluation found no evidence that bed closures in Winnipeg hospitals have had a negative impact on system-wide measures of quality of care. So every time the minister chooses to criticize us for closing beds it really begs some serious questions, and part of the seriousness in the questions is the minister's understanding about health care changes on a North American-wide basis, that there are a lot of people, doctors and nurses, that are behind a lot of this.

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

EDUCATION, TRAINING AND YOUTH

* (15:30)

The Acting Chairperson (Doug Martindale): Good afternoon. Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply meeting in Room 255 will now resume consideration of the Estimates of the Department of Education, Training and Youth. When the Committee of Supply last met to consider this department on May 17, 2001, it was agreed to have a global discussion on

Resolution 16.1. The floor is now open for questions.

Mrs. Joy Smith (Fort Garry): Mr. Chair, the last day I had asked for some information on boards and commissions. It was agreed that we would have until Thursday, I believe, to get those. So I will go on to my next question. One other question I had that was brought up to me: Could the minister please tell me where Heather Hunter is placed in Manitoba Education and Training, and what her function is at this point in time, please?

Hon. Drew Caldwell (Minister of Education, Training and Youth): I will have to review. I do not have before me the information about where Heather Hunter is within the department right now. I am trying to recall in my mind's eye where she is located right now. I may be able to provide that before the afternoon is out here, when some further staff come into the room.

Mrs. Smith: Last day we were talking about staff modifications to his office, and he indicated he was going to give a listing of the staff and a listing of their functions. Could the minister indicate whether he has had any ministerial staff at the Brandon Cabinet office, please?

Mr. Caldwell: There are no ministerial staff—Department of Education staff—at the Brandon Cabinet office.

Mrs. Smith: Perhaps I will give the minister a minute. He wanted to say something else. At this time if there is anything you would like to add, please feel free to do that.

Mr. Caldwell: I was just going to add about the Brandon Cabinet office generally. I have had the opportunity to use the office for a number of meetings. In fact, Cabinet has met at that office a few times. So I do find it a very useful institution, a useful place. I know that the member opposite, her colleagues, at least when the previous government was in power, found it to be a useful place. In fact, I have had on occasion as a Brandon city councillor to be at meetings at that office. It is, I think, a very, very positive location for meetings with western Manitobans, southwestern Manitoban officials, whether they are school, hospital, municipal officials. So it is

a very, very good office. I was pleased that the former government retained the Cabinet office in Brandon for western Manitobans. I find a similar benefit in using that office. I was just going to add those thoughts.

Mrs. Smith: It has come to my attention, Mr. Chair, that the minister has, since his appointment, been sending letters to teachers outlining the work of the minister. This letter is on the letterhead of the minister and is normally two to three pages in length. Could the minister provide a copy of this letter for the information of committee?

Mr. Caldwell: Mr. Chair, I have made it a practice since being appointed Minister of Education and Training in October of 1999 to be highly visible in the field, in fact, to make myself widely available throughout the province of Manitoba in schools, in board offices, in parents' homes and independent schools. Meeting in churches, meeting with all stakeholders as much as I can, as much as is physically possible in the 730-odd schools around the province, and in the 50-odd school division offices, and in the innumerable independent schools and home-school situations. Try to make myself widely available, of course, given that we have hundreds of thousands of students; a couple of hundred thousand students in the province, 730-odd schools and over 10 000 active teachers and so forth. It is obviously physically impossible to be spread that thin, to be able to connect personally with everybody who is involved in the public school system.

I daresay that every citizen in Manitoba is passionately interested in our education system in the province. I am very heartened by that. I feel very privileged to work with a populace that is so concerned about public school excellence and so engaged in the many challenges that face this province in promoting public school excellence and further developing public school excellence.

In fact, I believe I have sent more than one letter out to teachers. I have no problem bringing the last letter to Estimates tomorrow, and would be pleased to put that material on the record. That is an extension of my belief that the Minister of Education and Training should not

only reside in Room 168 and have conclave with his or her colleagues in caucus and in the Legislature with members opposite and with the governing party of the day, but rather it is my very strong belief that the Minister of Education should be accessible and available to all Manitobans on a regular basis to engage in a two-way dialogue with the public on matters educational.

So, in response to the member's question about the recent letter that has been sent out to teachers, I will bring that with me to our next meeting in Estimates and put it on the record. But it is an extension of my philosophy that the minister should be fundamentally engaged with the broader public on issues of education.

In fact, the member might be interested: I do regularly send out e-mails to all the staff members, Mr. Chair, in the Department of Education and Training as well, so there is a two-way dialogue that goes between my office and civil servants as well as teachers, parents, educators generally.

Mrs. Smith: Perhaps the minister would like to just stop and introduce the staff that has come to the table.

Mr. Caldwell: It is a pleasure. Actually, Gerald Farthing, the ADM of Public Schools; Claude Fortier is my right-hand man for Estimates, or left hand as the case may be here today, to my left; and the Honourable Tim Sale and the Honourable Steve Ashton are also in attendance, which is a pleasure, as well as you, Mr. Chair.

If I could, too. I do have an answer, since Doctor Farthing came in, Mr. Chair, that Heather Hunter is with the Research and Planning branch of the department right now.

Mrs. Smith: I must say I know of these, and personally some of the Manitoba Education and Training staff, and really applaud the staff at Manitoba Education and Training, because they are very, very knowledgeable people, work long hours, and are very dedicated to the education field. So it is an honour to be sitting at this table with you.

Having said that, could the minister, Mr. Chair, please tell me what her salary is and if she

is on secondment, or if it is a permanent position, or what status her working position is? That is Heather Hunter.

* (15:40)

Mr. Caldwell: I will have that information for the member tomorrow. My staff are not sure if it is a temporary basis, if it is a permanent basis or what the arrangement is. The deputy is not here right now, but we will have that information for the member tomorrow. I should echo the comments that certainly I feel also very much privileged to have such a tremendous staff supporting myself and supporting education in Manitoba generally. I know that the Member for Fort Garry (Mrs. Smith) did work with some of the departmental staff in her previous life with the department, and certainly I feel oftentimes that I am the staff's cross to bear personally because they do educate me almost each and every day on their portfolios.

Mrs. Smith: I thank the minister for his offer to provide a copy of the letters that have been sent out to teachers. My second question to the minister: Could the minister indicate whether this was an initiative developed by the department, or was this developed by the government central policy committee to send letters out to teachers—to their personal homes? Because I do have quite a few letters from teachers who have received information from the minister, and I will have it on record that sometimes some of the teachers felt this was very politically motivated. So I did want to bring it to Estimates, and I wanted to ask the minister about this initiative.

Mr. Caldwell: I think the answer to that is contained in my first comment on this matter. I believe very strongly that it is important to engage in a regular fashion members of the department, teachers, parents, trustees, children, broader communities as well—whether it be business leadership or labour leadership or municipal officials. So the initiative to engage in a thorough manner the general public of Manitoba, the teaching profession in Manitoba—as I said, school trustees, parents, children, broader communities, business and labour—is one that I feel is very important in seeking counsel from stakeholders and from the broader

public; in seeking advice from the broader public, in informing the broader public of initiatives that have been undertaken within the department, and encouraging a two-way feedback with teachers, with parents, with municipal officials, business and labour leaders, children.

So the initiative that has been taken by myself as Minister of Education and Training in visiting schools, in visiting communities, in visiting school division offices and visiting chambers of commerce and visiting with municipal officials is something that I believe in very strongly. Certainly, I think it is important that the Minister of Education particularly be engaged in a very thorough sense with the public on matters educational. This is really a philosophical belief of mine that elected public officials should be engaged in a very thorough way with the public that they are responsible to.

That means, I think, relating to the public, to teachers, to trustees, to parents, to children, to business/labour and broader municipal, broader public in Manitoba what the department is engaged in; what the major initiatives are that are on the agenda, and to seek not only to inform the public about what the initiatives are, but also to seek constructive feedback and sometimes a very critical feedback about what we are engaged in as a government. It is a personal philosophy of mine. I was a city councillor in Brandon for eight years previous to being elected as an MLA in September '99, and my philosophy as an elected official in the City of Brandon was to have an open door and to be continuously engaged with the public. My philosophy as the Minister of Education is to have an open door and to be continually engaged with the public.

So it really extends, Mr. Chair, from my personal philosophy of what it is to be a publicly elected official and what it is to be responsible as a publicly elected official, and what it means to me is to be continuously and actively engaged with the public on issues, agenda items, policy questions that I am engaged in and to seek feedback in that regard.

Mrs. Smith: I just want to put on the record that I see Estimates as a way of asking a specific question and just getting specific information. I

would thank the minister for his very lengthy answer; however, I asked only one specific question, and please do not feel, Mr. Chair, that the minister has to go through the same answers over and over again in a roundabout way. I know he is trying to answer as best he can, but all I want to know very specifically is—I am talking about the letters that were sent to teachers, not about the churches the minister has gone to or about all this open dialogue or da dee-da dee-da.

Could the minister indicate whether this letter-writing initiative was developed by the Department of Education, or was this developed by the Government's central policy agency? The minister has indicated that it came from him. Did it come through him through the department? Did the department write the letters, or, Mr. Chair, did the Government's central policy agency write the letters?

Mr. Caldwell: Well, neither one. It is an extension of my personal philosophy of what it is to be a publicly elected official, and to be responsible to the public. I think being responsible to the public means engaging, in a very meaningful and thoughtful way, the public on issues of importance to the portfolio.

When I was a city councillor, those issues involved poverty. They involved community economic development. They involved housing. They involved a broad number of issues, and I was constantly engaged in a very similar fashion as I am as minister in seeking advice, in publicly representing the agenda items and the issues that were important and were on my agenda as a city councillor.

That same philosophy of being publicly engaged with the public in a meaningful way is one that I have brought to the minister's chair, so it really, ultimately, and in a very meaningful way, is something that is a personal belief of mine as someone who is a publicly elected official.

What that means to me is somebody who is engaged with the public in letting the public know what the agenda items are on my table and seeking advice on the same, so that the best advice, from teachers in this case, but the best advice from teachers, parents, trustees, children

is something that I am cognizant of. So it really is in a very fundamental sense a reflection of my own philosophy of public service.

Mrs. Smith: So, Mr. Chair, did the minister write the letters himself? Did he get Department of Education people to write the letters? Or was someone at the central government policy agency engaged in writing the letters specifically to the teachers?

Mr. Caldwell: Well, I guess fundamentally I am responsible for every letter that I put my signature to. Every letter, truly, and every piece of information that I have sent out, both in terms of my previous life as a city councillor in the city of Brandon or as the Minister of Education, which I have been privileged to serve as for the last 19 months, involves many more minds than my own. But the responsibility for any letter that goes out over my name is mine. The material that I review in drafting letters—which I do with alarming frequency in this job, draft letters, I mean. A big part of this job is drafting letters and responding to the public. I am engaged in every one. Am I solely engaged in everything that I have written? No. But in terms of the material that goes out over my name, I do take responsibility for and I do engage myself in drafting. That is not to say that oftentimes I will not take verbatim out of material that is placed before me for my review certain phrases, a sentence or even paragraphs, but it is to say that when I sign off on a letter it is my letter.

* (15:50)

Mrs. Smith: Mr. Chair, very specifically speaking, due to the minister's answer, what I can understand is that the minister drafted the letter. Whom did the minister give it to, to Department of Education people to rewrite and redraft, or did he give the letters to the teachers to the Government's central policy agency?

Mr. Caldwell: It all occurred within my office. I did not provide a letter to other people to rewrite for me. I am engaged in writing letters on a daily basis. In fact, today I have already put out a couple to pasture. I am not certain of any other way to put it than the Minister of Education or the minister in any portfolio has a very experienced and dedicated staff at his or her

disposal. The advice of departmental staff in this portfolio or any other portfolio is sought on most issues, if not all issues. Certainly most issues. In my case, it is pretty much all issues. Because every day is an education for the Minister of Education and Training in this province.

As I said, the letters that were sent or have been sent out from the minister's office, those that are sent out over my signature, are my responsibility. I am engaged with each and every one of them. Typically, most, if not all, of those letters also have the engagement of other people in the department; whether that is through reviewing files, or reviewing reports, or reviewing previous correspondence, or, in a more direct fashion, whether that is having the letter drafted for me for certification issues, or what have you, on individual files.

The letters of which the member speaks in terms of the letter to the teachers of the province, and I am not even sure how widely distributed they were, but the letters that go out to teachers on what is on my plate as the Minister of Education and Training are primarily, and first and foremost, my responsibility, and certainly one of the series of letters that I am regularly engaged in myself, as are my e-mails to the departmental staff and any other sort of informational letter that may be distributed widely to trustees, to parents, to teachers.

We had similar advice in terms of the Grade 3 assessment with parents and teachers. We certainly have had a number of correspondences of this nature with school superintendents and trustees. As I said earlier, to me it is very much part of my personal philosophy of what it is to be a publicly elected official. That is to be publicly accessible, publicly accountable, and very much engaged in a meaningful way with the public, as I said, teachers, trustees, parents, children and a broader public, on matters educational.

I guess I will underscore, again, the responsibility for these letters is mine. It springs from my strongly held belief acquired over the course of over a decade of public service that this is a very important thing, to engage in a dialogue with the public on a wide variety of issues, in this instance educational issues. It really is my responsibility.

Mrs. Smith: From what you are saying, I gather that the minister wrote the letter and handed it to Department of Education people to type and redraft, and then it was sent out.

Mr. Caldwell: I guess we are dancing around it. Obviously, more than one person is involved. As I said, when I am drafting these things I often have a pile of previous documentation in front of me or before me so that when I am addressing—I do not have a letter in front of me right now to refer to, but one of the agenda items, as I recall, was Grade 3 assessment, as one of the items on the letter. When I would be drafting the section referring to that particular item, I would have before me a number of correspondences from the department, a number of reports from the department, a number of letters often times from the field, so I could get a sense for how that particular item had evolved.

So, yes, it is my responsibility to draft the letter, but my drafting of these letters comes from a wide array of material that may come from the department. It may come from teachers in the field. It may come from parents in the field. If we were to correspond what was in my letter with something that may be pre-existing in department material, or in school division material, that is very possible. But the letters themselves, as they are drafted and written, are mine alone in terms of responsibility. There is not a process where I draft a letter, then it goes to the department for redrafting, then it comes back for me for redrafting and that sort of structure. Really, it is myself sitting down with material on kind of a semiregular basis. I am so busy that oftentimes I cannot do it as regularly as I would like. Quite frankly, I would like to do it more regularly, but I cannot.

They are drafted by myself, often in conjunction with memos around me, or sometimes whoever even happens to be in the office. If the deputy is in the room, or some of my staff, I will bounce ideas off them and get ideas presented back to me, or perspectives put back to me.

The process really is one that something sits on my desk and, with a loose-leaf pad beside me, I will draft a letter over the course of days, sometimes weeks, and get some feedback from those around me in the office, as I said, whether

it be the deputy or staff or colleagues. The genesis of the letters is mine and the content is mine, in as much as it comes out of my pen but it is shaped by a wider array of things. There is not a process, other than as I have articulated, and it is a philosophy that stems from my own personal belief of what it is to be a publicly elected official and being publicly accountable and publicly responsive in a two-way dialogue with the field.

This is not something that is new to me since being an MLA. It is something that was new to me since first being elected as a city councillor back in the early '90s in Brandon. It is a philosophical belief that we should be engaged in a regular way with the field.

Mrs. Smith: So the minister was engaged in writing letters to teachers from the minister's office, and it went through Manitoba Education and Training, those not government agency, and was mailed out to teachers to their personal homes. Is that correct?

Mr. Caldwell: I am accepting the member's point that they were generated by myself, as Minister of Education, engaging educators throughout Manitoba. I think that is something we should all do in our elected lives as publicly elected officials, being gauged with those who we serve on; being clear about what our agendas are, and seeking advice and comment on agenda items, so that the best advice from the field—in this case from teachers—is reflected in our deliberations around policy issues. So yes.

* (16:00)

Mrs. Smith: Mr. Chair, could the minister indicate how many mailings have been done, and the cost associated with each mailing through the Department of Education? Because from his answers, his rather lengthy answers, it seems to me what I have heard, if I can sift through it, is he has done it through Manitoba Education, Training and Youth, with advice from anybody who happens to drop in to his office. But actually, the letters were drafted by the Minister of Education and the mailings were sent out through what department? Through Manitoba Education and Training, through the minister's personal home, or through the government agency—A, B or C?

Mr. Caldwell: These were letters to the field, from the Minister of Education and Training, discussing policy items that were and are in many cases on the desk of the Minister of Education and Training, seeking to inform and advise teachers or educators on educational policy issues of the day in Education and Training and encouraging and seeking a two-way dialogue. In fact, we have got a very, very positive experience with the field in our various methods of seeking consultation and dialogue and advising and informing the field of policy initiatives underway and those being contemplated. These are, I think, very useful and constructive and positive means of communicating with the field as Minister of Education on matters educational, and they are very much vehicles for communicating and dialoguing with the field. They are handled, managed and advanced through my office.

Mrs. Smith: Could the minister indicate whether these letters have been sent throughout the province? My previous question was not yet answered. I asked, Mr. Chair, how many mailings to teachers had been done and the cost of each mailing, and so we could extend that over to where these letters have been sent throughout the province.

Mr. Caldwell: Well, there are letters to teachers pretty much every day. Certainly there are a number of letters each and every day to trustees, teachers. We have communicated with the field, and that is not just teachers, although the member is concentrating on teachers. There have been letters to the field in terms of trustees, in terms of teachers, in terms of superintendents, parents, so there have been a number of letters to the field, and it is a two-way correspondence. It is something that is very important in disseminating information and providing for opportunities for parents, teachers, trustees, superintendents and so forth to engage us in the minister's office. But they are letters that come from the minister's office. Chances are, we do have a difference in philosophy perhaps is being expressed in this particular discussion, but I think that the investment for a 45-cent stamp to provide information—

An Honourable Member: 47 cents.

Mr. Caldwell: 47 cents? My colleagues corrected me, 47-cent stamps now. You know, for a three- or four-page letter to go out with a 47-cent stamp in terms of communicating with parents, teachers, trustees and so forth, I think is a very, very good investment. Far less expensive, I daresay, than printing up pamphlets or brochures in a party propaganda political sort of way, which I am loath to enter into. But I do believe that it is important to communicate on a regular basis with the field. I suppose—I am just looking at Doctor Farthing here. He is writing madly to my left, although it is not on this issue. *[interjection]* London School of Economics. Doctor Farthing has been very privileged to work with Harvard grads, Oxford grads and LSE grads.

At any rate, the whole matter of communicating and consulting with parents, teachers, trustees and, as I said earlier, the broader public, labour, business and so forth is something that I believe in very personally and strongly. I do believe that the use of the post and personal letters to deal with these issues is a very—I hesitate to use the phrase "warm and fuzzy," but it really is. I think there is an engagement that is involved when there are letters or telephone conversations that does not present itself easily when people have brochures or pamphlets and so forth.

So, again, it is my personal style. I think and have felt ever since being first elected many years ago that engagement of this nature, engagement of a personal nature, and engagement that is thus transmitted, is the best way to put forth in a meaningful way the position or agenda items or policy deliberations that I am having, whether it was as a city councillor or now as a minister of the Crown.

That is a personal philosophical belief, but that is really where it stems from.

Mrs. Smith: Mr. Chair, I request that the minister just stick to answering the questions. I do not need to hear all this philosophy on this side of the House. The answers still are not forthcoming about how many mailings have been done to teachers and the cost for each mailing.

I want, Mr. Chair, to give you some background. I have had letters, documented

letters, from teachers who have never communicated with this Minister of Education and who have had letters coming to their personal places of residence. They are concerned that the minister has their addresses. They are concerned that the lack of privacy—and, quite frankly, some of these teachers have said it is a lot of political propaganda, sort of saying look what I have done; I am the good guy. Some of these teachers have said they are worried that the minister has their personal addresses where he can send a personal letter to their homes.

I would ask that the people involved, and, Mr. Chair, that you would give me the courtesy of listening to my question because this is very important. I am asking on behalf of many teachers who have contacted me and actually have said that they have received personal letters to their places of residence outlining the minister's philosophical beliefs and what all his department is doing.

Mr. Gregory Dewar, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Their concern is this: Where did the minister—*[interjection]* I am fully aware that you may be a little uncomfortable with some of these questions, we can do it in Estimates or we can do it in Concurrence. I need some answers because I have promised these teachers that I would get these answers.

My question to the minister, Mr. Chair, is: Could the minister indicate from which database the names were taken? Because the teachers said, categorically, they have never visited his Web site. They have never communicated with him in any way, shape or form. But they are very concerned that their right to a private life and privacy has been violated, because they have received letters to their homes. Not to their schools, to their homes. That is why these questions are being asked of the minister today.

I had no answers for them. Now, I have heard in great detail about the minister's philosophy. All I am asking are some very clear-cut questions. I have very few answers in this Estimates time. So could the minister please answer the questions on how many mailings have been done to teachers, the costs associated

with each mailing, and whether these letters have been sent out? I am talking about teachers, Mr. Acting Chair, not his time on city council in Brandon, not about parents, not about trustees. I am talking specifically about teachers.

Teachers want to know where this Minister of Education got their names to send them personal letters to their personal homes. That is my question. Could the minister indicate from which database the names were taken, in view of the fact that I have documentation these teachers never contacted the minister, never visited his Web site, never did anything concerning the minister, but they received personal letters from him?

* (16:10)

Mr. Caldwell: Four score and ten years ago it was 1910. In 1910, we did not have Web sites and we did not have the ability for mass communication like we do today. The post was used to communicate primarily, although I suppose there were telephones in some sources. In terms of the letters that have gone out to the field, which I make no apologies for to the Member for Fort Garry, I believe it is very important that we engage the public, we engage teachers, we engage trustees, we engage superintendents, we engage school business officials, we engage children, we engage labour leaders, business leaders, municipal officials, reeves and mayors throughout the province on issues of education. As I said, I make no apologies for doing that. In fact I think it is high time that the public was engaged in a meaningful way on educational issues in this province.

Mr. Tom Nevakshonoff, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

I know that in the last 18 months, I have been in over a 100 schools around the province, in many divisional offices, in home-schooling contexts, in folks' homes, in independent schools, and it has been quite astounding to me, as a rookie in this Chamber, having been here only 19 months, how rare of an occurrence it has been for the Minister of Education to be in schools, in board offices, in home schools, in independent schools, and, in fact, in the divisional offices and municipal offices around

this province. I think it is quite shocking, frankly, how little engagement the ministers of Education that preceded me had with the field.

Again, this comes back to a philosophical difference, I suppose. I believe in making policy and formulating policy based upon the best advice of the teachers and trustees throughout the public school system, where the philosophy previously seemed to be the best advice or the best policy could be made cloistered in Room 168 of the Legislative Building. That is not my style, it is not my intent, and it will not be in the future. I will be engaged as long as I am a member of this Legislature in a very active and meaningful way with the public that places confidence in us to elect us as public officials to serve the best interests of the people in the province of Manitoba.

These are very, very important philosophical differences. One of openness and one of closedness, one of inclusivity, one of exclusivity, one of authority, and one of, I suppose, engagement in a meaningful sense with those who are active in our schools and active in our communities across the province.

With regard to the letters that have been sent out, the member may be pleased to know, or she may not be pleased to know, the teacher mailings that have come out of my office, and I have checked this with staff since this debate began, or this discussion began, at Estimates, that the mailings are not a blanket mailing that go to every teacher in the province. They are not a list generated from the Department of Education and Training, but they are comprised of teachers from various sources, including MLAs' support lists, caucus lists, people who have identified themselves as teachers to us, and those interested in education generally.

So the sources for the names that have been distributed, or the names that have received letters, perhaps the one or two teachers or however many the member wishes to represent, have been contacting her on this matter. It may be that they have forgotten that somewhere along the line they did make a representation or expressed an interest in keeping track of what the agenda items are, but the letters have been sent to people who have identified themselves as

teachers who are interested in education. They wanted to keep updated in terms of what the education agenda was for the Government.

Certainly, if the teachers that the member is talking to wish not to be communicated to, in both the Government's agenda and wish not to be engaged in providing the Government with advice on what they see as important to the public education system, I will certainly be disappointed but happy to oblige their desire to not receive letters from me. That is not a problem from where I sit. I think that most teachers, if not all, wish to be engaged in a meaningful way with the formulation of policy; wish to give the minister advice on educational issues on a regular basis; wish to be part of a process that is striving to rebuild educational excellence in this province; and wish to be part of a process that continues to engage in a meaningful way, seek advice in a meaningful way and seek information and guidance on best practices, in a meaningful way, for the classrooms of the province of Manitoba.

Again, it comes back to, I suppose, a philosophical difference, an approach. My approach is one that seeks to engage people, and the approach that was in Room 168 previous to this Government being elected to office has been articulated to me as somewhat different than that.

Mrs. Smith: So, basically, in this almost three-quarters-of-an-hour dialogue, we found out that the minister wrote the letters to the teachers. It went through Manitoba Education, Training and Youth personnel. It was mailed out through Manitoba Education and Training Department to teachers' individual homes, and the minister has stated that teachers' names were extracted from MLAs, from different lists, from interested teachers. The fact that teachers have said that mailings had arrived at their homes, and they do not know how the minister got their personal home addresses—perhaps the teachers, according to this minister, have forgotten that they contacted him on some issue.

I would have to ask a further question: What was the database, and what was the cost of the mailings, and how many mailings went out across this province, from the minister's personal letters only to teachers?

Mr. Caldwell: There is obviously a sensitivity to this matter, and I appreciate the sensitivity, as I said, having been in over 100 schools and being around the province meeting with trustees and teachers about the fact that this has not been happening. There have not been school visits of this nature and engagement of this nature in many younger teachers' entire career, and for older teachers, more experienced teachers, it has been a rarity, certainly not something that has happened under the administration of the last government.

The letters that have gone to teachers in the last 19 months—there have been two, as I recall, last fall and winter. They are designed to engage teachers on matters educational in the public education system, to advise teachers of the issues of the day, what is before Government and before the department in terms of our deliberations, and to seek advice on those matters as articulated, and in fact, on any, any matter of interest to teachers and educators. I think that is a very, very positive and constructive endeavour to engage the field.

With regard to the cost of mailing, and I am not sure how many letters go out. I think it is in the range of 2000 to 3000. We can extrapolate 47 cents per letter, and I do not know if somebody has got a calculator here, but we can extrapolate that number and that would give us a reasonable—everybody is reaching for their calculators. So 47 cents times 3000, and that will give us a ballpark number for the cost of mailing letters: \$1,410.

So, if there are educators out there who wish not to be communicated with, perhaps I could ask the member for their names, and we will delete them from the list. That would be very easy.

* (16:20)

Mrs. Smith: To just reiterate, there are teachers who resent political letters coming to their homes from the minister, and have suggested that I request of the minister during Estimates that he send them to the schools, because those letters will reach all teachers through the schools and can be done through the teachers' union

organization in the schools, rather than arriving in their personal mail at home.

I still do not have an answer from the minister, Mr. Chair, about what database he is using or who is providing these personal mailing addresses. So I do not have an answer to go back to some of these teachers. But the suggestion from the teachers, the teachers involved here, and there is quite a number of them, they appreciate the fact that he would like to dialogue, but they do not like political letters coming right to their door, to their personal homes, and have said if the minister sends these letters to all schools, every teacher will get them. That is a way to reach every teacher in the province without offending the privacy of the teachers' homes.

So I am making that request on behalf of a number of teachers whose names I will not, cannot give to the minister without their permission. But I am making the minister aware today that there are a big number of teachers who like to dialogue with the minister but would like to do it through their schools, not their personal home addresses. They do feel that the minister has circumvented their right to privacy on several occasions, in fact on more than several occasions. I have elected not to bring this up in Question Period; I have elected to bring it up here in Estimates.

I know the minister means well, and I am sure it is a heavy-duty job that he has to dialogue, and I appreciate his motivation to dialogue. Teachers feel that their workplace, their school is where the minister should be dialoguing, not their personal homes. There are some teachers who have said quite categorically that they will bring this up publicly if this continues, and it is up to them to do that. I have been the messenger and I have brought it here to Estimates today.

Now, could the minister indicate whether there will be future mailings and whether the costs associated with these mailings have been provided for in this year's Estimates, and where are these dollars located in Estimates?

Mr. Caldwell: In terms of Estimates and where dollars are allocated for mailing, there is a line

item or more than one line item under Communications, so postage is covered off under Communications for mailing.

I do appreciate the member's comments, and certainly, from the discussion here today, detect a high degree of sensitivity on this matter. I know that I, too, have been the recipient of a number of complaints directed toward the Member for Fort Garry (Mrs. Smith) for similar notes going or faxes or e-mails going to schools around the province on various issues in my tenure here. I mean, that is just part of the business that we are in, I suppose, is dealing with people not appreciating specific tactics in terms of communicating with people.

I will certainly take under advisement the member's comments about sending letters to school addresses as opposed to home addresses. In fact, that would please me because I think I would be able to hit all 10 000-odd teachers in the province as opposed to the 3000-odd people who have identified themselves as teachers interested in education in the province which comprises the current lists. So I will take that under advisement, and thank the member for her comments.

Mr. Glen Cummings (Ste. Rose): I caught the last part of the exchange that just occurred around these mailings, and the minister is right. There can be a certain amount of unease and discomfort about these types of communications. I have been around long enough to know that his colleagues in opposition were always very curious about who paid the cost of the mailing and whether or not it classified as government mailing or whether it was party mailing or whether it was an MLA mailing. Would the minister care to enlighten us on those issues?

Mr. Caldwell: I appreciate that. As somebody that was not in this building previous to 19 months ago and did not have the privilege of seeing most of my colleagues in opposition like the member did, and I am thankful for that fact. I appreciate the member's comments. I think that there has been some good discussion around this particular issue and how we approach the matter of communicating with the field. This has enlightened me to something that I did not understand or realize to be an issue of concern in

this House. So the nature of the letters though, I have to be I think clear on this, are not political in nature. Believe me, if you have seen me write a political letter it would not be the kind of letter that went out citing the different agendas that were before us right now. But I do appreciate the member's comments and appreciate the concern that has been expressed here, both in terms of where a letter should be addressed to and the sensitivity about content.

But these letters, and the two that went out, are very clearly around a number of agenda items that we are engaged with as a government in both making public and seeking public advice on. In this regard it is teachers' advice specifically. But I think I have learned something here in the last, I guess, hour on this matter and will take under advisement the comments from the Member for Fort Garry (Mrs. Smith).

Mr. Cummings: I take it from the minister's answers then that he acknowledges that these have gone out as ministerial and departmental mailing. I wonder if he would confirm that.

Mr. Caldwell: Yes, that is right. Previous to the Member for Ste. Rose coming in, we had had a discussion about the philosophy that I brought with me to the Department of Education and Training—to the minister's office; that I had developed over the course of my three terms as a city councillor in Brandon. That philosophically I believe very strongly in having an open office and engaging in an ongoing dialogue with the field. Whether it is with my constituents as a city councillor, I guess more specifically in this case my constituents as the Minister of Education and teachers.

So these are letters that are coming from the minister, and they are letters that are seeking to clarify the agenda items or the policy issues that are current on my desk, and to seek advice on how we should proceed with those areas.

Mr. Cummings: Well, given what we have just been discussing and the sensitivity of contents and the misuse of mailing lists and so on, when this is seen to be going to a private address, then the minister must have access to a list that has the private addresses of professionals working in the field, as he likes to describe them. They are

professionals working in the public school system. You can call that the field if you like. I think of the field as somewhere else. It is where I was yesterday for a little while before I headed in here. I think the minister could save himself a lot of grief if he would be forthcoming about how he acquired that list.

* (16:30)

Mr. Caldwell: We did have an opportunity, Mr. Chair, to discuss this about an hour ago as well. The mailing list for these particular letters is derived from various sources, primarily through my colleagues in the caucus, as people who have identified themselves as teachers and are interested in education. That is really where the list comes from.

Mr. Cummings: Well, is the minister saying that he can get a sweeping list to cover the teachers across the province by the knowledge of his elected colleagues, which is more than half of the elected members? But it probably does not cover much more than a small majority of the teachers themselves, given the demographics. Well, it would be a majority of the teachers, but it certainly would not be a comprehensive list. Unless the minister has a better answer than that, then the assumption is left hanging they have access to a union list or a Department of Education list. As I said before, he can save himself a lot of grief if he clears the air on this.

Mr. Caldwell: Well, actually in terms of this mailing list, there are over 10 000 teachers in the province of Manitoba, and I know the Member for Ste. Rose suggested that maybe there is over half. We are only sending out about 3000 letters so it is substantially less than even a third, and maybe a quarter of the teachers in the province.

They are indeed people who have identified themselves as teachers to my colleagues and to myself, and I know who have identified themselves as teachers who are interested in education. Mr. Chairperson, the member may be interested in that I made the point when we drafted the first letter. When I engaged in putting together the first letter, I made an inquiry personally that I would like to send this to all the teachers. My staff warned me off, for the very point that the member makes, that, no, that is not

kosher. We will not and ought not to for the reasons of, I suppose, ethical conduct, avail ourselves of a list from the department. These are people who have identified themselves as teachers to my colleagues, some 3000 teachers out of the 10 000 or 11 000 or 12 000 that are in the province, as being interested in educational issues.

The Member for Fort Garry (Mrs. Smith) has suggested, and I have no reason to disbelieve her, that there are some who have approached her that do not wish to have these letters. How their names came to my colleagues, it may have come through their colleagues or what have you, but I think that the point that the Member for Fort Garry made about the sensitivity around home addresses is something that I think I have to take under advisement. She may be right, and the member from Ste. Rose by extension, that a better way to approach this sort of dialogue is with the school address. That does assist those who feel uneasy about the situation feel easier about it.

Those who have been recipients of these letters are far fewer than 50 percent of the teaching population in the province. They have been identified by my colleagues as teachers who are interested in matters educational, so that is where the mailings have gone to.

Mr. Cummings: Well, as we are reminded in the House consistently, honourable members are that until they prove otherwise and accept the minister's statement. Would he agree then, if he had access to a list of teachers through the department, that it would be unethical to use those lists for direct communication from the minister's office?

Mr. Caldwell: As I mentioned, when I put together the first letter, that was my initial idea. As a city councillor previously—I know that the Member for Fort Garry (Mrs. Smith) does not like hearing this too much because we have gone on about it, but it is something that I practised as a city councillor in terms of personal communications with my constituents. It is something that philosophically I think is important in terms of being engaged as a public official with the public.

When the first letter was ready to go, my initial feeling was to send them to all teachers in the province and made the request of staff—and I am not sure which staff—that this is what I wanted to do. The staff member said, no, I do not think this would be a very good idea. I said, well, I am trying to engage the field. The response was, well, for a technical issue, perhaps that would be appropriate; specifically a technical issue, or something that you were seeking direct advice on a specific issue. But not a broader agenda letter such as of this nature, that was inappropriate or could be deemed inappropriate. I see now, with Estimates, that it certainly would have been deemed inappropriate, so I am glad that I did get that advice, but my initial inclination was to send a very broad letter to all practising teachers in the province.

I would agree with the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings) that, in light of some of the concerns that were raised in Estimates today, indeed that would be a wrong-headed thing to do.

Mr. Cummings: I did not ask my colleague, so I seek the guidance of the Chair and the minister. I have another line of question. I would like to ask about a teachers' college of licensing, if the minister would be agreeable to answering in that area.

Mr. Caldwell: Sure, I would be pleased to discuss that. I had the opportunity to visit the Ontario teachers college, Ontario College of Teachers, during the last Canadian ministers of Education meeting in Toronto. I think it was in February. I would be pleased to discuss that because it is something that I think both sides of the House are likely interested in having a discussion about.

Mr. Cummings: That is precisely why I would be interested in the minister's reaction. It has always struck me—and without a lot of, I would answer on my own part, detailed discussion with practising professionals, but I do have a few in my family that I can have discussions with informally as well as acquaintances in the profession. I would be interested to know—the minister has already indicated that he has had an opportunity to have some discussions with other jurisdictions. But interested in the minister's

view of the appropriateness of separation of the professional licensing side of teachers' professional activities, and putting some independence in the hands of those very professionals. We have lots of examples where we have done it, some good, some bad, I suppose, but certainly the medical profession is an example. Those who have had trouble with the licensing issue would say it is not a great example, but the one thing that I always feel is important is that we have to recognize the professionalism of the teachers who are employed in the province.

I would be interested to know if the minister has taken this beyond some superficial research or if he has sought, or is seeking, any input from the professionals or within his department. I mean, certainly I would understand that he might want to review this with those who are his advisors in the department before he began to seek public input. But either one of those situations, or has he had any communication with the Teachers' Society?

* (16:40)

Mr. Caldwell: Mr. Chair, from my own perspective, this was raised with me as the minister in terms of certification broadly, the global issue of certification and regulation in the profession and so forth, by the Manitoba Teachers' Society on an informal basis during a meeting, well, shortly after being appointed minister. As the member may appreciate, it certainly was not at the top of my agenda in the two weeks or two months after being appointed the minister. I was still trying to find my way to the bathroom around here. It was raised with me, though—*[interjection]* Yeah, I found it now. But it was raised with me by the Teachers' Society in a global sense a couple of months after being appointed minister.

I did apprise myself over the months following that, maybe my first year in office, of the former BTEC in the province of Manitoba, the Board of Teacher Education and Certification, as well as having discussions with some of the departmental staff in the certification branch about their current practices. Mr. Chair, my colleague in the Legislature, the MLA for Riel (Ms. Asper), also has an interest in this particular matter, so she has discussed it with me

a few times since in terms of the whole global, again, issue of certification and separation and independence from the Legislature and professional standards in kind of a holistic manner. So it is something that has been raised with me on a number of fronts.

I did have occasion, as I mentioned, to familiarize myself a little more thoroughly with the Ontario College of Teachers when I was in Toronto in February and, in fact, spent a day at the Ontario College meeting with various staff officers, as well as the director, to get a holistic view of their operation and procedures and indeed their institution. I actually had quite a pleasurable visit, inasmuch as my own Bachelor of Education is from Queen's University in Kingston. They called me up on the computer in 30 seconds and had my whole record from Manitoba, as well as my record in Ontario, in terms of certifications and credentials and current standing and so forth. So I was quite impressed at their database and the efficiency by which they could monitor all teachers in the province in terms of their own professional development and employment history and so forth.

I am also interested in visiting, if and when the occasion arises, the British Columbia college and see how their operation functions vis-à-vis the Ontario example. I am just advised, as well, that last week the deputy chaired a meeting involving the faculties of education, the Manitoba Teachers' Society and the Manitoba Association of School Trustees, where this issue was raised during the course of their meeting.

So it is an issue in a global sense that is under discussion. I know that the previous government had somewhat of an interest in this matter as well. I think that philosophically—and we have talked a lot about philosophy here today, but, philosophically, I think that there is a large measure of positive activity that can be handled around certification issues by a professional body, a governing body. I think that there is a public interest in maintaining a fairly strong degree of engagement from the Department of Education. That is certainly the case in Ontario, where the minister makes the majority of the appointments. But from within the teaching profession and other agencies like faculties and

so forth. I am curious to see how the college works in British Columbia, how it functions in British Columbia, because I understand it is somewhat different.

I think the issue is something that is fairly alive in the field, although there are so many other issues in education right now that it is one of many. But it is something that has caught my attention. It has been raised with me. I have tried to familiarize myself with how it functions in Ontario, and what has been the record in Manitoba over the years, because it has changed and evolved in Manitoba as well. I would be interested in receiving the views of members opposite in this regard, too, because I think it is something that does have some merit in exploring. Certainly, there are strong advocates for a college in Manitoba, but there are also strong advocates for maintaining the status quo. I think the main thing is, from all our perspectives, is what is going to serve kids in the profession best and that is certainly what I am interested in. If the member has some suggestions or insights, I would be interested in hearing them, too.

Mr. Cummings: This is my turn to ask questions. The minister is then saying he has only had a superficial discussion relative to this topic. That is fair. I just wondered, other than the meeting that he referenced a moment ago, if there had been any specific meetings, without revealing state secrets, if there are any specific meetings with the various organizations that would have an input in this, that they would have put this on the agenda as an item for discussion?

Mr. Caldwell: No, there have not been any specific meetings on this matter but it has been raised from time to time. As I mentioned, a couple of months after I was elected—and I do not even know who from MTS, but it was at an MTS meeting—had raised it with me. But we are certainly open to having a broader discussion on this.

Mr. Cummings: I have another interest, and I do not think this qualifies as jumping around too much. I just asked the stage that you are going through in the Estimates books.

Would the minister entertain some questions on boundary review if he has the appropriate

staff with him? I am more interested in what his direction is in this respect. I obviously have had some association for a number of years with rural school divisions. I represent three school divisions in part and almost in totality in one case that are struggling, I think, to deal with this issue. It is not a new one. Obviously there was the Norrie report under our administration and, for the record, it was a pretty far-reaching report. It was not implemented because there were some hooks in there and some problems associated with that type of reorganization.

But, nevertheless, I think the public feels they are at the edge of a bit of an abyss out there until the minister provides some further comment about his desire to see amalgamation proceed. My colleague has certainly raised this with the minister on a number of occasions, but I have never had the opportunity or taken the opportunity to get into the debate. My concern comes not only from a taxpayer but also from having been a trustee, where I saw the problems associated with rural organization and the problems associated with resources in resourcing some of our rural school divisions. Transportation enters into it, distance and all of those things, but the minister has been, I think, somewhat reluctant lately to venture into this area. His first comment, as I recall, upon taking office, was, and I am paraphrasing, but the impression left was: Stand back while I get a swing at this sucker, and it is going to happen.

I am obviously paraphrasing, but that was at least, in my view, the impression that was given out there. That has been somewhat modified. I understand the last initiative was, well, show me what you are doing on a voluntary basis to achieve this. I have some mixed reaction just within my area on that. I wonder if the minister has got enough feedback from that initiative to comment on what he heard.

* (16:50)

Mr. Caldwell: The feedback is still coming in, but I am prepared to have a discussion about it here if you would like. I can perhaps clarify or obfuscate as the case may be on the issue. I am willing to have a discussion about this particular issue. It is something that has engaged me since being appointed as minister. As a municipal councillor in Brandon, I was involved in offering

the secondment of Earl Backman, the city manager in Brandon, for the use of Mr. Norrie during the Norrie commission hearings. I do have some passing acquaintance with the process that was undertaken by the former government with the Norrie report. Certainly I have been up to my eyeballs in this one since October of '99. I am willing to have a discussion. Anything I can do to enlighten or add to the discussion here today I am willing to do.

Mr. Cummings: Not just from my local school boards, but I have heard the full range of comment, off the record, I suppose, in some cases, from trustees and administrators. But some of it on the record, some of it probably published. The comments generally were, well, we are actively searching what a good fit is with some of our neighbours. But the end result is that there is divergence in mill rate, very obviously. That is an issue that I will want to get some comment from the minister on, but I am more interested to begin with in what he would consider an acceptable level of achievement in terms of amalgamation. Let us talk rural more than urban for a minute if he would.

Mr. Caldwell: Well, I do not have a fixed number in my head. The process that I embarked upon, and maybe I can backtrack up to October '99, when I was appointed minister, because that does contextualize it for the member and for the public record through the Estimates process.

An Honourable Member: You make me nervous when you look at your watch.

Mr. Caldwell: Yes. I know. I only have an hour. When I assumed the minister's office in October '99, the first thing I did after swallowing hard and opening the door was to call all the branches to provide me with briefing notes on what was before them, what was on their plate, and then meet with the various directors once they advised me of what was on their plate.

As the member knows there is quite a range of branches in Education and Training, and at that time also it was post-secondary and the community colleges as well. So it was quite a large portfolio.

It took me quite a while frankly to get through the briefing material, and longer yet to

understand it. In fact, you know, there is a case to be made I am still grappling with the understanding of it in many instances. As I said earlier, every day is a learning experience for me, as the Minister of Education, which somehow seems only appropriate

One of the items that came to my attention was the Norrie report. In fact one of the first press questions to me was what was I going to do with the Norrie report? Which I suppose is not surprising, given the attention that was paid to the Norrie report in the mid-'90s. My response to the interviewer, I think it was the *Free Press* that asked me the question, was that I was going to dust off the report and have a look at all the different areas under my watch now as Minister of Education. Dusting off the report I think generated a news story the next day that the Norrie report is dusted off, and away we go, which likely is reflected in the Member for St. Rose's (Mr. Cummings) comment that I was going to take a whack at it.

It surprised me, in fact, the response to that, because very shortly thereafter there followed, I believe, an editorial in the *Free Press* about go to 'em and get at it. So I got a quick appreciation for the pitfalls and pratfalls of boundary amalgamation, based upon that initial response, because it was quite widely reported and other media picked it up from the *Free Press*. It was reported in the various regions of Manitoba that the Norrie report was on the agenda again, when all I said was that everything that was before me was going to be reviewed, which I think is appropriate. It is a new government coming into office after replacing a government that had been in office for 11 or 12 years.

At any rate, I did take a couple of weeks off and on to read the Norrie report. Scintillating reading I might add. I did read the report and made myself familiar with some, well, all of the content of the report, but some of the specific comments around the challenges and opportunities presented by division amalgamation.

Now, obviously, the reporting of my dusting off the report got a lot of school divisions interested. So, in short order, a central part of my discussions with school divisions around the province, Mr. Chair, was the Norrie report and

amalgamation, and I assured school trustees that dusting off the report and taking a look at it did not mean that we were going to move to the recommendations of the report, which I believe are 22 divisions around the province, if my memory serves me accurately. It was 20-odd divisions, but we were interested, as the previous administration was interested, as a Government as well, in having some thoughtful discussion and analysis of what would constitute appropriate school boundaries in Manitoba today.

The last modernization of boundaries occurred in the late '50s, early '60s.

An Honourable Member: '58.

* (17:00)

Mr. Caldwell: In 1958, the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) clarifies, and I appreciate that, which was a couple of years before I was born. There is quite a long period of time when boundaries in the province of Manitoba for school divisions have laid fallow. So, I, in discussion with my colleagues in the various school divisions around the province, my colleagues who are trustees and my colleagues in the Legislature in my caucus, we had a discussion around, well, how should we proceed on this matter that was analyzed quite extensively around the province in the mid-'90s with Mr. Norrie and his commission, and with the expectation in the province generated from that time period that government was going to look at this issue in a pretty thorough and serious matter, with a view to having some modernization of boundaries based upon objective criteria such as enrolment patterns, assessment base, program offerings and so forth.

I had the opportunity for the first six months or seven months in office to have a number of discussions with school trustees around the matter of the Norrie report specifically and more broadly school division modernization. During the course of those deliberations with trustees, I acquired the belief that there was a lot of knowledge out there and the way to proceed on this matter was to engage, in a kind of a meaningful way, but also a structured way and a serious way, deliberations at the regional level amongst trustees as to what would be

appropriate or inappropriate in the regions of the province around school boundary modernization.

I, subsequently to that, had a number of meetings with the Manitoba Association of School Trustees, none of which was solely focussed on this issue, but most of which had this issue as one of the agenda items that we spoke to. Their advice to me, and I took it, was to put in a structured letter to trustees around the province, my desire to engage them in seeking their best advice as to what would be appropriate in the regions of the province to set a template so that there would be some consistency of reporting back to the Government on this matter, and to set a deadline for responses back from the field. I took that advice from the school trustees. In fact, they assisted me in developing the template and the content of the letter so that there would not be undue alarm raised in the field, and that there would be an understanding that this was a good faith exercise.

The responses that have come back from the field have been, in the main, quite thorough. We have not got them all back yet. I know that April 21 was the deadline, and I think on April 22 I was phoned by the press to comment on it. Of course, there is substantial volume involved in this exercise. There are a lot of things to consider, and a lot of implications for any movement, anywhere in the province frankly. I have likely 70 percent back to date. I made the joke, you know, I was a high school student, as all of us were here at one time, I assume, and I was not always on time with my term papers, and I do not expect school divisions to always be on time with deadlines that are submitted by me. We all have busy lives and are engaged. A number of divisions have asked me for extensions so that they can be clear on the advice that they give back without guessing. I have granted those extensions. Other divisions have asked for some more information because of gaps in the template and so forth because we want to be consistent in analyzing the information that comes back.

But over the course of the next, I would suggest, three or four months, we will be analyzing the material that has come back from the 50-odd divisions around the province and entering into discussions with those divisions

that see some benefits and proceed from there. I know that we do have a number of divisions that are actively pursuing amalgamations now as a result of this current round of discussion.

I know that the members opposite saw through a couple of the amalgamations during their tenure as well. The Prairie Spirit School Division, which is the amalgamation of the former Tiger Hills and Pembina Valley which has been a very successful exercise for those communities in that particular part of the province. In fact, I have spent probably more time in Prairie Spirit School Division since I have been minister, visiting schools and discussing issues with trustees.

Certainly rural Manitoba is the division that I have spent the most time in. I quite enjoy going out to Prairie Spirit because they have been re-energized by that process. In fact, the schools in Pilot Mound and Crystal City, this is my old stomping grounds being a southwest boy myself, and I remember hockey games and baseball games out there where you could barely get through the second period without a bench-clearing brawl between Crystal City and Pilot Mound. Now, of course, we have two very, very good schools in the same school division with two vibrant schools in both of those communities when, previous to amalgamation, both of the schools in both those communities were in some distress.

So it has been a very successful and energizing experience in Prairie Spirit, and I credit the members opposite for facilitating that process in Tiger Hills and Pembina Valley. Then in the city here, of course, we had the amalgamation between Norwood and St. Boniface during that time. So there are successful models, both rural and urban, Winnipeg and southern Manitoba, that have taken place over the last few years. There are a number underway now along the same tack, and as I said, I am expecting to get the remainder of the reports back from the school divisions in the days and weeks to come.

Mr. Cummings: That was a pretty good dissertation, about 14-and-a-half minutes. Perhaps the minister could give me a more

concise answer. I will try and ask a concise question.

One of the problems that he is going to have, obviously, in achieving amalgamation is the diversity of mill rates and unanimity, if you will, or at least some commonality of services available. I believe the students, including those who wrote the Norrie report, would probably have recognized that there were some serious anomalies that arose from the way the boundaries were developed previously, without naming any of them, because it can be somewhat insulting in some ways depending on how people view their situation. Some it is a matter of geography; other times it is a matter of local economics, and that is driven by geography, as well, of course.

Has the minister made any comment, or is he prepared to make any comment on his willingness to intervene if he sees divisions being orphaned, for lack of a better term, because those with the low common mill rate may not be a very desirable marriage candidate?

Mr. Caldwell: I appreciate that comment, because it is one of the major challenges in this exercise. I know the members opposite realized that when they were reviewing the Norrie report.

I have looked on this particular agenda item that is on my table somewhat as a superintendent would look at his or her school division, and I put myself in the place of superintendent of the school division known as Manitoba. Just as a superintendent in a school division would look at relative disparities within his or her division and distribute resources accordingly, that is the way I have tended to look at Manitoba, in the school division known as Manitoba, or school division articulated as Manitoba.

We do have regions in this province that have a better capacity to raise funds than other areas of this province in terms of the tax base. We have areas of this province, my home community included in Brandon, that have a very, very strong commercial tax base, where other parts of the province do not have a very strong commercial tax base. It does lead to issues of equity and ability to support program

offerings in the schools that that particular division has contained within it.

So I am conscious and alive to the issue, as the Member for St. Rose (Mr. Cummings) puts it, orphaning school divisions. The main driver, I think, for myself, as well as for the previous government, was how to create a quality public education system that provided equity for programming across the province so a child, for example, in Point Douglas would have the same opportunities as a child in River Heights, as a child in Norway House. I think that philosophy still guides the thinking on this particular issue. I think it is a common belief amongst all of us in the House that we want a child in Manitoba, wherever that child lives, to have the same opportunities as any other child in the province.

So I am alive and conscious of the concept of orphaning and the pretty broad ability to raise revenues locally, and I do not want to see a situation arise where structurally one area of the province suffers because of an inability to raise sufficient revenues to support quality programming in the school system. It is a very important matter to me, and it is a very important matter to the school divisions, too, because I have heard exactly what the Member for Ste. Rose has heard, a division that is relatively more wealthy not wanting to take in a division or accommodate a division that is relatively poor.

* (17:10)

I have tried to appeal, and I believe I have been in the press a couple of times—I know I have locally in Brandon; I cannot recall if I have been in Winnipeg. I am making an appeal to the ideals and the humanity of Manitoba's trustees and superintendents to care not only for those children who are within their borders but also those children who fall outside of their borders. I know it is a difficult thing to do because we are all naturally inclined, I guess, to look after our own house first.

So I understand that sentiment, but I think in the public school system we have to look after all Manitoba children first, and I have been appealing to the higher ideals, as it were, of trustees and superintendents in that regard.

Mr. Cummings: Well, historically, that manifests itself in parents of children seeking to

very often transfer their children into the neighbouring school division where the other resources are available. To some people, that is simply not available though, geographically, unless they literally move, which takes us back to the 1950s.

But we are in a different age now. There is also tremendous ability to deliver high quality programs remotely and in other ways. Frankly, and let us be up front about this, YNN, I think the minister unnecessarily shortened the life of what might have been a valuable asset to some of these schools, and, frankly, I will be very specific. The one school division that embraced YNN was in my area. Ste. Rose and the Turtle River School Division had the signature of all but two of their teachers wanting the system because of the other things that they saw with it. I am not expecting the minister to respond. I am not attacking him brutally. I mean, until he is prepared to reverse and invite them back, then I guess he is going to have to bear that cross, but it does have some relevance to what we are talking about.

But the minister did a skilful job of circuiting my last question which is: Will he be prepared to intervene in amalgamations? If we get a rash of amalgamations out there, and there are obviously going to be some orphans, is he prepared to intervene?

Mr. Caldwell: I will answer the last question, I guess, in terms of the intervention. I think it is too soon to ascertain that. I have been pretty steadfast in the year and a half that this has been an issue, since my initial surprise at how much of an issue this was going to be, as I mentioned, after commenting to the *Free Press* reporter that everything was open on my desk and I was dusting off the Norrie report, which, as I said, surprised me in terms of the broad interest in it.

It is too early to really answer definitively because I have been approaching this process in good faith, stressing to school divisions that what I was interested in was their best advice on this matter. Their best advice is articulated through an analysis of enrolment trend patterns, assessment-based realities, program offerings and so forth, shared services that currently exist between divisions which many if not all

divisions have shared services between neighbouring divisions and so forth.

I am still waiting for a number of reports back. I have not begun my assessment of the material that comes back because I do not want to enter into that particular phase of this deliberation until all school divisions have reported. I expect, as I said, that to be completed in terms of getting the material back from the divisions in the days and certainly a few short weeks to come. The deadline, as I mentioned, was April 21. There are still a number to come back. My hope has been throughout, as we have had this process of deliberation and consultation and dialogue, that the advice offered to me would be thorough, it would be presented in good faith, it would be such that it would place the interest of students in the region first, not the students as exists within one division, but rather students that exist more broadly both within specific divisions and those who fall outside divisions, because we do have a wide range of mill rates across the province, as the member has acknowledged.

It is too early to speculate. I am hopeful that the advice that comes back from the field will reflect common sense and will reflect that broad concern for children in the regions, whether they are inside a school division or not. At this point, it is too early to say. As I said, I am hopeful that the best advice that a student-centred, child-centred, will be reflected in what comes forth to school divisions.

Just with regard, just quickly, and I will just touch upon it for a second, the idea of using technology and the tremendous tool of IT, Internet technology and information technology that was not previously available to us as a province. Last year I was happy to put on the record, and I am happy to do it again, that the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach), the former Minister of Education, there are only two of us in the House right now, I believe, and I am not former yet, but my day will come. *[interjection]* I know the members opposite are working on it, but I did want to acknowledge that—*[interjection]* No, nothing is fair here. I know. There are two people who have held this Chair in the House right now. The Member for Russell, who is here with us right now, was

responsible for setting up Campus Manitoba, and that was a tremendous benefit for this province and remains to this day a tremendous benefit to the province in terms of the transmission of educational opportunities to Manitobans. I think that was a very bold initiative at the time and continues to be something that we work to build.

There are many challenges, but I am hopeful that the material that does come in from the field will represent the best interest of kids wherever they may reside in the province.

Mr. Cummings: Is the minister prepared to intervene financially, given what are some of the likely problems that arise? I will context that question because equalization of mill rate is probably the single most questioned problem that school divisions face. Second to that, of course, is—or maybe first, but one that generally gets mentioned second is the ability to deliver programs. He says that he is not yet prepared to intervene in a directive way. Has he made any comment or has he made any overtures to school divisions? I am sure he would have had some communication with school divisions that are saying, you know, if we could see our way clear to get some help to equalize the mill rate here, we would probably move on this? Has he responded or made any pronouncements in that respect, or is he prepared to intervene in that respect?

* (17:20)

Mr. Caldwell: Yes, I guess there are three points with regard to the question from the Member for Ste. Rose. We have continued the previous administration's policy of providing \$50 per student for an amalgamated division. I think that that was a very good initiative of the previous administration. It is something that when I was reviewing this particular file felt was very important to divisions in terms of easing into a process that oftentimes is fraught with unknowns. I think that that was a very useful and positive step that the previous government undertook. It is something that I retained during my own administration of this particular office.

The second point in that regard in terms of finances in this process, we did as a government offer, and it has been taken up by a number of

divisions, \$10,000 per unit under discussion for amalgamation to bring in facilitators or assistants that divisions may need for travel if trustees were meeting together at a certain location or however they wanted to use it in terms of facilitating the amalgamation process. There have been a number of divisions, I do not know how many right offhand as we are sitting here, who have availed themselves of that \$10,000 amount to help to facilitate discussions. Whether it leads to amalgamation or not is not the point, but to facilitate discussions around the issue of amalgamation/shared services. So there has been some further fiscal support for those discussions through that.

In terms of the mill rate, I believe previous legislation provides for three years for harmonization of mill rates on amalgamated divisions. That has also been retained. That was initiated by the previous government as well. Going further than that at this time, though, again, I guess I am in the same position. I do not have all the material in from the school divisions yet. I really do want to remain true to the process that was begun and not begin to really have a thorough analysis in the department until we get 50-odd responses back from divisions, but, as I said, I expect that to be complete very, very shortly.

Mr. Cummings: Does the minister see any ramifications for administration of the schools, should larger divisions arise? Out in the rural areas we have superintendents who are supervising staff numbers that might be equivalent to one of a large school almost, in some respects, but there are distance issues. It comes down to the position of the principals and the school-based management, if you will.

Has the minister had any discussions or prepared to comment on implications? I am sure he has had some questions from people who are concerned about that. It is relevant in the bigger picture, I would say, to the independence of principals, their role and stature growing in the system as opposed to diminishing or even status quo, that it is going to have to grow if you grow the school divisions.

Mr. Caldwell: In the Prairie Spirit case, and I think it is an instructive case for rural Manitoba, because we do have a model and a successful

amalgamation that worked and is seen by the communities involved in the former Tiger Hills and Pembina Valley to have worked.

The amalgamation did allow for the redistribution of resources from administrative offices, i.e., the superintendents and staff that were associated with the superintendents, and provided for the redirection of those resources to various consultant services, and I am just going to get clarification, in the curriculum area and the technology area, and I believe in maybe the clinical service as well in terms of school psychologists and so forth. So the resources that were redirected from superintendent's capacity and superintendent's offices was redirected to provide greater and more broad support to individual schools throughout the system. That is something that did happen, and it is in existence today. Empirically, we can see it working today.

In terms of principals, I do not see any diminishment in the role of principals certainly. You know, how school divisions want to model themselves and manage themselves really is up to the local school board. I know in my own division, in Brandon School Division No. 40, I mean we have just had a recent debate in Brandon, where they required a fourth superintendent. That is their philosophy in terms of managing their particular school division. I suppose there is as many different methods and philosophies of managing divisions as there are divisions, but I do not see any diminishment certainly in any role of principals, and I do not think the Member for Ste. Rose does either. If those positions are enhanced in terms of their administrative capacity, it may well be, but again that is a decision that the school trustees themselves would undertake to make.

Mr. Cummings: Well, just as an example of why I asked that question, why I think that there has to be a lot more thought go to it, it is very possible that school divisions could be roughly the same size as my constituency. It takes about an hour and a half to drive across it. You are going to end up, unless it is managed a lot different, it seems to me, the relationship of principals and superintendents may well have to change.

I have one question, and then I would like to turn it over to my colleague, and that is: Has

there been any discussion about potential impacts on the DSFM?

Mr. Caldwell: There are some discussions underway right now. I am not privy to them in detail because it does involve the Red River School Division, Morris-Macdonald School Division, where there is quite a DSFM contingent in that particular school division, but I know that it is something that has been raised in informal meetings. It is kind of a pity I suppose, for the purposes of the Member for Ste. Rose, that not all the 54 divisions have submitted their material yet, and the department has not had an opportunity to do its analysis of the material until all of the reports come in, because I would be able to probably answer in a more definitive fashion. In fact, I would be able to because I would have some analysis of that material myself, but I know that it is a consideration. I am aware of it in the Red River Morris-Macdonald context, but it is not something that we have had the opportunity to do an assessment of yet, in the absence of all the material coming in, but I am aware of it.

* (17:30)

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): Mr. Chair, I have some questions in a variety of areas, but because my colleague was discussing the issue of the school boundaries is really where I would like to spend a few minutes, with the minister's concurrence.

This is an issue that goes back I guess for some years. I think before the Norrie report, there was a paper prepared which talked about the possibility of amalgamation and how we could proceed with changing school division boundaries, not an easy issue for the minister. Because although you can get all the trustees on side, the minister knows full well that the public debate is the one that could really sort of throw the whole issue off its tracks and become a political issue for the minister, but more importantly causes some real heartache and real anxiety amongst the parents of students and the public at large.

I live in an area of the province where we have a school division that runs—for example, my own particular one, if you look at Pelly Trail,

it runs east and west, a long narrow elongated kind of division that runs, Mr. Chair, into that Rossburn-Oakburn-Elphinstone region. If you look at communities of interest there is really no interest of people in that east end of the division with people in the west end of the division. If you look at routes, the only common route that you could find in that whole area would be Highway 45, whereas the other highways basically run east and west. If you look at commerce, it goes north and south. Commerce goes north and south. Most of our trade to a larger centre would have to go to the minister's own community of Brandon. The north end of our area may go to Dauphin, but that is unlikely. Most of it does go to Brandon.

So if you were to look at the practicality of amalgamation in that area, you would probably have to look at a division that would run quite opposite to the one that is in existence today, or maybe would become more, not rectangular, but perhaps a little more boxy than the present school division is.

The debate in that whole area will of course centre around services to students and being able to provide students with some reasonable time on a bus, rather than having to spend more than the prescribed time right now on a school bus, because of the geography of the area. If you look at the valleys in that area, if you look at the number of crossings that there are in that area, you quickly begin to realize there are challenges there that perhaps a division like Hanover could not imagine, because Hanover is a very compact division and there are no restrictions in terms of crossings and valleys and rivers, et cetera.

So when you consider school boundaries you have to look at all of those issues. I know in the past when we talked about amalgamation that was always the area of concern, how large can you become and is it practical for us to look at, for example, the Norrie report, which suggested a certain number of students per division, which if you were to try to accommodate that in that particular area you would have one huge geographic division, because of the sparse population in that entire region.

This leads me into believing that sooner or later the department or the minister is going to

have to give some guidance to areas, with respect to geographic size, with respect to perhaps expectations of how long a student should practically be able to remain on a school bus back and forth from his home or her home, and issues of mill rate then have to come into play, because in that area or in other areas in Manitoba two divisions may have a very different type of mill rate.

If I can use that division as an example once again, if you look at the assessment of land along the Riding Mountain, usually very poor land, low assessment, and carries a very low taxation ability but yet a very high mill rate. If you look at south of there, for example, the Birdtail River School Division, a much lower mill rate, much richer land, therefore being able to sustain itself in a much better way.

How do you deal with those issues? These are the issues that local divisions then have to come to grasp with because they are huge challenges. You either have to deal with that through equalization, of trying to provide some equity in not only opportunity for students but in terms of finance to these areas, or you have to intervene in some other way. I know that perhaps the minister has not had the opportunity yet to deal with these issues. This is something that may in fact prolong the entire implementation of the amalgamation of school divisions, and I am one who is on-side with having to deal with this issue. I am not one who is going to oppose the amalgamation of school boundaries and school divisions. I think we can effectively do a better job and provide more money, if you like, for programs for students, rather than where we are perhaps providing funds today. The question is how. So I am not asking this question from just a philosophical perspective, I want to know how the minister is going to be providing some guidance to these areas to deal with some of the challenges that they face. I am sorry for the long question.

Mr. Caldwell: I appreciate it, because it has been noted here a couple of times I sometimes go on at length as well.

I appreciate the member asking the questions, because as a former minister he does have a pretty keen understanding of the

conundrum that this presents. Certainly, the points made about direction are valid. I think that there is, in a real sense, or there has been over the last 18 months a sincere desire and a sincere will in this Government to engage in requests from school trustees, their best advice on what can occur and it has been the difficulty—and this is part of the conundrum—the difficulty is in getting people to think outside the box, that overused phrase that we always hear, but it is very true.

We have had discussions, and I have been party to discussions where we have talked about mill rates and the poor cousin next door, and you know, children in my division and ratepayers in my division are well served, and we do not want to take on the child or the mill rate of the division next to us. That has been a real challenge and is a real challenge for individual trustees and individual divisions, and it is a challenge, by extension, to the Government on this particular issue and to myself.

As that discussion has continued, when it is raised with me I have tried to place it in the perspective for trustees and superintendents by saying just as you—the trustees representing the Government and I suppose the superintendent representing me—just as superintendents and trustees try to create equity of programming across their division and provide equality of opportunity to access programming across their division to all students realizing that there are some areas of a division are wealthier than others. In my own community, my colleague in Brandon West has a higher per capital income and a greater tax base residentially than I do in Brandon East. There are poor areas in Brandon School Division and wealthy areas in the Brandon School Division. Similarly, most school divisions have that same conundrum.

Of course, provincially I have that conundrum as the superintendent of the school division known as Manitoba. We have wealthier areas in the province and poorer areas in the province and how to equitably distribute resources across that division that is the size of the province of Manitoba is a major, major challenge with many views as to what is fair in that regard. I hear them every day, and I know the Member for Russell heard them every day

when he was the Minister of Education. So it is a conundrum and it is a large challenge, and trying to keep the discussion in the realm of education and building educational excellence and out of the realm of politics in making these decisions is a major, major concern of mine and a major challenge as we move through this.

I know the member will know that coming from the western part of the province, the *Brandon Sun* wrote an editorial about maybe three weeks ago that was very squarely discussing the political aspect of this, and the *Winnipeg Free Press* has not been shy in this regard either in their editorial commentary.

So there are a great many pressures on this issue from the political side and a great many pressures on this issue from the educational side. The member notes, and I agree with him, the editorials do not have to get elected. He is right. I have been striving to keep this discussion in the realm of the educational and in the realm of what is best for students, and when I have been meeting with trustees and we have strayed a little bit from the children and into the political, have been at some pains to bring it back to the educational discussion and away from the political discussion. I am not naive enough to think that this debate is only going to be played out in the educational realm and the what-is-good-for-programs realm, but I am, I think, clinical enough to try to steer it back to educational issues when the debate does become one of politics.

It is a very large conundrum, as the member notes, and it is one that I have been engaged with very actively over the course of the last 19 months. It is one that I am very sincere in my desire to rely on good faith and to rely on the best advice from trustees and superintendents based upon objective analysis of mill rates, of enrolment trends, of program offerings and what is available from a regional perspective for children in Manitoba.

But there are a great many hurdles and there are a great many challenges in this regard. I do appreciate what the member says with regard to mill rates and trade patterns. In fact, one of the things that I have discussed with trustees over the course of this debate is on trade patterns and

how trade patterns in rural Manitoba, indeed in urban Manitoba for that matter, how trade patterns in the province have changed quite substantively since 1958 when the last major boundary reorganization took place.

During those 40-odd years, we have had a tremendous move away from rail transportation to the automobile and to the highway system throughout the province of Manitoba, as the member referenced in his discussion about Highway 45 and the relative patterns between Russell-Roblin in north-south vis-à-vis east-west.

So I am alive to those issues, but, again, I am constantly at pains to bring the discussion, when it wanders too far into the political realm, back to what is good for the children and what is good for the classroom.

* (17:40)

Mr. Derkach: I thank the minister for that. The issue of boundaries goes beyond just the challenges that we have identified together. For example, a simple thing like location of school division offices all of a sudden becomes a political issue in communities. I think the Prairie Spirit School Division had a very unique—it was almost an anomaly, if you consider the complications that arise in school divisions when you talk about locations of offices, challenges of mill rates, distances of travel and many of the others that are associated with the impacts of a change in school boundaries.

Back in 1991, it was 1990 or 1991, we had prepared a framework that talked about an approach to school division boundary changes. Actually, when I look at that back in that time and I look at the Norrie report, I would have to say I prefer the former to the latter because the approach was quite different. Rather than looking at large school divisions with populations of 15 000 or so students, the approach was quite different in looking at different principles, if you like, of amalgamation. It does not matter at what point in time, I think the minister is going to have to provide some direction with respect to issues as they relate to school division boundaries, and it would be helpful.

The Opposition can disagree with the Government on issues and the approach it has taken on the philosophy, but I think on a very important issue like this, one that can be volatile—I was very young in 1958 when the original school boundaries came, but I remember my parents meeting almost weekly on the issue of boundaries, which I did not understand at that time. There was a Mr. Labossiere—I believe that was the gentleman's name—as a matter of fact, who was one of the people who was sent out to convince school districts, consolidated districts, to amalgamate. The reason that name still sticks in my mind is because he was an inspector of schools who had been elevated to this position.

But I remember the volatile debates that used to happen. I only knew about them from reports from my parents, who came home after a meeting and would be completely frustrated. The whole community seemed to be in an uproar about this issue of large school divisions.

If we do not approach this correctly, we as politicians, whether we are in the Opposition or the Government, are going to wear it, perhaps not immediately, but down the road.

Therefore, I am one who would say on an issue like this there can be a meeting of minds in terms of how we progress and proceed with this, but you have to lay the cards on the table in terms of what plan you have in mind as a minister for proceeding with this, and the earlier the better. Now, there could be some things you want to hold close to your vest. I think that can be understood in the political arena, but in a conceptual way you need to be able to be true to your word in terms of how you want to proceed. That is the only way you are going to get support.

I want to talk about school division boundaries and the reason for amalgamation when I go home, because I see what it is doing to us in quality of education. Who knows? Maybe we will be in government when this finally happens. I have some confidence that is probably where we will be.

But having said that, I think this is such an important issue. For example, back to my own school division, when I worked there we had

about 1400 or 1500 students in the school that I worked in. Today there are less than 1000 students in the whole school division. They still have the same infrastructure, a superintendent, principals, vice-principals, special needs co-ordinators, special needs workers. Now, maybe we need all of those, but because we are not looking at the bigger picture, we still seem to have the same number of people administering. I think what is being short-changed is the student and the resources that we are providing to that student.

It is not the Government's problem of today. It is more of a cultural thing. I think that is the term the Minister of Health uses sometimes, that we have a culture that we have to change. I think in this respect we do. But it is going to require creative and innovative thinking on how we do this, because you cannot subject a six-year-old student to two hours of travel on a school bus in one direction.

So is bigger better? Or do we have to match the age of the child to the facility and the institution that we provide and the proximity of that to where these children live? Will it mean that we maybe have to start looking at different sizes of institutions to accommodate the needs if we are really interested in providing equal opportunities for students who live in remote areas as compared to the opportunities of students who live in large areas?

You can have a huge institution in a city like Winnipeg and accommodate very high needs for students, but you cannot do that in a remote environment. So this all has to enter into the equation when we look at the amalgamation of school boundaries, and the minister has to give the plan. We have not seen that to date.

From listening to the minister in his responses to the Member for Ste. Rose, I know the minister either does not have the plan firmly embedded in his mind or perhaps has not been able at this point in time to formulate with his staff a concrete proposal. I can understand that, but sooner or later, before we get down this road too far, we have to have a plan given to us by this Government on what the division approach is going to be, because you will have to enter into a public debate on this and you will have to

lead it as minister. I guess I would simply ask that you provide for us that plan as soon as you have it or as soon as you are ready to disclose it to us and then publicly, but more importantly to give guidance to the trustees and to the people who are running the school divisions.

Somebody told me once, and I mentioned this to the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce, that I was a very courageous person to take on this school division boundary issue. I was told by another fellow that, when someone says you are courageous, you had better be careful because that is not a compliment. So I hope that nobody has come to the minister and said he is very courageous about this issue, but indeed it is one that I think needs some very, very careful thought, because what we are going to do here is not something that is going to be changed tomorrow or in the next mandate of another administration that comes in.

As you know, the first boundaries were developed in 1958. That is a long time ago. I do not think there have been many changes to those boundaries since that time, but this is something that is going to be there for a long time, and we had better make sure that we do it right for the children, for the future generations, for the kids that are going to be growing up in that system rather than simply taking a very narrow look at a political advantage that we can exercise.

Mr. Caldwell: I appreciate the Member for Russell's comments. I have spoken earlier about the fact that I was a city councillor in Brandon and also happened to be an elected official on the Union of Manitoba Municipalities and subsequently the Association of Manitoba Municipalities and the Manitoba Association of Urban Municipalities, so I have had the opportunity to deal with the Member for Russell (Mr. Derkach) when he was minister of Rural Development. I always appreciated his leadership by the Department of Rural Development at that time and in terms of what he brought to the table for municipal officials. So I do appreciate his comments here today as a former Minister of Education on the issue of amalgamation, and I do in fact concur with all his remarks that he just completed and put on the record here today.

Nobody has called me courageous yet in this matter, so I will touch wood on that. We have

entered into, as I mentioned earlier as well, this process in good faith seeking the best advice of trustees throughout the province as to regional approaches to this matter and what makes sense for the various divisions with their neighbours around the province. At the point where we do have all the submissions into the department, we will be analyzing that material. At that time, it would be appropriate for myself and the Government to put on the table what we have learned from our colleagues, the trustees of the province in terms of their perspective on the issue of boundary modernization in their regions of the province.

It is certainly a very complex issue, and I do agree with the member that, once every 40 years—I have only been here 19 months, but I can appreciate why this is only entered into once every 40 years, because it is a very emotionally charged discussion. Communities feel very strongly about their schools. The people of Manitoba feel very strongly about the public education system. Really, in large measure, that is what motivated me as minister to seek a broad discussion over the last 18 months on this particular matter as opposed to coming forth with an agenda of my own. Really, the agenda is to create better opportunities for Manitoba's students in our public school system and that is where this discussion commenced. I do appreciate the words of the member from Russell and do value his perspective on this particular matter, and in fact, will probably be making photocopies of this last 10 minutes of Estimates so that I can carry it around in my back pocket as we move forward on this, because the member is absolutely right.

* (17:50)

Mr. Derkach: The minister had set out a time frame for school division boundary amalgamation. He said that, I believe, it was the end of June, which is in the next month, in his original vision of amalgamation was when he was expecting some action I suppose from school divisions. I think if I were to ask him today what his timetable was, he would probably give me a vague answer in terms of what he might envisage. Quite seriously, is the minister really looking at this within this mandate of his Government, Mr. Chair, or is he looking at the

implementation beyond the regular mandate if you like of the term of this Government?

The reason I ask that question is, I think school divisions out there need to know whether or not we are looking at a one-year, two-year, three-year window for amalgamation. I do not think it is wise or fruitful for us to move on this in a piecemeal manner because then you really fragment the way that your map, your division map will look at the end of the day, and you are going to end up with little pockets that nobody wants.

I reference the Duck Mountain School Division which is in a very unfortunate geographic position. I think it was a mistake 40 years ago to have made Duck Mountain a division standing by itself. The thinking at that time I believe, and I could only surmise because I was not around then to be able to make a decision, but it appears that the government of the day at that time, must have had a special plan for Duck Mountain in that they would be getting more provincial dollars because of their dismal assessment in that area. But I do not think that ever happened. They have been poor ever since and have had difficulty in meeting the challenges of education.

I do not want this to happen again when we move through this process. I am asking the minister whether or not his time frame has changed, and what it might be.

Mr. Caldwell: In terms of the June 2001 date, I know it was reported but I do not think it was ever directly attributed to me, but I do know it was reported. Having said that, we set a date of April 21 in discussion with our colleagues at the Manitoba Association of School Trustees as an appropriate date after some 18 months to get information back from school divisions. I am still waiting for about 20 responses. I have had a number of calls for extensions and reminded folks that April 21 was the deadline. Having not had a 100% completion by April 21, I think, what are we today, May 23, that June 2001 was an artificial date. As I said, I do not think that date was ever directly attributed to me but I know it was widely reported.

In terms of the discussion on amalgamation, I have been on the record, perhaps even in the

House but certainly in the public media, that we would like to have this discussion over by the next elections, divisional elections, school trustee elections, which is October, the end of October 2002, so that the new boundaries would come into effect with the election of school trustees in the 2002 election. Like the member from Russell, I certainly agree that this is best dealt with and put to rest because the lingering uncertainty on any issue frankly at a political level I think is not in the best interests of anybody, but 2002, with the divisional elections, has been my objective, so that we would have elections conducted for trustees where amalgamations take place in the newly configured boundaries. That is my objective, having begun this process some months ago.

Mr. Derkach: I guess I have to say the minister surprises me, because that means we are just a little more than a year away from implementation of new division boundaries. We have not even begun the public debate on this. I think that is where the rubber hits the road, if you like, when the parents and the general public and the taxpayers enter into this arena of debate on this issue.

I guess my question to the minister: Is this a firm date, or is this a goal with perhaps the flexibility of extending this, depending upon the reaction and the need for thorough debate on this issue? To me it seems like we have been living with these boundaries for 40 years. I know we would like all put this matter to rest. I remember how anxious I used to be when I was in the minister's shoes to get issues off the table and get them dealt with. I have come to realize with some experience haste does not necessarily make waste. On the other hand, when you are dealing with an issue of this magnitude there is reason to take time. My question is: Is this a firm date, or is the minister prepared to be flexible in his approach on this matter?

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Nevakshonoff): Honourable Minister, you have two minutes.

Mr. Caldwell: Okay. I will just be brief because I know we will likely pick this up again tomorrow. I think in terms of the discussion around the province it has been underway for a little over a year. In fact, as I mentioned earlier,

this is one of the first newspaper stories after I was appointed in October of '99 about the dusting off of the Norrie commission report. We have had a pretty extensive discussion around the province on this at the trustee level and community level to date. I expect that will only pick up as the Government's plans and the Government's analysis of the divisional reports are made known.

I think we have been fairly consistent that we wanted to have, by October 2002, elections with the new configurations. I do not expect every division in the province of Manitoba to change its configuration, but I do expect the material that has come back from the field will reflect common sense and will reflect what is best for students. I am hopeful when we review that material there will be some consensus based upon what is best for children in the regions of Manitoba. I will have a better idea of that when all the material comes in. So 2002, I think, is the objective.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Nevakshonoff): Order. The hour being 6 p.m., committee rise.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

* (15:30)

Mr. Chairperson (Conrad Santos): Will the Committee of Supply come to order, please. This section of the Committee of Supply has been dealing with the Estimates of the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs. Will the minister's staff please enter the Chamber.

We are on page 106 of the Estimates Book, resolution 13.1. This section of Committee of Supply had agreed to have a global discussion.

Mr. Glen Cummings (Ste. Rose): Mr. Chairman, if the minister would be agreeable, I have what would be categorized as a constituency question but probably one that she has been anticipating.

The Interpretive Centre at Neepawa has been in progress for a couple of years, starting to undertake some operations. There was an outstanding commitment when this Government came into office based on a business plan. I am not asking the minister whether or not she

intends to honour the business plan. I am assuming that from the indication she gave a year ago that she would be receptive to receiving a proper and appropriate business plan from the Interpretive Centre.

I guess my first question would be: Has she received a business plan from the Great Plains Interpretive Centre?

Hon. Jean Friesen (Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs): At the end of the last session, we were in the middle of answering a question from the Member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Loewen) on some changes that he had noted in the administrative support salaries in Brandon. I just wanted to point out to the member, I think we had finally agreed the number was \$15,000 not \$15 million. And I think the member will recognize that this is an issue of levels at which new people have been appointed and it is lower than the salaries that were there in the previous administration.

On the issue that the Member for Ste. Rose has raised, I have met, the department staff have corresponded with the group in Neepawa and district that is looking at the Great Plains Interpretive Centre proposals and I have met with the group myself last week. We did also meet with some representatives of the group at the AMM, Mr. Chairperson, so there has been a continuous contact.

The previous government had made a commitment based upon the examination of a business plan to look at the proposal, and, I think, had also required that a certain level of fundraising be undertaken successfully before the Government would make a commitment to look at the business plan.

The group has been successful, as I am sure the member knows, in receiving quite a large grant from MRAC, which I think has been very useful to them. Given that, we did want to initiate a meeting with them that we had last week to look at how this has affected the kind of plans that they had in the past, and also to look at how their fundraising had been going and what kind of proposals they had for the future.

We had a very good discussion. I am sure the member will, I think, find similar comments

from the people in the group that he will or has been talking to. There have been, subsequent to that, further discussions between staff and the group. What we are doing is working with them on their existing business plans. They did bring some documents to the meeting. Those have been looked at by staff, and what staff I think in agreement with the group are doing now is working toward the next phase.

If I can, Mr. Chairman, we do have a new member of staff at the table whom I did not introduce last time. That is Mr. Gerry Offet, who is the Acting Deputy Minister of Economic and Community Development Services.

Mr. Cummings: Just so I understand clearly, the minister has had meetings and discussions with, I think I said the beautiful plains, I meant the Great Plains Interpretive Centre, but has not yet received a business plan from them?

Ms. Friesen: Yes, we did receive a business plan that they had been working with. There were a number of questions that we had about it. We are continuing to work with them on that business plan.

Mr. Cummings: I appreciate that answer because, as the organizing board knew, there is obviously an element of responsibility that is imposed on them in terms of bringing forward a viable business plan. That also, of course, gives some power of judgment to the current government as to whether or not the business plan is viable and acceptable, and the criteria by which they will assess it.

It has come to my attention the Premier (Mr. Doer) has made the comment that this was a commitment but there were no dollars attached to it. That is fair comment. On the other hand, based on a viable business plan, does the minister see herself as being a lead advocate in lobbying with her colleagues to obtain funding from appropriate interests?

Let me expand on that. To say there are no dollars attached to it, there are in fact a number of areas where a previous administration could have or would have gone on a basis of a viable business plan. Because of the nature of the organization there are a number of cross-sectoral interests. In other words, it is not just an area

that one department would necessarily see itself as the only one that would relate with any potential proposal that would come forward. An example would be that it ranges all the way from agriculture and tourism to education, all of the various activities they could undertake, Mr. Chair, depending on which directions they wanted to put emphasis in place.

Therefore my question: Does the minister responsible for the department that was referred to as the Department of Rural Development, now part of the amalgamated department, see herself and/or her department as taking the lead role in responding to any business plan that might be brought forward?

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, the simple answer is, yes, it is our departmental staff who are working with the group on their business plan and offering advice and moving this forward in any way that we can be helpful.

* (15:40)

Mr. Cummings: It will be this department that would be doing the assessment of any proposal or the proposal that they have in hand. Can I assume then that the minister, if she is seized of the plan that they bring forward, would be involving other appropriate departments in the discussion of the proposed business plan?

Ms. Friesen: I think much of that is already in process. The previous government had involved the Department of Conservation, the Department of Agriculture, but not the Department of Tourism or indeed the Department of Education. The member is quite right that there are a number of opportunities in this proposal for interest and perhaps advice from a number of government departments.

We have already spoken to a number of government departments about this and alerted them that this proposal is there, and we will be keeping them informed as things move.

Mr. Cummings: One area of financial support that might have been available to this type of project could have been the Sustainable Development Fund. Can the minister tell me if it is still functioning?

Ms. Friesen: I think the Member for Ste. Rose (Mr. Cummings) is aware that that is not in our department, and so a more specific answer will have to be sought from the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Lathlin). But to the best of my knowledge, the Sustainable Development Fund still exists, although it may well have additional or different guidelines.

Mr. Cummings: From an organizational perspective then, can I assume, Mr. Chair, that there is not an interdepartmental committee that the Sustainable Development Fund reports to, obviously that this minister is not part of it, if there is one?

Ms. Friesen: I think the member should be directing some of those questions to the minister. Obviously, as with all government programs, there is a Treasury Board connection here for the larger picture. So I think for the specific answers that the member is looking for, I think that would be the direction to go.

Mr. John Loewen (Fort Whyte): I would like to move on to subappropriation 13.1.(d), page 26.

I would like to ask the minister if she could provide a list of any new employees hired during the course of the last year within the department, if she could advise the level they were hired at, the salary range, as well as the starting salary, and in addition if she could advise whether the position was filled through secondment, appointment, or whether a competition was held.

Ms. Friesen: The member is asking this under line 13.1.(d), but I am assuming by the range of the question that he is not just asking about new personnel in the Human Resource Department; he is asking for the list of all new hirings or secondments across the department as a whole.

Mr. Loewen: That is correct, operating under the assumption that the Human Resources people would be the ones who would have the information.

Ms. Friesen: The member will appreciate with the staff that we have at the table within the Chamber we do not have all of that detail available, but we can undertake to provide that.

Mr. Loewen: Whenever. I thank the minister for that and that would be appreciated.

One of the activities identified for this department is to assist department managers and departments on the workforce adjustment. I am just wondering if, as a result of the consolidation of the two departments into the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs, whether there was any substantive departmental reviews undertaken in the last year.

Ms. Friesen: I wonder if the member could expand on what he means by departmental reviews. Are we still talking personnel, reviews of staffing, reviews of personnel, reviews of vacancies? What exactly is he asking?

Mr. Loewen: There are a number of departments within the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs, and I am just wondering if the Human Resource Management unit undertook, as part of the Human Resource function, any departmental reviews, not of individuals, but of in fact some of the departments within the minister's portfolio with regard to any activities within those departments that had to be realigned or changed as a result of the merger.

Ms. Friesen: These did occur last year. Essentially what happened was we took the staff from the Urban Affairs section of the Department of Urban Affairs and Housing. I think the number of staff there was 14. They were integrated with the staff of Rural Development, and the number there was and is approximately 300 people—I do not have that specific number—to which was added the Infrastructure Program, which has a new, integrated staff. At the time last year it was still the previous infrastructure staff. I think the infrastructure staff was six with two seconded. That has changed. The federal government was looking for an integrated office. This is something that they had done in other provinces in the new infrastructure program. So we do have a new, integrated staff of federal and provincial—integrated perhaps is the wrong word there, but we do have a combined staff of federal and provincial employees in a single office dealing with the infrastructure programs.

* (15:50)

Let me just conclude the section on infrastructure by saying that we have seven staff in that area. What we were not able to find was the number of federal staff. I was hoping to give the member a picture of that office as it goes into full gear on infrastructure programs. But we will find that and send him that number.

Mr. Loewen: I thank the minister for that. I would also ask if the Human Resources Management department could provide a list of any employees that left the department and were provided with a severance package during the course of the year.

Ms. Friesen: I understand by that that the member is looking for a list of all staff members who left last year. Yes, we can provide that.

Mr. Loewen: As mentioned yesterday, my colleague from Russell has some questions, then he has to go on to the Education Estimates. I wondered if we could let him take the floor for the time being.

Mr. Leonard Derkach (Russell): First of all, let me say that I am happy to see that the minister has maintained the staff that have worked for both departments for a number of years, and certainly I know the advice that she is getting from them is excellent. I look forward to seeing some continued programs for the rural side of our province, which indeed are so important in rural Manitoba today as the farm crisis continues to loom in that part of the province.

Today I have a number of questions which, I guess, take us back in time to when I was still in the ministry and an issue that was not resolved at that time and one that probably continues to come back to the department from time to time, and it has to do with the Royal Canadian Legion's association and the exemption on taxes on these premises.

The Dauphin Legion was exempted, I think, back in 1947 through a private member's bill of the Legislature. What it did at that time was provide an inequity in the way that legions were treated across the province. A Mr. Petrinka has been acting for some of the legions to try and gain some equity into this entire process in how legions are treated with respect to school taxes.

I would like to ask the minister whether or not she has heard or whether or not she has made a decision with respect to settling this issue with the associations or whether in fact there is still, as I understand it, an outstanding claim here and an outstanding issue.

Ms. Friesen: The Member for Russell—and I have made the same mistake before. I referred to him as the member for Roblin. The Member for Russell is certainly right in that this is a long-standing issue and that there were differences or anomalies introduced into the treatment of legions by the private member's bill in the 1940s.

He asks whether it is still an outstanding issue, and what I am able to tell him at this point is that, for a number of legions who are represented by the gentleman that he mentioned, Mr. Petrinka, there are outstanding issues that they have taken to court. Given that it is before the court, I would want to be very careful about discussing the nature of the outstanding issues as they or others would define them. So I actually want to be quite careful on that since it is before the courts at the moment.

Mr. Derkach: Well, just to clarify it for the minister, I have a copy of a letter that was signed by Mr. McFetridge, who is general counsel to the department, I believe, where he indicates in his letter that in fact this matter is not before the court because a statement of defence has not been filed on behalf of the Province and that there is still, I guess, a will, at least by the Province, to consider an option of settlement outside the court. So I would like the minister to clarify for me whether or not this option is still available by way of agreeing to a statement or a statement of facts as they relate to this matter.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, I wonder if the member would table the letter that he is reading from, or that he was discussing.

* (16:00)

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Chair, I have not quoted from the letter. This is not my letter, and I would have to get permission from the recipient of this letter before I could, indeed, file it and table it. I will do so by sending a page. Mr. Petrinka is in the gallery. He is saying that, yes, I can, in fact,

table it. The letter was written to him, and I will table this letter. If I could just get perhaps the pages to make a copy of this so I can get the original back, please.

I just want to clarify for the minister that this is not an issue that I am trying to find the minister in some sort of conflict. Indeed, I am just trying to get information as to the status of this, because it is an issue that was before me when I was in that position. So I just want some clarity as to how this is proceeding and whether or not it is proceeding.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, well, we will look at the letter when it arrives, and the date on it, but to the best of my knowledge this matter is in the hands of our lawyers and is being discussed at that level.

Mr. Derkach: Well, Mr. Chair, it may be before the lawyers, but I think it is still incumbent on the minister to make her position clear as to whether or not we are prepared to treat veterans' associations across this province in an equitable manner.

I want to read a section of The Municipal Assessment Act where the Dauphin Veterans' Association is exempt. It is under exemptions, section 22, subsection 1(n), I believe, yes, 1(n) where it says: "Is owned by the Dauphin Veterans' Association, used and occupied by the Association and other organizations comprising members or ex-members of Her Majesty's Forces and is located in lot 8, block 11, plan 243 in the Town of Dauphin."

This speaks to this particular facility being exempt under a private member's bill which was brought into this Legislature many years ago. However, I think it sets a precedent, Mr. Chair, in that the Veterans' Association building in Dauphin is no different than most of the legions in rural Manitoba or in Manitoba. Indeed, I believe the City of Winnipeg has dealt with some of the legions here in the city, but many of them find themselves in a position where they are not treated equitably when compared to Dauphin.

I guess all we are trying to do is to establish that individuals who belong to other veterans'

associations have the same privileges in this province as the Dauphin Veterans' Association does. We are simply talking about the exemption of school tax on these premises outside the licensed premise.

So I am asking the minister whether or not she is prepared to move ahead with this and provide some equity to legions across this province. My understanding is that there is an amount of money that is associated with this and that it is less than \$200,000 per year in terms of the school tax. It would provide for members of these legions who have not only served our province and our country but have indeed come back to belong to legions some equity so that they are not treated differently than the one specific facility in Dauphin.

Ms. Friesen: I am sure the member is aware that the position of the previous government was not to change the anomalies that were introduced by the private member's bill for the Dauphin Legion. This Government has not changed that perspective. I think the answers that I have given in the House on this have dealt with issues of taxation and of exemption of taxation of areas of legions that are not licensed premises. I am sure the member is aware that legions are exempt, all legions are exempt from educational taxes except the portion which is a licensed premise, or of the portion of the building which is a licensed premise.

I do not believe that the position of the previous government was any different on that. Any changes to this, I think, would have to be proceeded by discussions with municipal authorities, with the AMM. I think that is the answer I have given to the Member for River Heights (Mr. Gerrard) in the House.

Now, the member is suggesting that the issue of equity is the one that is before the courts. I am not sure that the member is right on that. Here I want to be very careful about what is at issue before the courts. The letter that the member has tabled I think does not necessarily indicate that, that the issue before the courts is somewhat more specific than that.

I think again we are dealing with matters which are before the courts and are in the hands

of our lawyers. I think it is quite legitimate for the member to raise these issues, but I think you will also understand that when a minister responds on these issues that the record is taken in a different way perhaps than the raising of questions. Perhaps that is also legitimate as well.

So I respect the right and the role of the member in raising these questions, but I think he will also have to respect that given that this is before the courts at the moment, given that it is in the hands of our lawyers, it makes it very difficult to answer the very specific questions, that either the case or the issues that the member is raising can be answered in the House at this time.

Mr. Derkach: I respect why the minister wants to be careful in how she responds to these questions. I say quite sincerely that I do respect her caution. All we are trying to do is to establish some equity in the way legions across this province are treated. I know the complexities of the issue. They are not straightforward and they are not simple. On the other hand, I think some new evidence has come to the fore the last year and a half or less which probably changes this matter somewhat.

Indeed I believe, I could be corrected, but I think there was indeed a signal to the association that this matter may be revisited. But I guess I would like the minister to give me some advice as to what the meaning of that last paragraph in legal counsel's letter to Mr. Petrinka is, so that we have a better understanding of what the Government is prepared to do, because it appears to be suggesting that the Government is somewhat reluctant to move this to court. So, although the statement of claim has been filed, it seems that there is still some concern about taking this to court through a statement of defence and then having it dealt by the courts.

If, in fact, the minister is saying that, yes, they are prepared to have this go before the courts, I will not have any further questions in this regard, but there seems to be a hesitancy, if you like, from Mr. McFetridge to file a statement of defence. It appears that there might be some options available to him. I do not know this; I am just asking this for clarity.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, I am certainly prepared to respond as best as I can to the member's questions, but I am not a lawyer. What the member is doing is asking me to interpret a lawyer's letter. I would certainly, Mr. Chairman, prefer to discuss those matters with our own counsel before I can advise the member on what it is possible to respond to, and I will undertake to do that.

Mr. Derkach: I thank the minister for that. I just simply asked that, perhaps, before her Estimates are completed, whether or not she would undertake to discuss this matter with legal counsel so that, in fact, I think the goal is to have the two lawyers come together and then both agree either to take this matter through the courts and proceed in that direction, or whether or not this matter is still open for negotiation. I guess that is the outstanding question that I would ask the minister to come back to me with a response on.

Ms. Friesen: I cannot commit to the time frame on that before the end of Estimates since that is not exactly within my control, so I will do my best and make this as expedient as I can. Nor can I commit to the schedule of another member of staff who is not in my department. Given those two difficulties, then I will certainly do my best to get a response as soon as possible to the member.

Mr. Derkach: Mr. Chair, maybe I will put the minister on notice then that, in fact, we do have concurrence, and this is an issue that I will, if the minister is not able to find the information before the end of the Estimate process, then we will leave it to the concurrence process to have the information and begin to pursue it at that time.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, I hope that we would have the information before that, but, if not, then that is certainly a good fallback position.

Mr. Derkach: I just want to say thank you to the minister for giving me those responses, and we will wait for her response on the legal matter. Thank you.

* (16:10)

Mr. Harry Enns (Lakeside): Mr. Chairman, I, too, like my colleague from Ste. Rose, wish to take this opportunity to discuss a constituency matter with the minister and her department. Prior to doing that, let me just add my voice in support to that of my colleague from Russell on this issue that has just been discussed. Surely it is a question of equity, equitable treatment between like organizations. I would ask the minister to pursue it and look at it, as I am sure she has, from that perspective.

Mr. Chairman, the issue that I want to raise has to do with a subdivision matter within the Rural Municipality of Woodlands that has been before the department and its various agencies, planning people, for some time. Along the shores of East Shoal Lake there has been a land development proposal called, I believe, the Shoal Lake land development project. I am not quite sure of its accurate name. The land in question that is in the northwest quadrant of the R.M. of Woodlands is primarily undeveloped bushland, typical Interlake bushland on the shores of East Shoal Lake that has attracted the attention of some who believe they would make ideal locations for nature lovers, people to purchase some rural property and enjoy that kind of environment.

My understanding is, I am somewhat familiar with the process, that agencies such as the Department of Agriculture and Food have acknowledged that we are not talking about subdividing prime farmland. I know the area intimately. It is across the lake from my own properties on West Shoal Lake. At one point in time that general area supported a significant number of families, 30, 40 individual farm families. Now we are down to just a handful. I know this is an issue that has different meanings for different people. For the municipality, it is certainly a welcome addition, the development at issue in the municipality.

It is a constant struggle for some rural municipalities, the R.M. of Woodlands being no exception, to maintain their assessment base, their tax base, maintain their population base. I want to make sure that, in the minister's mind, in the department's mind, this is not to be confused with an issue I know this particular minister, this particular Government, has taken a somewhat stronger position on with respect to "urban sprawl," or whether it is the kind of

developments in the adjacent Capital Region. This is 40 miles northwest of the city, north of the city, on land that has very little other use other than for this intended purpose, to provide people who are attracted to that kind of environment to build substantial homes, cottages if you like, on it. My understanding is there is some specific interest by some European potential landowners in acquiring this land.

I want to indicate to the minister and the department that I am strongly in support of it. I can report to the minister and the department—I think they are aware of it—the R.M. of Woodlands, under the leadership of Reeve Ed Peltz, have been very open about this. There have been several public hearings held in the council chambers of the R.M. of Woodlands. There have been some objections raised, Mr. Chair, although only a handful. I think they have to be noted, and they have been noted.

My understanding is the department referred this issue to the Municipal Board. I have not heard, neither have the proponents or the council heard, of any decisions relative to the proposed subdivision, coming from either the Municipal Board or from the department directly.

So I take this occasion to speak to this issue as supportively as I can. I know that this would be of significant economic benefit to the R.M. of Woodlands in the additional assessment that would become available to that underpopulated portion of the municipality that the municipality, nonetheless, has to service with roads and other municipal services.

There are people that are directly involved. An immediate resident in the area, Mr. Bill Ogilvie, who is a long-time reputable cattle producer in the area and, I might also say, had a distinguished public service career with the Department of Highways with the Manitoba government prior to retirement and carrying on his cattle operation in that area. He has been appointed, if you like, and would be the kind of resident manager of the operation. But I would appreciate if the minister could enlighten me, put on the record, where this matter stands.

Ms. Friesen: I appreciate the question. I think we are talking about the same issue which is the Lake Ranch proposal in the R.M. of Woodlands. This is something which was put forward within

the R.M. of Woodlands some time ago, and there have been discussions within the R.M. of Woodlands amongst, I think, various levels of opinion on this.

I appreciate what the member is saying in the sense of the difficulties that rural municipalities face in maintaining a population base and a reasonable tax base, and I think that is an issue which is shared very generally across Manitoba and within the capital region as well.

But I did want to separate out the capital region issue because the R.M. of Woodlands, I think the member had raised it in this context perhaps with a question mark behind it. The R.M. of Woodlands is not, as the boundaries of the Capital Region have been drawn in recent years, contained within those.

We did send the issue of the R.M. of Woodlands and Lake Ranch to the Municipal Board, and a hearing was held on March 6, 2001. The Municipal Board has written its report and made its recommendations to the minister, and where it sits at the moment is that staff are reviewing that, so from March 6 to the present.

Mr. Enns: If I understood the minister correctly, Mr. Chairman, the Municipal Board has produced a report with respect to this proposed development, and that report is now within the bowels of the department and being considered?

Ms. Friesen: Just to respond to the Member for Lakeside, that is the gist of it. We have received a report very recently from the Municipal Board on this, and the department is considering it.

Mr. Enns: The obvious question is, of course: And what did the report say? But, Mr. Chairman, I am genuinely advancing this cause on behalf of some of my constituents. I am doing what an MLA is supposed to do, and I am trying to do it in as courteous a manner as I can. I am pleased to hear that the minister is aware that this geography that we are talking about is not within the capital region that I know this minister and the Government has taken kind of a special interest in it in terms of further development, that this is outside of that region.

I can only offer her the advice that I have tried to follow on some of these issues. Land

subdivisions always stir up a certain amount of controversy, but I always took great comfort in the fact that if the local government, in this case the R.M. of Woodlands, who, after all, are the duly elected people responsible for governing the affairs of the R.M. within the confines of The Municipal Act, when they have considered this matter not in haste but over a period of time and they have done so in a very public way. They have opened up their chambers to expressions of support or opponents to the project, if memory is correct, not on just one occasion but on several occasions, but my understanding is that the minister, the department has on file a resolution of support from the municipality.

* (16:20)

My further memory is—and because it happens to be my home R.M., I know the individuals involved—I believe it is unanimously supported by the R.M. of Woodlands, that under these circumstances, that that would weigh heavily in the proponents' favour when giving consideration to this development.

I am aware of and I know the nature of the objections, but I can also tell you that it represents the typical one or two individuals who have fear and, I believe, operate from some misinformation there. Mr. Chair, I know that in some instances, that area is well endowed with wild-life. We are fortunate in having the staging of large numbers of migrating birds, both ducks and geese. Deer are frequent in the area.

The kinds of people that are being attracted—and some have expressed the concern that they would add additional hunting pressure on the area. That really is not the case. The very people who are interested in this are attracted to that area partly because of the wildlife resources in that area. They would be among the premier preservationists or conservationists who would, if anything, protect the wildlife.

So these kinds of objections that I know that were registered simply are not valid. Once again, I would hope that maybe the minister and the department can be persuaded in this instance to come to some resolution on this matter relatively soon if the records are checked. This is an issue that has been before the department for quite

awhile. It is well beyond a year. I think it is approaching the order of two years, and I think the proponents deserve an answer, and really that is what I am asking the minister to do.

Paraphrasing my colleague from Russell, my hope would be that it would be during the course of her Estimates. If not, the minister can expect another little lobbying effort on my behalf when we reach concurrence motions with respect to her department. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Jim Rondeau, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair

Ms. Friesen: Well, I understand the role of the local MLA in presenting his perspective and representing his constituents on this particular issue, and the role of the minister in response is to take into account the advice of the Municipal Board and of the department and to render the best recommendations that he or she can muster.

That is I think the best that I can promise the member at this stage. I realize the advice that he is giving me is very consistent. The consistent advice that he has given in private, he is now giving in public, and that is to pay due attention to the wishes of a locally elected council. So, with that, Mr. Chairman, I think we will do our best to deal with this issue as judiciously as we can.

Mr. Edward Helwer (Gimli): Mr. Chairman, I also would like to support the project that the Member for Lakeside (Mr. Enns) just spoke about, the project in Woodlands, because I live not that far away from where this project would take place. I would certainly support this and support the member from Woodlands in this particular case, and also the proponents of the project. I think it certainly would help that area and would be a great asset for that area and for the R.M. of Woodlands.

I really have a question of another matter, and this is about the Water Services Board project, actually, within the R.M. of Gimli. At the present time, the Water Services Board has a project there to service Centre Street West with sewer and water. The contract was let last year, actually. I forget the name of the contractor off hand, but they started the project last fall and did not get it finished. They came back and did some

work again this spring just recently, but they have got a terrible mess there. As a matter of fact, Centre Street West has been closed now since it started thawing, actually. I think it is at least three weeks or a month that the street has been closed there. People have not been able to get their cars into their yards because of the road being in such bad condition.

I do not know whose fault it is, whether it is the contractor, whether it is the municipality, whether it is the Water Services Board, but nobody can seem to get any answers. I have had a number of calls from the residents there, and the municipality cannot seem to answer that question, actually, either, but the road is in terrible condition. The whole project has been, I do not know, it has not seemed to work out very well. It has been a real inconvenience to the businesses there, to the GM dealer. He has had his yard torn up all winter. It is a real inconvenience to some of the businesses.

I wonder if the minister could give me any indication of what is happening there or when this project will come to a conclusion.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, if the member could wait for a minute, we do have Mr. Dick Menon from the Water Services Board, who is in the gallery, and he is on his way down. It is a very specific question. On the chance that it can be answered very quickly and very simply, I think it is probably worth a few minutes' wait, if that is all right with the member, or if the member has other questions, we could come back to it in perhaps a couple of minutes when Mr. Menon is down here.

Mr. Helwer: Mr. Chairman, no, that is fine. We will be glad to wait for Mr. Menon and talk about this project. This is only one of the projects there that the R.M. of Gimli has ongoing with the Water Services Board. Well, I have another question on the Water Services Board too, but since Mr. Menon is here now, we will deal with the R.M. of Gimli first. Perhaps, would you like me to explain it again to Mr. Menon?

Mr. Chairperson in the Chair

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, yes, if the Member for Gimli (Mr. Helwer) could just summarize

that particular issue, and we will deal with them one by one.

Mr. Helwer: Mr. Chairman, yes, as I explained to the minister, in the R.M. of Gimli, the Water Services Board has a project there, Centre Street West, which the contract was let some time last summer, I believe. I am not too sure who the contractor is, but they started this job and did not get it finished last fall. They have got just a terrible mess there. The street itself, Centre Street West, which is quite heavily populated, some of the people have not been able to get into their yards since the snow went, actually, since the frost started coming out of the ground.

The contractor came in and tried to do some work, apparently, but I guess pulled out again because of the wet conditions. So there seems to be a mix-up there. I do not know who is to blame, Mr. Chairman, whether it is the contractor, the municipality, the Water Services Board, or who has the responsibility there to go in and try to straighten that project out.

I wonder if Mr. Menon or the minister could, through Mr. Menon, give us some answers there.

* (16:30)

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, if I could, just before we answer that question, perhaps direct a request to the Member for Fort Whyte (Mr. Loewen). Since we have Mr. Menon here from the Water Services Board, if there are other members who have very specific questions, and I know it is of interest to many rural municipalities, if there are other people who have questions on the Water Services Board, this will be the best time to get those answers quickly.

On the issue of the R.M. of Gimli, I am advised that this was a contract which was let in the late summer and that at the time there were two options presented to the municipality, that is, of a low-pressure system or a gravity system for the sewer. The municipality chose to go for a deep burial, that is, sometimes I gather as deep as 30 feet in order to get the gravity that they require, that they chose. The contract was let late. There have been rains. There have been rains again this spring, obviously, as the member

is aware. So the project essentially has taken longer than it would have done if a different choice had been made, but nevertheless that was their choice. I am advised that if the rains stop and the land dries up that the project is about a month from completion.

Mr. Helwer: I appreciate the minister's response. I wonder who is responsible for maintaining the roads to make them passable at least so these people can get into their yards. It is so messy they just cannot get in. There are deep holes and deep ruts. There has been no gravel on the road whatsoever because of the digging. Who is responsible for trying to maintain these roads at least in driveable condition? I think most of the people realize that, you know, there is a mess from the digging. They understand that. They have to put up with that. I think they are just tired of not getting any answers now and that they cannot get into their yards. So who is responsible for that?

Ms. Friesen: It is a good question. The answer apparently is that it is a divided responsibility that, where the contractor has dug up areas, then it is his responsibility to maintain those as passable; where it is the R.M.'s roadway, then it is the R.M.'s responsibility to do that, but, having said both of those, I think we would all recognize the difficulty of maintaining that at a time in the spring when there are heavy rains and where there has been uneven settling.

I am sure it is very awkward and difficult for the residents of that area, and I am sure that we all hope that the weather will clear up and that this can be dealt with as quickly as possible. It is a divided responsibility.

I should let the member know, if he is not aware already, that I was out in Gimli two weeks ago and did meet, at a joint meeting, a very useful and informative meeting of both the R.M. and the town at the old school, in the town hall chambers. I was also in Teulon, saw your picture on the wall in Teulon.

Mr. Helwer: I thank the minister for that, and I am sure that, if she was in Gimli, she probably heard from the municipality there.

I realize that it is a joint venture, and really it is the contractor's responsibility to put the road

back in the condition that they got it in, when they first started the project. I realize that, because the project was started last fall, it rained, and they could not complete it. They started again this spring, and then could not complete it again, either. It seems they pulled out all the equipment just recently. Is there a reason for that, or will they be moving the equipment back as soon as the restrictions are over, or what is the project doing there?

Ms. Friesen: I am assured that, when the conditions are right for the work to begin again, when the rains stop and the land is again available, the equipment will be moved back, and one assumes that the contractor is making the best use of his equipment that he can and using it where it is possible to work on the land. So I am assured that, as soon as this work can be begun again, the equipment will be removed. I can understand, when the equipment does disappear, that people do have concerns, and I thank the member for raising those.

Mr. Helwer: I have another question. Another community along Lake Winnipeg there, the village of Dunnottar, actually, some years ago, they did a study on a low pressure sewer system there. In the village itself, it is mostly a tourist area. It is mostly a cottage area, although there are some houses that are year round. The village of Dunnottar did apply for a project there a number of years ago. It is a fairly costly project. It would be a low pressure system probably, but I think it is getting more and more important that they do something very soon because of the problem with the septic tanks there and the problem with the water, being the water table is very close to the ground there because it is close to the lake.

I am not sure where the project is at this time, but I would hope that, when the village is ready to proceed with that project, the Water Services Board could look at that very favourably and get that project underway as soon as possible. Could the minister bring me up to date as to where it is at this time?

Ms. Friesen: I understand, and the member may well be aware of this, that the council before the present council, that is the council that was elected before 1998, did meet with the Water

Services Board and that feasibility studies were done in conjunction with them at that time. A cost estimate for the kind of sewer system and lagoon that they would require I believe was—our general sense here is about \$3 million. We do not have all of the details in front of us.

* (16:40)

I understand that since that time the council has not met with the Water Services Board, and I am not aware that they have pursued with the Water Services Board the results of that particular feasibility study. I would think another obvious area would be the Infrastructure Program, the joint Canada-Manitoba Infrastructure Program. It is quite possible that they would have applied under that. I do not know if the member would be aware of that or not.

Mr. Helwer: I am not sure if they did apply under the Infrastructure Program, but you are right, it would certainly fit under that program, I think, very well, Mr. Chair, because of the fact of the groundwater contamination there, plus the shallow wells, plus the septic tanks. I think this project should certainly qualify under a green project, that kind of thing, and it should fit the Infrastructure Program a lot better.

I am not sure where the council is at this stage of the game. I know it is very expensive for their budget, but if they could get a three-way split on it, certainly that way, cost-wise, that certainly would help the residents there at least to make it possibly affordable.

But I really think, though, that it is going to come to a point there where they are going to have to do something very soon because of the septic tanks and the shallow wells and the contamination that has taken place there really. I will be speaking to them in the near future and will recommend to them that they do look at the Infrastructure Program, if they can apply, and if they have not applied as yet, they should look at it and try to get it in as soon as possible.

Just one other question on the Water Services Board, and that is the town of Teulon a number of years ago was approved some \$40,000 or \$50,000 and a sewer extension to service the golf course there, although it was

never done. Is this what is still on the books and still available to them?

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, as I mentioned partly in jest to the member, we were in Teulon a couple of weeks ago and did sit down, not with the council formally, but with the administrator and one of the council members. This was not an issue that was raised with me at the time, but, as I said, it was not a formal meeting. If I understand the member correctly, what he is talking about is the Water Services Board offer not to the golf course itself but to the people between Teulon and the golf course, to individual people who would have been on a line had it been extended. I see that he is nodding, and that is the case. Well, as I understand it, at the time, the people along that proposed line did not take up that offer. The best thing I can suggest is that he perhaps, on their behalf, or the group themselves talk to the Water Services Board again, see where things are. I understand that the money is still on the books and that discussion is the best channel at this point, but obviously it would not be for this year.

Mr. Helwer: I want to thank the minister for that response. I appreciate that it was for the residents in the rural municipality that are adjacent to the town, and it was just to serve an area there. It did include servicing through the golf course, but that was a separate item. I appreciate that.

I just have one question on the Infrastructure Program. That is the Town of Winnipeg Beach has applied for an infrastructure program for their streets. This is to repair their streets. They do have a reserve fund put away for this particular purpose, and they are just waiting for approval on this infrastructure grant. Could you give me any indication as to when this might be approved or whether if possible it could be approved or what status is it at, at this time?

* (16:50)

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chairman, last week I was also in Winnipeg Beach and certainly had the tour of streets and improvements that have already been made in that area and the hopes and aspirations of the council. The specific issue that the member is asking about is difficult to

answer. I am not able to give him a specific date on which there will be a response. I guess there are a couple of factors. Maybe the best way to do it is to simply explain the way in which the program works. In many ways, Mr. Chairman, it is not that different than it has worked before. The Manitoba system that developed under the previous infrastructure agreement was certainly one, I think, that was taken as a model by a number of other provinces, and we did, with some modifications, repeat the same model in this second agreement. Applications were received, a long list of applications, out-numbering the amount of money available by three to one.

In order to sort through these applications at the end of the January 31 deadline, or the first intake, we do have an advisory committee of the AMM, as well as representatives of the mayors and reeves of northern Manitoba. They have sorted through those and have made recommendations to the federal and provincial governments. We have announced, from that first intake, three projects in rural Manitoba: Cormorant, Haywood and Balmoral. In the city, we have announced the True North piece, as well as the first announcement which dealt with the floodway. It is a joint program, and the reason that we have not announced anything further is that there are both federal and provincial. I am putting them both on a par. It is a partnership agreement. There are federal approval processes to go through. Many of the federal approval processes are not just administrative in the sense of Treasury Board and formal approvals over certain amounts that the federal government and the provincial government require, but the federal government also has environmental approvals that it has to achieve.

It takes time, and I know it is difficult for communities who want to have an immediate answer and particularly for parts of Manitoba with a very short construction season. So it is difficult, and I know that the federal government is aware of that as well. This is also the first intake, and so it is going to take a little longer. We anticipate that as it did in the previous program. It is a six-year program. By the end of the program some of these will be coming more quickly.

The Winnipeg Beach proposal is a proposal for streets and street renewal and, yes, falls under the broad criteria of infrastructure, but, again, the first criterion is green infrastructure. I cannot comment; in fact, I do not even have the information with me on where such a project would rank in the first round of intake. But I think what I am saying to all communities is there are further intakes, that you do not drop off the list simply because you are not announced in this first one. The people are kept on the list; as they did last time, the advisory committee will continue to review these. The next deadline, I believe, is in October.

Mr. Helwer: I appreciate the minister's response, and I want to thank her for your response. I think that that is all the questions I have, and I will defer to the Member for Fort Whyte.

Mr. Loewen: I thank the minister and her staff for indulging some of the constituent questions that have come up from my colleagues. I do have some questions, a couple of questions on the Water Services Board, so I will try to deal with that right now. Unfortunately, I cannot state unequivocally that I do not have other colleagues who have questions on it; and, unfortunately, some of those colleagues are involved in the Education Estimates and some of the other estimates that are going on right now. So I am not sure that we will be able to deal with every question at this time, but certainly the questions I have we can deal with.

Specifically with regard to Bill 15, which was introduced and passed last year with regard to the provincial authority over water control, there was in the committee some support for the bill, some conditional support for the bill, and some objections to the bill. Certainly the AMM endorsed the bill conditionally. They had two provisos. One is that basically a longer-term and more comprehensive land drainage and water management strategy be developed by the department, and I wonder if the minister could give us an update on that area, whether that has been undertaken or whether any work has been done.

Ms. Friesen: Bill 15 was under the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Lathlin) and in the

Department of Conservation. I think the specific questions on the follow-through on them from that bill are perhaps better addressed there.

What I can say is that drainage is obviously an issue throughout much of Manitoba. The part that falls under this department and under the Water Services Board is the Conservation Districts Commission. So in spite of the name those are part of Intergovernmental Affairs. Conservation districts, which we have been expanding, and I could give the member a list of the expansions that have occurred since we took office, are a way of beginning the process for many municipalities of dealing across boundaries and dealing with the issues of water flow that do not respect the artificial municipal and other administrative boundaries that we put on them.

The Conservation District Program is one that is jointly funded by the Province and municipalities. It is one that I think has met with some success in many areas. Under the previous government and under the previous, previous government, I think it began in the 1970s as a program under Premier Schreyer.

There are some modifications, perhaps experiments, that are occurring in the conservation district program. We are not only expanding them, but there has been a program with the oldest conservation district, the Whitmud Conservation District, Mr. Chair, that will look at new ways of municipalities becoming involved in drainage issues and in the permissions and authority that is given for drainage. It is a pilot project. That was the word I was looking for. It is a pilot project at the moment. Obviously that particular conservation district is facing a very difficult situation at the moment, but over the longer term we do look for some useful reports from that.

On the specific issue that the member is raising about water strategy across the province, that the AMM has referred to and is obviously very concerned about, I think those are better referred to the Minister of Conservation.

Mr. Loewen: I thank the minister for that. We will take that up with the Minister of Conservation as well. But certainly the AMM

indicated that they were taking a real leap of faith in supporting the bill. The other condition, as the minister is aware, is the formation of watershed district boards. I realize there has been an attempt to align those with the conservation districts. There is some long history there that I am sure the minister is aware of.

I am just wondering if it is the intent of the department to align all of the conservation districts on watersheds, and, if that is not the case, are they contemplating establishing watershed boards to deal specifically with watershed issues?

* (17:00)

Ms. Friesen: Yes, I understand this issue. That is the desire to align watershed boundaries and conservation district boundaries. It is something the AMM is very concerned about and something they have talked to me about on a number of occasions. The issue of boundaries, whether we are talking health boundaries, school boundaries, municipal boundaries, watershed boundaries, ecological boundaries, biozonal boundaries, is always a difficult one. I think the ideal is to align them wherever possible. Sometimes issues such as history and local desires are equally as important.

In the case of the conservation districts, which is a relatively old program, as I mentioned to the member, the conservation districts do manage soil and water along watershed boundaries or on subdivisions of watershed boundaries. It is not an easy matter I think to move two entirely watershed boundaries for conservation districts, because they are funded jointly by the Province and by municipalities. It is not a matter of putting an overlay on the provincial maps and saying, okay, here are your boundaries, because municipalities want to deal with issues and watersheds, which are for the most part entirely within their boundaries.

It is an issue we are aware of. I think the intent is the right one, but it is not necessarily a straight line or an easy way to get there. I think municipalities and conservation districts are dealing with this in a flexible manner at the moment in dealing with subdivisions along watersheds as best they can, something certainly that we continue to be open to discussing. We

understand the intent of it, certainly the kinds of things that others have talked about as well in the environmental community and in the planning area.

Mr. Loewen: I certainly realize the difficulties in trying to align all of the conservation districts on the watershed on a watershed basis. My question to the minister is, given that may not be possible in a number of areas for a number of political reasons as well as other reasons, is the minister giving consideration to the AMM's request to form a watershed district board that would oversee water management for a watershed, realizing that in some cases it may be in addition to conservation district boards that are there? I think the AMM was pretty specific in their request that there should be a board, whether it is a conservation board or another board constituted to look after the water management plans specifically for each watershed area. I am just wondering if the minister has plans to ensure that each watershed district, each watershed, has a water management plan and a board that is responsible for the overall watershed area.

Ms. Friesen: I think we understand the intent of the AMM's concern. I think they are shared by many Manitobans. The water management plan that the member made reference to, the creation of water district boards, is certainly something that the AMM has talked about. My understanding, however, is that is not necessarily the only approach that they would see as feasible. So I think it does need some more discussion and certainly discussions with the Conservation Commission. We do have a Conservation Commission on which all of the appropriate deputy ministers sit, which does deal with cross-boundary management of water. The member will also appreciate that municipalities are the legal entities with which we deal, so that makes the conservation districts, I think, a useful vehicle. It has been an effective vehicle in many areas because we can deal with the legal entities of municipalities. The municipalities, the conservation districts also deal with both soil and water management. They are not just for drainage, but they have a broader mandate. In some areas, different parts of a mandate take a higher priority.

So I think the concerns of the AMM are shared by many Manitobans. We certainly will

continue to look at the proposals that they are making and to look at overall water strategies. I think the member is aware of the emphasis that the Government has put upon water issues, issues of clean water, the Drinking Water Advisory Committee that we had formed, and the issues that have come through both the Floodway and through the Premier's concerns for water issues to the south of us, as well as the emphasis that we have put in this department, is what I can primarily speak to, on the expansion of conservation districts. So we are, by putting money on the table, encouraging the expansion of people to plan with their neighbours and to plan for wet years and dry years, to plan for both soil and water management, and to expand that capacity across Manitoba.

Conservation districts, in some areas, do many of the same kinds of things that the watershed management boards, that the AMM has talked about, do. They do not cover all of the province. They certainly do not cover, for example, the area east of the Red, where there has been, under the previous government, a more immediate response to the issues of the '97 flood. So there is a different kind of approach there. It is certainly one that conservation districts may offer some direction to.

Mr. Loewen: I appreciate the answer from the minister. The difficulty that we have sometimes on this side of the House—and again I appreciate there has been a lot of emphasis on these issues, and particularly water issues and the rhetoric we hear from the government. We are trying to sort out the rhetoric from the actual actions of the Government. That is why we are going in this direction. I guess I would ask the minister then: Is there a water management plan in place today for each watershed in the province of Manitoba?

Ms. Friesen: I can advise the member, that in the 10 years of the previous government, the program of conservation districts expanded by four. In the 2 years of this Government, we have expanded the number of conservation districts by three, and that, to the best of my knowledge, every conservation district has a water management plan for its watersheds.

* (17:10)

Mr. Loewen: I appreciate the answer. I do not think it really answers the question, because the

conservation districts can certainly have water management plans, but is that in each watershed? Are they co-ordinated? I mean, can we say that each watershed has a water management plan at this present time.

Ms. Friesen: What I can advise the member is that the conservation districts, as I suggested earlier, are both soil and water management plans, so that in some areas, for example, and in some years, perhaps even decades, one or other of those might take precedent. Each of the conservation districts will, within two years of being formed—so that the new ones will not have their management plans yet, but those which have been formed earlier will—within two years, there is a management plan that is put in place for the resources for both soil and water, and every five years, as with municipal plans, those conservation district resource management plans for both soil and water are reviewed.

Mr. Loewen: I thank the minister for that. Just to follow up on that, maybe to finish it off, hopefully, can the minister advise if in the near future there will be a water management plan in place for each watershed district?

I appreciate the conservation districts manage both water and soil and that they have plans, but I think my understanding of what the AMM was looking for—I think there is a lot of merit in their request—is that every watershed have a co-ordinated water management plan, and where that watershed involves two or three conservation districts, that hopefully there is a master plan for that watershed district. Because I am sure, as the minister is aware, when they are broken up into parcels there certainly can be conflicts between what is seen as good by a conservation district versus what is the big picture and in fact going to be of most benefit to Manitobans in dealing with the entire watershed.

Is it possible for her to advise whether it is the intent of her department to have a water management plan for each watershed district within the province of Manitoba?

Ms. Friesen: I think the short answer is that in meeting with the AMM, and they have raised this at a number of levels with government, that we certainly have recognized the importance of

this and that we have agreed to work with them to further this proposal.

There is at the moment, the co-ordinating mechanism is through the Conservation Districts Commission on which sit both citizen representatives and deputy ministers from appropriate departments. The conservation districts present their annual plans, annual budgets to the Conservation Districts Commission, and there is an opportunity there for some co-ordination in the manner that the member is speaking of.

But I think what the AMM is looking for is something which goes beyond that and looks at all watersheds in the province, and we certainly agreed to work with them on that.

Mr. Loewen: I thank the minister for that. The other recommendation from the AMM was to make amendments to The Municipal Act and The Water Rights Act to clear up some of the confusion in terms of language between the two acts. I realize the minister is hesitant to go into pending legislation. I notice on the Notice Paper that there is a bill, The Municipal Amendment Act, No. 34.

I am just wondering, Mr. Chair, if the intent of that is to clear up some of the confusion in the language between The Water Rights Act and The Municipal Act, as recommended by the AMM.

Ms. Friesen: I have the Order Paper for today, and I do not see The Municipal Act on there. I have No. 33 as the last one. Is there a 34? Did I miss that?

Mr. Loewen: Just for clarification, on the Notice Paper, Notice of Motions for Thursday Next, under honourable Ms. Friesen, No. 34, The Municipal Amendment Act.

Ms. Friesen: Yes, I have found it now and it is there, Bill 34. All I can tell the member at this point is that we will have to wait for that bill, and any questions about bills from Conservation and his looking for comparison between the two would have to be directed to the Minister of Conservation (Mr. Lathlin).

Mr. Loewen: We will look forward to that bill. It has piqued my interest now. Maybe it has

something to do with the arena. That seems to be what we are having trouble finding out about these days. That concludes my questions on the municipal Water Services Board and this subappropriation.

* (17:20)

So if we could revert back to where we were, which I believe was subappropriation 13.1.(e) on page 28, I have a few questions. I would like to thank Mr. Menon for his assistance.

Under the Financial and Administrative Services, I would ask the minister if since the amalgamation of the two departments of Rural Development and Urban Affairs into Inter-governmental Affairs, has there been any type of financial cost-benefit analysis done with regard to the amalgamation of these departments to determine at least from a financial perspective whether any benefits have been realized?

I think if we go back to last year's Estimates, one of the objectives of combining the two departments was to provide some cost savings.

Ms. Friesen: I can advise the member that there has not been a formal written review, if that is what he is looking for. I can advise him, and I am sure he can work out the math on this as well, that there are more programs in this department, whether it is in Neighbourhoods Alive! or whether it is in the expanded conservation district program or whether it is in the expansion of planning or whether it is in the additional resources that are in community economic development and that the staff have not changed in number and in fact in some areas are less. So there is considerable pressure upon staff at all levels of the department.

I do not know what formal accounting methods there are to deal with the impact of that expansion with either the same or diminished resources. At the administrative level, I suppose in the minister's and the deputy minister's office, for example, we have one less minister than we had. We had a Minister of Urban Affairs. There was also a different minister who dealt with infrastructure. So those have all been combined into one department, where the predominant

number of staff obviously are still in rural development in one form or another. We also have one fewer deputy minister. We have certainly more than one fewer staff in terms of the minister's special assistants and assistants to the deputy minister.

So in the management area of the department there are considerably fewer resources. I can certainly say that for secretarial and administrative staff in my office that we have the same number of people who are dealing with an incredible—and I am only speaking from my own experience. I am not speaking from experience in the office of the deputy minister or of the ADMs, and I think perhaps some of the same issues are occurring there. At the secretarial level, we have staff who are dealing with an enormous increase in administrative and secretarial work as a result of the amalgamation of departments, partly a result, too, of the beginning of an infrastructure program when there is an increased amount of work and flow-through at various levels of the department.

The impact of dealing with the federal government, for example, in a joint infrastructure program in an adjoined office also adds to the secretarial and administrative levels. So we have not done a formal review of that, but I can certainly advise the member, if he was not aware already, of many levels of the department of expanded programs and of increased workloads for the same number or fewer staff.

This would be an appropriate time, in fact, to express my appreciation, on behalf of the Government, for the stress that I think has been there in the increased workload and the same amount or fewer resources. Certainly there have been some parts of the department where I think people have put a tremendous amount into the job, not just in terms of hours but in terms of community contacts, dealing with local communities and municipalities and certainly going beyond the call of duty.

Mr. Loewen: I thank the minister for that answer. I just want to clarify one point, though, because she mentioned that there is a lot of extra workload as a result of the Infrastructure Program. From her earlier answer, it is my understanding that seven new staff had been added as

a result of the Infrastructure Program. Am I misunderstanding her previous statement?

Ms. Friesen: Yes, I think there was a bit of a misunderstanding, or maybe I was not clear enough. Last year, there was 6.5 staff in Infrastructure. This year there is 7. My reference to increased workload dealt with two elements. One was creating a joint office with the federal government, Mr. Chair, and doing much more work together. It works both ways, in some ways as a sharing of the workload, but, in some ways, it also adds to it.

But the main point that I would make in terms of workload in infrastructure is that this is the first round of a new program so that gearing up for that this is the time when there is the first rush of applications. It is a time when people need the greatest amount of information, rapid responses on the telephone and by fax, et cetera, for people who are interested in applying and ensuring that they have accurate and up-to-date and standardized information for all people who are applying. So I am sure, as the member can appreciate, in the beginnings of any program, that those demands are always the highest. One would anticipate, a year into the program, that those demands might be a little less.

I have in front of me the Canada-Manitoba Infrastructure Secretariat staff. The total staff, as I said, I am just confirming what I said before, in terms of full-time equivalents, it was 6.5 last year and this year, that is, 2001-2002, a total of 7 full-time equivalents. Those are divided between 1 manager for professional and technical, 2 administrative support.

Mr. Loewen: I thank the minister for that clarification, and I am sure her staff is working very diligently and constructively, for the most part. It is probably a little frustrating for that Infrastructure staff to be working on evaluating proposals, only to see the Premier (Mr. Doer) out far ahead of them before the evaluation is complete, describing projects that he will support and that he will not support, based on his political wishes as opposed to the sound advice that I am sure he will be getting from the department.

In any event, I would like to move on to 13.1.(f), Program and Policy Development area,

which I believe was a new branch created last year. I guess my first question to the minister on this is has this new branch met the expectations that she laid out for it last year when she created it?

* (17:30)

Ms. Friesen: This is the former section of the department that was known as Corporate Services. One of its primary responsibilities is to deal with Rural Forum, which as the member can imagine is a very large undertaking and involves contacts with Nunavut, this year with visitors from overseas in a number of areas, as well as with the federal government in the development of the rural dialogue. There are 30 partners that we have in Rural Forum. So it is the managing of that and the communications around that which have formed part of the responsibility.

I think a second major responsibility of this section of the department has been the community profiles, the Manitoba Marketplace Web site, which was launched at Rural Forum this year. Last year this section of the department also undertook the creation of the Premier's Pipeline, that is the Web site that enables young people to interact directly with the Premier's office. They were also organizers of the Youth Forum or part-organizers, together with the Department of Education, of the very successful Youth Forum that was held at Rural Forum this year.

Last year, what we did at Rural Forum, was to have a round table of young people with the Premier (Mr. Doer). This year what we did was to have a much wider cross-section of young people who met for a full day from right across the province and then met in smaller groups with different Cabinet ministers. I participated in both of those experiments. I thought they were both effective in their different ways, but the latter one, the larger one, the smaller group discussions I thought were very, very effective. I certainly gained a great deal out of them. I think they were well-received by the young people.

So that sense of encouraging direct contact between government and between young people I think is an important direction that the

Government generally wants to move in. This section of the department in program and policy development enables us to take some of those early steps in that area.

The Marketplace Web site that has been developed with community profiles, several million bytes of information about communities right across Manitoba, is another important initiative of the department which enables the department to be part-partners with communities in defining themselves for the larger world. It is an interesting program, one that enables communities to present themselves as they would wish to be seen to the wider world, whether it is in tourism issues, whether it is in issues of economic investment, or whether it is to encourage immigration or migration within the province, Mr. Chairperson. It is, I think, a program which has also been developed with youth, a number of the people who are involved with this creating the videos. We had a very good demonstration of it at Rural Forum, both creating the videos and drafting portions of the Web site for different communities.

I think it has enabled young people to be part of a broader approach to Manitoba and enabled them to meet and to interact with people in communities they might not otherwise have dealt with. There was, in conjunction with Red River College, a video that was produced about the making of the Web site and about the community profiles. I do not know if the member had a chance to see it, but I thought it conveyed very well in a very short video the enthusiasm, the learning experience and the experience of Manitoba the young people who made that video for their course at Red River College, that they were able to have.

I think in terms of meeting the goals that were set out for the department as we moved into a new Government, that is of looking to the future, of working with community colleges, of expanding places and opportunities for young people in post-secondary education, bringing them into that sense of Manitoba and into the sense of a different, new government for Manitoba, I think some of those issues were met.

We could talk about Rural Forum. Generally, this is its ninth year. It is certainly a

program which I think was close to the heart of the previous minister. That is something which I have always spoken of at Rural Forum, because he is often there. In fact he was there this year and last year, and I know it is something that does remain very close to his heart.

It is an opportunity that is seized by many communities across Manitoba, as well as by people from Nunavut and elsewhere, as a means of networking, a means of exchanging experiences, about community development in Manitoba, about ways of, not just presenting themselves, but of learning from each other. I think that was the original intent of Rural Forum. It is certainly something which we have continued, and is a very major undertaking for the department.

It is something which the department I think is strongly connected with in the minds of the general public. It is always something about which I am asked, whether I am in Brandon or Winnipeg. Where is Rural Forum going to be? What is the next theme for Rural Forum? How are we going to be involved in coming years? I think it is something which has taken hold of the imagination of many parts of Manitoba, not all parts. It is difficult for some parts of the province to represent themselves at Rural Forum every year.

This is the ninth year. We are going into the tenth year of Rural Forum. It is something that I have begun to talk to both the department and to people whom I encountered at Rural Forum this year about. It is ten years at the end of this next one. Where do we go from here? What sense of direction do you want to give us? I am hoping at the forthcoming Rural Forum we will have that opportunity. Certainly, we have given a youth direction and youth participation to this section of the department.

* (17:40)

Mr. Loewen: I thank the minister for that. No one questions the value that Rural Forum has served. Unfortunately, due to a death in our extended family, I was not able to get to Rural Forum this year, but many of my colleagues were. Although there were certainly parts of it that were well done, there are certainly some

concerns on this side of the House for the direction that Rural Forum has taken. As I said, we will come back to that.

I guess a little more specifically, when the minister introduced last year that this department of program and policy development, this branch, had been created, she had indicated it had been given the mandate for program development and the development of new strategies and initiatives for our urban, rural and northern communities. I was interested in whether in fact she could share with us what new strategies, what new program development, had been developed by this department over the course of the last year since its inception dealing with urban, rural and northern communities. Are there any specifics?

Ms. Friesen: This section of the department deals with the information technology initiatives, some of which I have already mentioned; the departmental Web site; the Manitoba Marketplace; the community profiles; the community connections advisory committee, the rural component of that; and also liaises with the municipal administrators' association information technology committee.

It has dealt with community access programs for youth employment and also with the Premier's Pipeline and the youth programs that I mentioned earlier. It also provides support for the marketing and communications of some areas, Mr. Chair, particularly as we deal with the preparation of information for speeches and forthcoming, for example, the Neighbourhoods Alive! forum that we will be having in Winnipeg.

It also deals with international and other co-operation agreements. It has had the primary responsibility for continuing the Canada-Ukraine Legislative and Intergovernmental program and for the development of the prospective, and I am being very careful about this one, partnerships with Poland in a similar legislative program. It also undertakes many of the activities of the department in connection with the Nunavut memorandum of understanding. Consistent with the department's desire to work across boundaries and to encourage co-operation, it also has conducted regional round tables. We anticipate that that will continue in future months.

In conjunction with other departments, there are strategic initiatives that are being developed across departments. One, for example, is the Northern Development Strategy, of which this section of the department would be a participant.

Mr. Loewen: I thank the minister for that clarification. Just with regard to the Program and Policy Development branch, I noticed last year in the Expected Results was the, and I will quote directly from the Departmental Expenditure Estimates last year: Completion of an update to the Rural Economic Development strategy, support to the development of a provincial economic strategy, and introduction of a youth leadership community involvement strategy.

Given the minister's response, it sounds like a lot of work was done on the youth leadership involvement. I appreciate that. I am just wondering, as that expected result is not included in this year's Estimates, whether, in fact, there was the update to the Rural Economic Development strategy, whether there was a report completed, and if that report can be shared with the members of the Legislature.

* (17:50)

Ms. Friesen: That continues to be worked on. As I am sure the member can appreciate, it is not something which is being worked on entirely by the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs, although obviously there is a leadership role here. The departments of Agriculture, the Community and Economic Development Committee of Cabinet, as well as for example the IT sections of the Department of I, T and M are also obviously part of any rural economic development strategy. The regional round tables and the Community and Economic Development personnel, the Community Development Corporations and the liaison that we maintain with them, as well as with the federal program of community futures, obviously all these are part of considerations as we go forward to review the rural economic development strategies. This is the section of the department that would be the coordinating group.

Mr. Loewen: Is the minister anticipating that her department will provide a report on its new

Rural Economic Development strategy to the people of Manitoba?

Ms. Friesen: That is something that is being worked on across departments. I am not able to give the member a finite answer of time, place and document, but certainly that is something which is obviously of concern to government, in the city and in rural and northern Manitoba. Economic strategies and development strategies will be very much a part of the Government's future.

Mr. Loewen: Well, I am a little surprised and somewhat dismayed at the answer I received from the minister. Certainly the department, as it was formally constituted, was a Department of Rural Development, which had the primary responsibility, and, I think still carries a primary responsibility, for economic development strategies in rural Manitoba. Given that one of the expected results of this brand-new branch that was formed last year was the completion of an update to the Rural Economic Development strategy, that would lead me and, I believe, most other Manitobans to conclude that an update was undertaken of the Rural Economic Development strategy that this Government would use as a road map for its future plans in rural development.

I am surprised, if that in fact was what was expected of this department, that there is not a plan, if not in the immediate future, certainly some time in the not-too-distant future, to publish some type of statement or plan or paper outlining this government's Rural Economic Development strategy. Is the minister saying that that is not the case?

Ms. Friesen: What I said was I could not give the member an indication of the time, place or format that that would take place. What I did tell him was that many departments across government are working on a rural economic development strategy and that this department is the lead department for that. There is, obviously, a necessity to and a desire to communicate with Manitobans on this. There are a number of forms that that may well take. The connections through the Community Development Corporations, as well as through community futures and the

round tables that we have continued, in fact, to expand will be part of that.

Mr. Chairperson, we are also continuing our support for the rural development initiatives at Brandon University. We have expanded the Community Works Loan Program. We have expanded the work of the youth entrepreneurs, in fact expanded the definition of youth so that a greater number of people can take some encouragement from that.

So I think the member has to look at what is happening. He has to look at the programs that have been expanded, and he has to recognize that—I do not mean him in a personal sense—but the nature of the question also has to recognize that there are activities in a number of areas of government, whether it is agriculture, whether it is industry, trade or mines, whether it is tourism, whether it is culture and heritage, that do have an impact upon the way of life of rural Manitoba and the maintenance of rural life and rural communities. An obvious one, of course, is also transportation, as well as conservation.

So, what I did not want to give the member the sense of was that a rural economic development strategy would only be coming from this department. The department has a coordinating and a lead role, but the nature of life in rural Manitoba goes much beyond the confines of this department. It requires the expansion of many areas of the new economy. It requires investments in education, such as we are making. I know that the members opposite do not see this as a particularly significant area of vision. It has always puzzled me as to why they do not view investment in education as a vision for the future of Manitoba. But the expansion of Assiniboine College, the expansion of programs in the north, the expansion of distance education, the expansion of options for rural students in regional schools as well as in the smaller schools of rural Manitoba, are at the basis of what is possible and what the future can be for rural communities. I think rural communities themselves are very much aware of this. They talk frequently about the role of young people and the importance of maintaining young people in their communities, and hence the

emphasis upon a youth strategy within the Department of Intergovernmental Affairs as well as across government generally.

So education, transport, high-speed technologies, the investment in rural health care, the expansion of programs for rural doctors, and the encouragement of rural students to look at those kinds of ways of remaining in rural communities, all have a role to play. What I want to get across to the member opposite is how important almost every department of government is in maintaining rural communities. That is the direction that we are intending to go. It is not one that, again as I said, I have the ability right now to tell the member when there will be a report, what form it will take and how it will be delivered. We are certainly very aware of continuing those conversations across rural Manitoba.

We have, in fact, looked at the kinds of programs which the previous government had in rural economic development. Many of those programs have continued. Some of those programs we have expanded and I think the member is aware of which ones those are, such as the Community Works Loan Program, the REDI program, the Grow Bonds program.

I know that he does not think that two Grow Bonds in rural Manitoba in one year is a particularly astounding record but I think he might want to compare it to the later years of his own government. I think it is a reasonable beginning for this Government and is an investment in rural communities. I know that the member opposite has a great interest in—

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

Call in the Speaker.

IN SESSION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Conrad Santos): The hour being 6 p.m., this House is now adjourned and stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow (Thursday).

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Wednesday, May 23, 2001

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