



Second Session - Thirty-Sixth Legislature

of the

Legislative Assembly of Manitoba

**DEBATES
and
PROCEEDINGS**

(Hansard)

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Speaker*



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MANITOBA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Thirty-Sixth Legislature

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 2, 1996

The House met at 10 a.m.

PRAYERS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

PROPOSED RESOLUTIONS

Res. 4—Rail Line Abandonment

Mr. Jack Penner (Emerson): Madam Speaker, I move, seconded by the member for Steinbach (Mr. Driedger), that

WHEREAS the National Transportation Act 1987 eased the rail line abandonment process by requiring the National Transportation Agency to allow the abandonment of uneconomic lines except for lines defined as grain development branch lines; and

WHEREAS the Government of Canada will revoke the existing Order-in-Council or has revoked the existing Order-in-Council protecting all rail lines in western Canada from abandonment; and

WHEREAS the passage of Bill C-101, the Canada Transportation Act, which is currently before parliament, will free the rail lines from regulatory control over rail line abandonment; and

WHEREAS the passage of the Omnibus Finance Bill 1995 eliminated subsidies to rail transportation of grain and increased the competitiveness of trucking relative to rail; and

WHEREAS these actions will cause a diversion of traffic from rail to road, particularly on road networks linking farms and grain delivery points; and

WHEREAS these low volume provincial and municipal roads, connecting bridges will require upgrading to meet appropriate loading and safety standards at a substantial cost; and

WHEREAS such upgrading costs exceed the fiscal capability of road authorities, both provincial and

municipal, which are currently hard-pressed to finance existing demand on their roads; and

WHEREAS the rural municipalities have continually pressed the government of Manitoba to assume responsibility for municipal roads affected by abandonment because of the significant costs involved and limited resources of the rural municipalities; and

WHEREAS the Government of Canada collects taxes on road fuel consumption in excess of \$5.1 billion annually and has historically spent less than 10 percent on highways and infrastructure; and

WHEREAS the Government of Canada has steadfastly refused to contribute to a national highway system to assist the provinces in maintaining and upgrading a safe and efficient coast-to-coast network; and

WHEREAS the Government of Canada has an obligation to fund a national highway system so that all regions of the country will be able to meet the needs of farmers, other producers and the general public.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba petition the Government of Canada to provide appropriate compensation for road impacts due to the rail line abandonment and rail subsidy elimination.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I wonder if there is leave to accept the proposed resolution as read by the honourable member for Emerson. It has been somewhat revised, and I will reread it according to the resolution submitted. Agreed? Leave has been granted. [agreed]

It has been moved by the honourable member for Emerson (Mr. Penner), seconded by the honourable Minister of Natural Resources (Mr. Driedger), that

WHEREAS the National Transportation Act 1987 eased the rail abandonment process by requiring the National Transportation Agency to allow abandonment of uneconomic lines except for lines defined as grain development branch lines; and

WHEREAS the Government of Canada will revoke or has revoked the existing Order-in-Council protecting all rail lines in western Canada from abandonment December 31, 1995.

I purposely wanted to read that particular sentence because that was the slight revision.

Dispense?

Some Honourable Members: Dispense.

WHEREAS the passage of Bill C-101, the Canada Transportation Act, which is currently before parliament, will free the railways from regulatory control over rail line abandonment; and

WHEREAS the passage of the Omnibus Finance Bill 1995 eliminated subsidies to rail transportation of grain and increased the competitiveness of trucking relative to rail; and

WHEREAS these actions will cause a diversion of traffic from rail to road, particularly on road networks linking farms and grain delivery points; and

WHEREAS these low volume provincial and municipal roads, connecting bridges will require upgrading to meet appropriate loading and safety standards at a substantial cost; and

WHEREAS such upgrading costs exceed the fiscal capability of road authorities, both provincial and municipal, which are currently hard-pressed to finance existing demand on their roads; and

WHEREAS the rural municipalities have continually pressed the government of Manitoba to assume responsibility for municipal roads affected by abandonment because of the significant costs involved and limited resources of the rural municipalities; and

WHEREAS the Government of Canada collects taxes on road fuel consumption in excess of \$5.1 billion annually and has historically spent less than 10 percent on highways and infrastructure; and

WHEREAS the Government of Canada has steadfastly refused to contribute to a national highway system to

assist the provinces in maintaining and upgrading a safe and efficient coast-to-coast network; and

WHEREAS the Government of Canada has an obligation to fund a national highway system so that all regions of the country will be able to meet the needs of farmers, other producers and the general public.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba petition the Government of Canada to provide appropriate compensation for road impacts due to the rail line abandonment and rail subsidy elimination.

Motion presented.

Mr. Penner: Madam Speaker, I certainly concur that I should have probably explained the changes there because some of the typing here and the numbers are outdated.

The reason the resolution has come before the House and the reason I present this resolution today, and there is some urgency to this because we are seeing a very dramatic change happening because of federal policy changes in both the aspect of marketing and transportation policy decisions that have been made over the last year, year and a half. I think it is important to reflect at least somewhat on what these changes really mean to Manitobans in the farm community and the business community, the processing industry in much of Manitoba, and it is not only restricted to the rural Manitobans. It affects all Manitobans.

The elimination of the \$760-million Crow benefit now simply says that Manitoba farmers, grain producers, will pay \$760 million additional freight out of Manitoba into export positions each and every single year. The federal government made that decision. At the same time the federal government said, we will now relegate the legislation that was there previously prohibiting rail line abandonment. We will set it aside and allow the railways to make the decision based on an economical viewpoint as far as the corporations are concerned. There is no consideration given under that terminology of the agreement and the policy change that reflects the reality of the cost of moving grain into export positions. There is no consideration of that.

So, Madam Speaker, I would propose to the House that because of that decision the town of Gretna in southern

Manitoba will find itself without a railway because the line from Altona to Gretna will be abandoned. I think we have a number of other communities that will find themselves in that kind of a position over the next number of years. It will all be done to reflect the changes and the costs that will be incurred by farmers, but the true impact, Madam Speaker, is going to be relegated to the municipalities.

The federal government, I believe, has the responsibility to ensure that those municipalities are adequately compensated, as they were previously, to transport grain out of western Canada, and especially Manitoba because we will be affected to the greatest degree of any province, and the cost of moving grain out of Manitoba will be higher than any other province in Canada. Therefore, the federal government needs to pay some real attention and devise a compensatory package that will allow the province to sit down with the municipalities and devise a strategy that will put in place a network of highways that adequately will be able to carry the loads on a year-round basis that will be required to move grain out of these communities.

Otherwise, those communities will see themselves in a position where at periods of time of the year, such as we are incurring now, those communities and the farmers in those communities will have no access to market at all based on a policy decision reflecting the transportation system in this country. We have now been relegated to pick up and bear the cost of devising a network of transportation that will allow for that transportation of those commodities to take place.

Otherwise, I say to you that we will see a vast and major change in our agricultural industry in rural Manitoba simply based on the fact they will not be able to move the grain out of the province when they should. Some will argue, well, this will lead to further processing and those kinds of things. Yes, Madam Speaker, it will because the competitive factor will now drive the real cost of the product off the farm, and that is an asset, that is a plus, but the cost impact of where we draw the money from has changed totally.

* (1010)

Previously there was a contribution by all Canadians to the transportation system up to \$760 million. That is

gone. Previously we said to the railways, you must provide services to those small communities. That decision has disappeared.

So, Madam Speaker, I ask all members of this House to seriously consider the true economic impact and the massive changes that are going to take place within the next decade in Manitoba, and Manitoba will be affected very, very dramatically, significantly more than other provinces will be, and the elimination of a rail line from a community very often has designated that community totally irrelevant. So the social impact is a responsibility that the federal government must bear because of the policy changes they have made, and that is something that I think has not been properly considered. Therefore, I make the strong argument that because of the social impact, because of the economic impact, and because of the realities of the geographic location of many of the communities, agriculture being the end industry that has driven the economies in those small communities needs to be further reflected, and therefore I beg all of you to support this resolution, to ask the federal government to reconsider its compensatory obligations that we have to our citizens in this province, in the town of Gretna, in many of the other towns that will be affected by this kind of decision.

Will there be savings? There can be, Madam Speaker, simply because the competitive factor will now drive the forces which will bring the trucking industry, in a large part, into play to a much greater degree than we have seen in the past. If those savings can be transferred then into an economical road network, let us do that, but let us recognize the fact that we all jointly have a role to play here, and that the federal government's responsibility and the resources they draw from this province in taxation of the fuels and licensing, and all those kinds of things that they derive revenue from needs to be recognized. The redistribution of those funds needs to be added to the current distribution of funds that we see from Ottawa.

So I ask members to please recognize the predicament that many of our rural communities will face because of this decision, recognize that. Take a look at the hard and harsh realities that these communities will face, and if we can supplement that by additional road networks, maybe some of these economic impacts can be offset by encouraging trucking industries to develop in those communities and thereby build again on the

transportation system that we have been used to. It will explicitly need the consideration of our federal government to reflect the realities that they have caused by policy changes that will affect the farm community.

Ms. Rosann Wowchuk (Swan River): Madam Speaker, I want to thank the member for Emerson for bringing forward this resolution because it is a very important resolution and an issue that is causing a lot of concern in rural Manitoba. I think that it is one that the federal government should have thought through before they decided to change the Crow benefit, and those people who supported the federal government in their plans to change the Crow benefit should have thought about what the implications were going to be. Those are implications, just as the member for Emerson is raising, that we raise on this side of the House because we are very concerned about what is happening to our rural communities, and with all of this deregulation, what is going to happen to the farm community.

We just found out that the National Transportation Agency is going to allow railway companies to raise freight rates for grain shipment, and that along with the other costs that farmers are having to pick up because of these changes. Now we see that the railway companies have the ability to charge even more money. We have to wonder what that is going to do. In fact, there is going to be an increase of rate allowed to a maximum of 7.5 percent over last year's rates to destinations such as Thunder Bay, Vancouver, Prince Rupert and Churchill.

Of course, Madam Speaker, you know that in this House, on this side of the House, we have been very concerned about, and raised many times, the future of the Port of Churchill. I want to say that this is going to have a very negative effect on rural communities, and the member for Emerson raised that. I want to just reflect a little about what we have seen, just as railway line abandonment will, we see what has happened in communities where the main highway does not go through. I see this right in my own constituency where if the main highway is going through a community, well, the community will survive a little longer, but if the highway is not going through it and now the railway is taken out of that community, it is going to have a very serious effect.

Our roads are not built to the level to take the amount of trucking and the size of trucks that are being required

to travel now. As the trucks move greater distances, they haul larger loads, heavier weights, and you can see a tremendous impact on the roads. You see it right on the No. 1 Highway, but you see it right in our constituency where we have the additional logging traffic in the area, and there is going to be a tremendous burden on the municipalities and on the province to maintain these roads.

The federal government does have a responsibility. They have pulled \$760 million out of transportation, but they have taken no consideration as to what the impact is going to be on the communities. I have communities in my constituency that are very concerned. For example, I just had calls this weekend from the people in Fork River and Ethelbert. In both communities there are elevators. In both communities they are very concerned with the legislation that is before the federal government right now that the railway lines to those elevators will be abandoned and what will happen.

The impact will be, for example, in Fork River, where there is a very good elevator. The elevator has been upgraded and will probably end up being an inland terminal, and all of this traffic is going to have to go on the roads. That road, that No. 20 Highway, is just not fit to carry that much traffic. It is not at the level where it would be maintained. We have to call on the federal government. I think that not only should we be calling on the federal government to put money into the roads, I think we have to call on the federal government to reconsider their plans to abandon some of these lines. In some of these communities, abandonment of the line will mean the end of the elevator and a much greater cost to the farmers.

Members across the way and members on this side of the House know that farmers operate on a very narrow margin. If you have to pick up additional transportation costs, there is very little left. Although the price of grain appears to be going up, and it is, finally farmers are getting a good return for their grain, but they are also picking up additional input costs on fuel, on fertilizer on which there is no control, and now they have the extra costs of additional transportation. Aside from that, Madam Speaker, the additional cost that rural people are going to pay is the taxes that they will have to pay to maintain those roads. That is a very serious concern because, as I say, there is a very narrow margin on what

they operate on in all rural communities. We have to look at the social impact in these communities.

* (1020)

We all know that just as with health care, when a person leaves the community to get their health care services somewhere else, the same thing applies with farming. A person, rather than hauling your grain into a small town, for example, Fork River, and you have to haul your grain to Dauphin, at the same time you are going to go there and have other businesses done. There is a whole drain on the social economics of the community.

The federal government should have thought this through when they were changing it. I think that the members of the provincial government should have thought through—no, it was the federal Conservative government that began the dismantling of the Crow benefit, and the members of government did not speak out about it then, and they should have. We should be very concerned about what the federal government is doing with regard to the complete deregulation of the railway service, the move that they are making to allow for rail line abandonment, the moves that they have made to eliminate subsidies on the rail transportation of grain. All of this is going to result in the diversion of traffic onto our roads which are not built to the level.

I think here in Manitoba, as you know, Madam Speaker, where we as farmers are going to pick up the highest proportion of the transportation costs, we have to look at other alternatives, and we have to look at how farmers can get their grain to market at a more reasonable cost.

We have a lot of hope for the Port of Churchill, and farmers across the province, particularly in the Parkland Region and in the eastern part of Saskatchewan, feel that by shipping grain through the Port of Churchill, they will continue to have the opportunity to get a fair return for their product, for although the change to the Crow is going to change how we use grain in this province, Madam Speaker—and the member talked about a move towards processing, and I hope that we will see more processing in this province, but we also have to recognize that there are markets around the world that want our grain in its natural state, in its raw state. They will not

buy processed food. We have to have a transportation system that will allow that grain to get to market and get to those foreign markets.

The railway system is the cheapest way of getting that grain there, or it used to be until the federal government made these changes and until the federal government gave the ability for the railways to increase the rates that they are charging for grain shipment. But we have to ensure that there is a good railway system, and I hope that, along with trying to get the federal government to pay money into the roads, this government would also say, but you have to recognize that there are certain lines that are essential and cannot be abandoned, and in some of these areas where the lines are abandoned, communities are going to be destroyed and it is going to put a tremendous burden on farmers in the area.

So, Madam Speaker, I think this is a good resolution. It is one that we would like to see the federal government move on, that we would hope the federal government would take into consideration. I think that each one of us should be contacting, and I hope each of you have, your member of Parliament to make them realize that the decisions that they are making are hurting our rural community and the federal government has to take some responsibility in this. I would also hope that members would recognize that in certain parts of the province it would be far more economical to keep the railway going rather than shift all the traffic over onto the roads.

You know, you have to look at other parts of the world, and I sometimes do not understand where we are going in Canada. In other countries, people are looking for ways to improve their railways so there is a more economical and more environmentally friendly way to transport product in the country.

Here in Canada we have abandoned that idea. We seem to think that if we shift everything over to highway transportation, and quite frankly, I am concerned about safety, as well, when you travel on some of these roads and you see these very large trucks hauling chemicals, hauling fertilizer and grain and fuel, I think that it would be much safer to move those products by rail, and I think that is a big mistake that we have made, that the federal government has made, I should say, in making the changes that they have made to the transportation system and shift over to trucking. It is much more expensive in

my opinion. It is not as safe on the highways, and it is also a cost that municipalities and provinces cannot afford to pick up.

So, Madam Speaker, I think this is a good resolution. It could have gone farther. I would have wished that the provincial government would have been more critical of the federal government when they made the move to change the Crow benefit and would have lobbied to ensure that Manitoba had fairer treatment. It was a big mistake to change the Crow as we did. There were suggestions made that if the Crow was going to be changed that there be a phase-out period, but we did not get that from the federal Liberals nor did we get that recommendation from the provincial government here.

So this move is a good move. It is one that we would like to see. We would like to see the federal government take on more of their responsibility rather than just draining money out, that they would take seriously into consideration the impact that their decision of draining all this money out of Canada will have on the people in Manitoba.

So, Madam Speaker, again, I want to reiterate for those people in my constituency who will be affected, we have seen rail line abandonment. We saw the Cowan subline abandoned, although the people requested the government to fix up the whole line, they chose to only fix up the short portion of it, so that Louisiana-Pacific could get their wood out, but they did not choose to fix up the rest of the line which would have helped the elevator at Ethelbert. I would have liked to have seen more support for that plan from this government, but when we put that proposal forward, we did not hear very much support from them.

Also, Madam Speaker, I want to emphasize that again we have to have grain going through the Port of Churchill, but moves to increase the freight rate through those will not be in the best interest of the rural community. We will continue to urge the federal government to recognize the error of their ways in changing the Crow benefit and ensuring that they take on their responsibility, urging them to take on their responsibility to pick up their share of the costs that will be a much bigger burden than municipalities or provincial governments can pick up.

So, with those few comments, I thank you.

* (1030)

Hon. Albert Driedger (Minister of Natural Resources): It gives me pleasure to support the resolution. It is a pretty substantive resolution with all the WHEREASes, and I will be a little picky and choosy about which area I concentrate on.

I just want to say, Madam Speaker, that in another seven days it will be eight years since I had the privilege of being sworn in as a minister of the Crown for the Province of Manitoba. For the first five and a half years, my responsibility as minister of the Crown here in Manitoba was as the Minister of Highways and Transportation.

An Honourable Member: And a fine minister, too, Albert.

Mr. Driedger: I appreciate that. Thank you. Anyway, in reading the resolution, it made me think back to some of the debates that have taken place even in the last eight years related to the Crow, and, in fact, I can recall back far enough when Pete Adam was here in the House at one time many years ago. He was a member for Ste. Rose at the time and he had these buttons, Save the Crow. That is a few years ago, but I will not necessarily get into the rail line abandonment end of it that much.

I would rather concentrate on what I think should be the responsibility of the federal government and their obligations in supporting the transportation system in this country because during my tenure as Minister of Highways and Transportation the challenges were there continually about rail line abandonment. There was legislation in place that allowed certain things to happen at certain times, and railways were challenged to be financially economical and responsible, and as a result some of the abandonments took place. We would have liked to see things stay the same all the time. That is not the reality of life.

We had asked them to be responsible in many things, and when they made some of those decisions, even in terms of layoffs, and there was ongoing debate in this House as to should it take place or not. But that is a thing that I think corrects itself, and now that we have the Crow being deleted, this Crow subsidy being deleted, it gives another angle into the whole debate as to what

happens with grain movement, what happens here in the province of Manitoba, which I think is ideally located in the centre of Canada, but when it comes to moving grain to either the west coast or to Thunder Bay, it has the disadvantage of the freight, especially with the deletion of the Crow.

So adjustments, I think, will take place, and I think there is going to be, in some cases, a negative effect. In some cases, I think there is also going to be some positive things happening. I would like to say that the positive impact probably would be most felt in a place like my constituency, southeast Manitoba, which is very livestock-intensive, where we have the feather industry, we have the dairy industry, we have certainly the hog industry, and I am promoting very strongly the expansion of the hog industry, and I know the feed mills that basically are in my area out there are doing very well.

They haul grain from as far away as Saskatchewan, and all of that, of course, is done by truck because there are very few rail lines within the southeast area, so most of that is done by trucking. That is where I want to talk about the federal government having some responsibility. They made some of these decisions that ultimately are affecting movement, and this is how the farming community is affected, and I think they have an obligation. I want to make reference to the fact that when I was Minister of Highways and Transportation, we were that close to a national highway program.

In fact, we have been working on that for a substantive period of time, and it was the Conservative government at that time that we thought was going to make that decision. The case had been laid well with all the provinces across the country, and we were all in agreement that there should be a national highway program. We had worked out the details in terms of identifying in each province what should be part of the national highway system, and Manitoba was the strongest proponent of this system, because the deputy at that time, Boris Hryhorczuk had been working on this even prior to my getting involved as minister. We had a very definitive plan that basically had been developed through the ministers' conferences. The only component that was missing was the feds who continually dragged their feet, and that was a Conservative government, as well.

I am not choosing sides here, but the basis of our argument, to bring forward a national system, was the

fact that the feds were putting taxes on the road system and were generating revenue, as it says in the resolution here, over \$5 billion worth of revenue that they taxed out of this road system—[interjection] I do not have those details—and gave very, very little of it back. That was the basis of our talking about a national highway system.

The time when we thought they would do the announcement, all of a sudden they changed their position, and deals were being made with the eastern provinces who invariably always ended up with better deals. That is why we thought, if there was a national system with a sharing formula in place in terms of what would happen, that would have been very positive. However, that went by the wayside, and, when they started making some announcements for the eastern part of the country, it was then I made contact with the then-federal minister for Manitoba, Jake Epp.

Being very disturbed at that time because we had the bridge and locks at Lockport that basically they were trying to transfer to us, we came forward with a very strong position and managed at that time to come up with what was called the SHIP program, Strategic Highway Improvement Program, where we then identified, federally and provincially, certain roads that were going to be improved.

That program, I believe, is terminated now. It has been completed. We managed to get certain cost-shared funding on it. I think that is an obligation that the federal government has reneged on. There is nothing further again. I know that the Maritime provinces invariably—and I will say this critically. The federal government invariably has put more money into there than they have in the western part of Canada.

When I was out on one of my ministerial meetings, we had this giant structure, a bridge that is being built between PEI and New Brunswick, a phenomenal project out there, tremendous cost and a lot of federal money into there.

An Honourable Member: A lot of politics involved.

Mr. Driedger: A lot of politics involved is right. My argument is that there is not a consistent approach in terms of cost sharing between the feds and the provinces in terms of these things, and, of course, we all know it is

difficult to replace money. They have over \$5 billion worth of revenue that they tax off the road system and put very little of it back. I think that is where the weakness of the system comes in.

It certainly is very important for Manitoba because I have to say that the shift that has taken place from rail, the bottom end is going to take place. If it is not economically viable, they will close the rail lines, and that shift started taking place even before then already, from rail to road and the trucking industry. It is a very important part of the economy for Manitoba because we have, what is it, over half of the national trucking companies are headquartered in Winnipeg, and I think it has always been a very important part of our economy.

I could tell you that the port of entry at Emerson, for example, I think, is the fourth largest truck port of entry in Canada. There is a tremendous amount of trucking that goes through there. In fact, when we were out there the other day looking at the flood situation, my colleague the member for Emerson (Mr. Penner) was telling me that between 400 and 700 trucks a day come through that port of entry.

With Highway 75 being closed, we have to divert the traffic around there, but it just goes to show the impact of that industry on Manitoba. So I think that I would want to have all members support the resolution so that we can take and continue putting our case forward to the federal government that they should realize their responsibility in terms of sharing some of the revenue that they have generated through taxes. Canada is very unique. When you look at the size of Canada, transportation is a very, very important part of that. When we presented our case to the feds at that time in terms of a national highway system, Canada was the only progressive country that basically did not have a national system. When you drive in the States, they have a very substantive system in place that was done by the federal government. They have never managed to do that.

I think many people always thought that our federal government participated in the Trans-Canada Highway. They have done bits and pieces, but it has been very, very minute, and just having travelled to Ontario a few months ago, I have to say, though, that we have not done badly as a province here. I want to give accolades to the Province of Manitoba in terms of their road system. You know the

money that has been put in there because it was in 1977, '79, 1981, I believe, at that time the member for Pembina, Don Orchard, was the Minister of Highways, and, at that time, the Province of Manitoba had put \$100 million into the Capital program.

I have to be a little political here. After that, of course, when the NDP took over, it took a real dive, and we brought it back up again when I took over as Minister of Highways and Transportation. [interjection] Oh, yes. Constantly, I tell the member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk) check the figures, check the figures.

* (1040)

But we have at least brought it back up to the \$100 million a year that has been expended in Capital on highways, and it has stayed that way. I always felt it should have been more then; I think it should be more now. Comparatively to Saskatchewan, they have a much more extensive road system than we have, and they knocked the heck right out of theirs. That was, of course, under the NDP government, as well. So our system, by and large, has not been a bad system when we consider that the Trans-Canada Highway is almost twinned from border to border. You try driving into Ontario and find out what their road is like, the Trans-Canada. What a piece of junk. I was embarrassed that that should be part of the Trans-Canada.

An Honourable Member: I do not think Mike Harris is going to fix it up.

Mr. Driedger: Well, I have some hope that maybe the Trans-Canada in Ontario is going to be fixed up because I understand the Premier of Ontario comes from Sudbury—[interjection] No, not Sudbury.

An Honourable Member: North Bay or somewhere up in that area.

Mr. Driedger: Yes. So I expect, having come from the northern part of Ontario, that maybe there is going to be some improvement of the roads there. Northern Manitoba has relatively good roads too.

Madam Speaker, I was accused many times of not taking and giving consideration to roads in northern Manitoba. Prior to my being removed from Minister of

Highways, I toured the North road for road, all the way down to places like Norway House, Moose Lake, et cetera, because the pressure was coming down from the colleagues the members of the opposition, complaining about the North, and many of the roads were much better than the ones we had in the south.

That is a fact. I mean, I got sort of taken in, boy, starting to feel a little guilty. When you go out and look and find out exactly what has happened—you look at Highway 60, for example, which is the connecting route from The Pas down to Grand Rapids, in that area there, a beautiful piece of road, miles and miles. I have travelled it many times. Sometimes I counted four or five cars between that whole long stretch. I was amazed.

When we look at what happens on Highway 59, Highway 75 or the Trans-Canada, you know, the amount of traffic that is generated and the economy that is driven by that kind of thing—I am not slighting the North, but I do not think that it is justified when the members from the North keep crying about the roads all the time. That applies no matter where you go. Many of the comments that the member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk) made reference to, you know, the changing of the loads, the roads have not been built for that, the bridges certainly have not been built for the kind of loads that are being hauled now with the big trucks, the big semis, the feed trucks, et cetera.

So there are problems there, and I think the federal government has to participate. Municipalities alone cannot continue to finance that. The provincial government has the same handicap, and if it were not for the fact that there was over \$5 billion being collected in Canada off the road system with very little of it put back, it would be a little different argument, but I think there is a moral obligation for the federal government to work with provinces to bring up the transportation system.

Mr. Stan Struthers (Dauphin): I am pleased to rise today to talk on transportation problems and rail line abandonment that affects rural Manitoba so much, including my own riding of Dauphin.

Madam Speaker, in her novel called *Where Nests the Water Hen*, Gabrielle Roy described the little town of Rorketon as a bustling community. This was several years ago, decades ago. At that time Rorketon was a

bustling, busy community, lots of people around, lots of people in the district, lots of activity in a little town. Today I am not so sure that Gabrielle Roy would refer to Rorketon as a bustling community. Many things have changed over the past number of decades in that little community in my riding. I used to live in Rorketon, so I can talk first-hand about the things that people told me went on years ago in that small community.

Do not get me wrong, Madam Speaker, Rorketon today—

An Honourable Member: Sounds like kind of an exciting place to be.

Mr. Struthers: It is a very exciting place to be, as the Minister of Environment (Mr. Cummings) can attest. He has been there before. They have some of the best bonspiels in the province of Manitoba. It is good cattle country, and the people there work very hard to keep their community alive and well.

I would suggest to you, though, that the No. 1 difference between Rorketon today and Rorketon a number of years and decades ago is that they no longer have a rail line connecting their community with Ste. Rose to the south. Now, for people who have not lived a whole lot of time in rural Manitoba, it might be easy to not understand the importance of a rail line to small towns in small communities in rural Manitoba. Many of us, though, who have lived in rural Manitoba understand how vital it is to have a rail line connecting your community to the so-called outside world.

Madam Speaker, years ago, the older folks in Rorketon whom I had the opportunity to talk with told me of all the things that happened in that little community because of the rail line. So much of their activity was centred on the rail that connected them to Ste. Rose. The trains came into Rorketon three times a week, and one of the big social events in Rorketon, at the time, was to meet the train on Friday night and welcome everybody into the community, meet them at the train and then take them throughout the community to the different events that were planned on the Friday nights. [interjection]

Now, the member for Turtle Mountain (Mr. Tweed) laughs and says I would not remember that, and he is right. I am not that old. I am too young to remember

actually being there, but being a good representative of the people in Rorketon, I take the time to listen to what they tell me. I take the time to listen to the stories they impart to us, and I think every member of the House has a responsibility to hear the information passed down from one generation to the next. I would hope the member for Turtle Mountain does the same thing in his riding because there are Rorketons all over this province. There are little communities who depend on the rail for their very existence, and I would think that the member for Turtle Mountain has those challenges in his community, and I hope he is listening to understand the importance of a rail line and how negative rail line abandonment is for rural Manitoba.

Let us look at a couple of the facts that present themselves in this whole discussion on rail line abandonment. The member for Emerson (Mr. Penner) very correctly points out that \$760 million being sucked out of the rural economy by the federal government will have a very negative impact on the way we live in rural Manitoba. He also correctly points out that this is not just a problem in rural Manitoba, because as goes rural Manitoba, so goes urban Manitoba. Taking \$760 million out of our rural economy will have a negative impact on the whole province.

The problem that I see, specifically with the provincial government that we have in power here now, is that at the same time as they are pointing fingers to the federal government and whining about the amount of money that they are taking out of our rural economy, and changes to the Crow rate, and complaining about the offloading that the federal government is doing, they are simply turning and pointing the finger down to the R.M., the municipal level, and transferring that cost to the R.M.s.

The provincial government is not going to be the big sufferer in this whole switch in policy by the federal government. The people that are going to be hit are mainly two groups, No. 1, the farmers because farmers now will be spending more on transportation, getting their products, whatever they may be, to market. The other losers in this are going to be the rural municipalities. We have seen that over the course of the last few months, where this government has simply taken provincial roads and proposes to dump them on the rural municipalities. This is not the first time this provincial government has done that. This government did that two

or three years ago. They said, too bad, R.M.s, you have the roads, you are stuck with them.

Now, this offloading that the provincial government is doing is not just caused by the federal government taking \$760 million out of our economy. It is not caused just by changes to the Crow benefit. This government is saying that it does not want to raise taxes. It does not want to cut services, so they are going to let somebody else do it. This government is dumping its fiscal problems that it created onto the backs of the rural municipal councils. The rural municipal councils which have various levels of ability to deal with this problem—and the member for Gimli (Mr. Helwer) ought to know this. R.M.s in his own riding have contacted us, saying we cannot afford to do this. We cannot afford to have the provincial government dumping their responsibilities on us by giving us all the provincial roads.

* (1050)

Now, I do not think that is a very responsible way to deal with the realities that are out there. I think what the provincial government should do is stand up and say, the provincial roads are our responsibility. We realize that the actions taken by the federal government are going to increase usage and the damage done to our provincial highway network. We, as a provincial government, are in the best position to deal with that, and we are not going to shirk our responsibilities and simply dump them on the municipal level.

Now, the resolution that has been put forward makes some very good points about how the federal government, the federal Liberals, are abandoning rural Manitoba, as well.

As a federal candidate in the 1993 election, I can remember going to different auction sales and farm yards, and I was taking with me a petition against the changes to the Crow rate, against them, like the NDP have done for years. Well, how did we do? We did about 2,000 votes better than the person who would not sign that petition, who was the Tory candidate in 1993.

The Tories have gone for years, federally and provincially, saying we have to get more competitive. We cannot rely on subsidies. We have to be like the Americans with their system for agriculture. Now, here

we are with the federal government doing exactly what the Tories have wanted them to do for years. Now we get a resolution come to this House, complaining about the very thing that the provincial and federal Tories have been arguing for for years.

Those of us who have been battling against both the Conservatives and the Liberals are a little bit miffed that all of a sudden, out of nowhere, for political reasons, we get a resolution like this brought to the House. Who is going to suffer through all this? All this federal and provincial offloading and all this federal-provincial squabbling, in amongst all this we have forgotten that the people who are going to suffer in this are the farmers, and in particular small farmers who cannot afford to buy humongous trucks to cart their produce out to market.

The other thing that I think we have to consider is this change to the Crow rate in combination with other changes that are contemplated in the agricultural world. In particular, I want people to understand that the lack of support for the Wheat Board by both federal Liberals and Conservatives, and now I am understanding the present provincial government, that lack of support for the Wheat Board, in combination with changes to the Crow rate, is going to have an absolutely devastating effect on small farmers in our province.

The larger farmers, and particularly large farmers close to the American border, they may benefit if they can produce enough to satisfy that American market. I would challenge people in all parties, on both sides of this House, to get out to rural Manitoba where there are some small farms struggling right now, where you are increasing the costs of them getting their produce to market. I want to challenge people in all 57 ridings in our province to get out there and talk to some smaller farmers who are really going to be hit hard by the combination of the loss of the Crow benefit and the potential loss of the Canadian Wheat Board. The two cannot be seen as separate. They are interconnected.

Who else wins? The federal government sees this as a win for them because now they are saving themselves some money. They are abandoning one of the principles that our country was built upon and that was equalization. This is a form of equalization, and again it is the eastern interests who control the Liberal Party and

I must say the Conservative Party before them, who are saying now, the eastern interests and the grain companies, you are going to do okay in this, some of the larger farmers are going to do okay in this, but the people who are going to suffer are smaller farmers predominately north in the farm zone in Manitoba, north of the Trans-Canada Highway where they are too far from market to really take advantage of anything that is positive in agriculture these days.

The entire grain policies of the federal government today have been one of helping the corporate farm, the large corporate farm, who does not have the same interests in a community such as the little community of Rorketon, which I started out talking about. Those small communities across rural Manitoba were built by a multitude of small farmers, small farm operations, keeping our schools active and vibrant and full of young children, keeping our curling rinks going, keeping our skating rinks going.

If we accept what is going on right now with the federal government and if we do not stand up against what is happening, we are going to watch our smaller communities dwindling away. Indeed, we have already seen some who have turned into ghost towns. Some of those larger towns now are dwindling and it is because of rural depopulation and it is because of increasing costs to farmers which is at the base of this.

While I support the gist of this resolution and do not want to let the federal government off the hook, I do want the provincial government to think of some of the suggestions that I have made this morning and use that to temper whatever response they have to the federal government policy.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Hon. Jim Ernst (Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, I wonder if there might be leave to continue debate on this resolution. I know that there are two or three other members who would like to speak, and there may be some willingness to adopt the motion once debate has been concluded.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave of the House to not see the clock at eleven o'clock and to proceed with debate on this resolution?

Ms. Wowchuk: Madam Speaker, just on a point of clarification, I am wondering how long the minister is proposing. Is the minister proposing that we take the next hour for this resolution and not bother with Resolution 5, which, it was my understanding, was also going to be debated today?

Mr. Ernst: Madam Speaker, it was my understanding that there may be one or two more members of the official opposition, one member of the Liberal group here, and maybe one or two on our side. It may well take the next hour to complete all of those, but we would try to bring it to a vote by the end of private members' time today.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave? Agreed? [agreed]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure that I am given the opportunity to be able to put a few words on the record with respect to the resolution introduced by the member from Emerson (Mr. Penner). I listened very closely to some of the comments that were put on the record, in particular, those from the member from Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk) and the member from Steinbach (Mr. Driedger) put on the record.

When the member from Steinbach made reference to the need to have some form of a national highway system and a federal government that would be prepared to commit resources to a program that would see this come to light, it would be very difficult to argue against some sort of a national highway program. It is something which in time, hopefully, we will, in fact, see.

What we would like to do, I guess, is start lobbying today or at least continue the lobby. No doubt, the type of program that is being talked about would cost a considerable amount of dollars. In the last federal election there was a great emphasis put on the infrastructure program, and no doubt there are many municipalities across the country that would like to see yet another infrastructure program.

* (1100)

Then we have groups, interest groups, and legislators advocating for a national highway program, and there are numerous programs that could be instituted by the federal government, whereas there are limited financial resources in order to allocate out. We look at it in terms of the

importance of having a highway system, and the benefits of having a highway system to the province of Manitoba in particular are just overwhelming.

If there are things that we can do to facilitate and encourage the federal government to invest more in highways in the province of Manitoba, we would like to do that. If, in fact, for example, Madam Speaker, there is another infrastructure program, hopefully what we will see is the provincial government argue ultimately for more of those dollars being put into our highways.

The member from Swan River's comments, I thought, were most interesting in the sense that I get from the New Democratic Party's perspective that they would be quite content not to change the system, to again defend the status quo. For example, the member from Swan River said, Madam Speaker, what the world wants is our raw materials, and they are not necessarily prepared to buy the finished product, and the rail line abandonment and the loss of the Crow are going to put Manitoba in a worse position as a result of that.

I do not believe that argument. I do not believe it for a moment. I do not believe that members of Parliament in Ottawa believe that argument. We think ultimately that rural Manitobans and the initiatives that they have been able to muster over the last couple of years, in particular, have clearly demonstrated that Manitoba can produce a world-class product and that we do not just have to rely on raw material in order to have exports going out of the province of Manitoba.

I believe that there is a need for the federal government, in co-operation with the provincial government, to look at ways in which we can actually diversify the rural economy. When the Crow was dismantled, Madam Speaker, there were monies that were allocated. Those monies the province of Manitoba had access to, and if we do this thing properly there could be many more jobs in the province of Manitoba created. The opportunity is there for more farms to become better diversified to be able to compete and so forth, that we do not have to have the mentality of the past, the past being one of the province of Manitoba being a hinterland and shipping out all of our raw resources.

The other point that I picked up is just a very strong negative attitude that the New Democrats apparently have

towards the trucking industry. Madam Speaker, there is great potential, again, and Manitoba has the headquarters for a number of trucking firms that are across Canada. There are, in fact, from what I understand, a number of jobs that are there today that are looking to be filled particularly in long hauls. The New Democrats should not be as negative towards the trucking industry as a whole.

There are concerns that we have with trucking through some of the deregulations and the drop in pay that truck drivers have seen over the last while, and maybe there might be something that we could do to further enhance trucking conditions in ensuring that there are some standards, if you like. But I would not necessarily be as negative towards the trucking industry as the member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk), and I trust that she is speaking out on behalf the New Democrats in some of the comments that she has made, to have more faith and confidence in the different industries that can and will be able to prosper as a result of some of the federal initiatives.

There are some federal initiatives that ultimately do need to be addressed, as the member for Steinbach (Mr. Driedger) has pointed out, the national highway program, and getting more dollars invested into that is a legitimate concern, Madam Speaker. We trust that not only is the provincial government trying to get the feds to cough up dollars, but the province is also prepared to sit at the table with dollars. It is, in fact, a two-way street, that we do want to see a better developed highway system in the province of Manitoba.

We also want to ensure throughout rail line abandonment that it will be minimized in terms of the negative effects of that, and, most importantly, that we have the rail line that goes to Churchill. Whatever can be done to enhance that particular rail line should be done, because what we are talking about there in many ways is the future, to a certain degree, of the Port of Churchill. Most Manitobans, including I, believe that the future of Churchill can be one of prosperity if our priorities are right.

With those few words, Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak.

Mr. Edward Helwer (Gimli): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to be able to put a few words

on the record regarding the member for Emerson's (Mr. Penner) resolution here on rail line abandonment.

I want to go back in history a little bit, Madam Speaker. In the early 1970s, the federal government appointed the Hall Commission to deal with branch line abandonment. At that time, I was on a committee—the Interlake Development Corporation had a committee, and the manager at that time was the late Eric Stefanson Sr., who worked very hard on this branch line abandonment for the Interlake area. Because he had a lot of experience and because the late Eric Stefanson was a former member of Parliament for Selkirk and because he had a lot of experience both federally and provincially and in transportation issues, we had put together a plan for the Interlake area that would serve the Interlake area for the next 25 years up to the year 2000 at that time.

At that time we had four branch lines in the Interlake area, and the one that went through from Grosse Isle to Argyle, Inwood up to Fisher Branch, was abandoned. CN abandoned that line. That left us three lines, and we now have three lines serving the whole Interlake region. The one line running up through Selkirk into Gimli is a CP line. That is a nongrain-reliant line, so that one will continue to operate because of the freight going up to the distillery at Gimli. The portion from Gimli to Riverton was abandoned, and the Riverton elevator was closed, so it is now just a transportation handling facility where they haul it by truck from there to Arborg. But it is so important in the Interlake area, if you look at the history of what happened to the rail lines, the one going up the centre of the Interlake that serves Stonewall, Balmoral, Teulon, Arborg.

These are all very large grain points, but the problem is, the elevator companies have been doing nothing to enhance their own grain handling there. They have made no improvements to the pools. The Patersons have done nothing to improve their own facilities really, so I do not know what is going to happen in the future. It seems the grain companies, they want to build high throughput elevators on the main lines and they want the farmers to truck to those high throughput elevators, and we already have one at, Pool has a big high throughput elevator at Rosser. Aggro, down here on McPhillips, has made an improvement to their elevators. They handle a lot of grain from the whole north of Winnipeg area. So I do not know how long we will be able to sustain these branch

lines, as an example, up through Teulon and Arborg and Stonewall, even though Arborg handles a lot of grain there.

* (1110)

What has brought about the changes is not so much the provincial government, the changes in the Western Grain Transportation Act, of course, by doing away with that. Certainly it is going to change how we do business in western Canada and especially in Manitoba, because it is so very important to us because of the fact that we are so far away from the B.C. port and so far away from Montreal. So it has a real impact on us and the branch line abandonment and the way the Western Grain Transportation Act and all these things have had a real, very large effect on how our farmers are doing business in Manitoba.

One thing it has done, it certainly is going to enhance the hog production, livestock, whether it be cattle, turkeys or chickens. Of course those are controlled by the supply management group, so there is no way farmers can start producing turkeys, which is another of the quota system, such as the supply management in the poultry industry. That has hurt the farmers again, because you cannot start farming. You cannot get a quota to produce broiler chickens or turkeys. Supply management has hurt this industry and there is a demand in Manitoba; Manitoba farmers want to expand in these things, but they cannot do it because of the fact of the controls of the supply management system.

The member for Dauphin commented on the fact that we did not improve the roads. Let me tell you, our government, we spend more money on highways in Manitoba than we take in from gas tax. The federal government, on the other hand, takes in more money than we do on the gas tax, and yet they spend nothing, not one dollar on the highway system in Manitoba. Therefore, it really puts a strain on our budget, on our resources, to try to maintain these highways and to build new ones and to build new ones and to improve them, but I can assure you that in the last eight years, since 1988, our government made a lot of improvements to the highway system of Manitoba.

The member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers) forgets that the NDP were in government for 16 years prior to that,

and what did they do? Absolutely nothing. They did nothing to improve the highway system. They let them deteriorate to the extent whereby we had to spend a lot of money to improve them. They let the provincial road system go. They did nothing to improve them. When we came to power in '88, we inherited this mess that the former government left, so our Minister of Highways at that time did trade some roads with the municipalities and the municipalities did take over some of these low volume PR roads, and it made sense because they have the equipment and they would be able to look after these better than the province.

No, we did not transfer a heavy debt load or a heavy expenditure over to the municipalities. As a matter of fact, in this year alone, our municipalities are going to have a 6 percent increase in revenue because of the tax-sharing system that we have with the rural municipalities in the town and villages. So they are taking advantage of the growth that we have in Manitoba and the extra money that is coming in that is going to the municipalities so that they can spend more money on the roads and improve the street system in Manitoba. So the member for Dauphin is really doing his constituents a disservice by saying that we are not fixing these roads. He should look back a little bit and look at what the NDP left for us and the mess we had to clean up.

The member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) talked about the infrastructure program and really that is an excellent program, and we would like to see that program extended so that we could get some federal dollars, get them to spend one-third of the some of the infrastructure money that we could spend on some of the drainage on the highways and things of that nature in Manitoba. This was an excellent program. It was established a few years ago but it has served Manitoba very well, and we were one of the first governments to take advantage of some of the money that was there and it has worked out very well for us in Manitoba. I would like to see another program such as we had for our rural municipalities and towns and villages to take advantage of some of these things to improve some of the roads and streets in Manitoba.

(Mr. Marcel Laurendeau, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair)

This is another example where the federal government could take some of that gas money, or motive fuel money,

that they are collecting in Manitoba from the truckers and from all the other people who use our highway system. They could give us that money back, and we would be glad to cost-share some of the improvements on some of the highways, and whether it be the PR roads or the provincial trunk highways or the towns and the streets. This would give us an opportunity to improve those and certainly would be a great benefit, not only to agriculture and help the rural economy but also help tourism in Manitoba and help everyone involved.

Tourism as you know is a real growing industry in Manitoba and especially in my constituency up Highways 8 and 9 with the beach communities there and the cottage areas, creates a lot of traffic on those roads and those highways. It would be nice if the federal government would come in and share some of those costs, some of those improvements, but unfortunately that may not happen in the near future, I understand. It is too bad, the Minister of Highways (Mr. Findlay) talked about how we were very close to a national highways program. This would have been an excellent way for the federal government to cost-share some of the roads and improve some of our transportation system here in Manitoba.

Just some of the things that are changing in Manitoba and as to why we need an improved highway system and not only because of the branch lines that are closing—that is certainly putting an extra load on our highways—but also the expansion in some of the other value-added industries that have been taking place, such as the expansion of the potato industries, the expansion that Simplot has planned for their fertilizer plant in Brandon. All that product has to move by truck to other points in Manitoba and Saskatchewan and North Dakota possibly or wherever they sell their product, so that, again, puts more stress on our highway system, so it is expansions like this.

SaskFer in Saskatchewan is expanding its fertilizer plant there, and, again, some of that product moves into Manitoba, therefore creating more of a load on our highway system and hence the need for more improvements to the system, and all the other, the livestock, the hog production, the increase in the cattle that we have, especially in the Interlake area. In the last number of years, the livestock populations have certainly expanded and grown, and this has been great for agriculture. Hog production, there is another example of

a real success story in hogs; the prices are excellent and hog production has continued to expand. This also creates more demand for our feed grains, and that will move by truck to the feed mills that produce the feed for hog production, these hog farms. This, again, creates more and more stress on our highway system, and this is why we need more assistance from the federal government to help offset our costs on some of these provincial trunk highways and also the provincial roads in the province.

Hog production, livestock, the potatoes, the expansion of Simplot, the expansion of the canola processing plant at Ste. Agathe, all these things are just great for Manitoba and create new initiatives, new opportunities for our farmers, and will serve our producers for many, many years to come, but, on the other hand, it does put more traffic on our highway system; therefore, we will need to improve it.

How much time have I got left there, Mr. Deputy Speaker? Two minutes. Okay, great.

Just getting back to the way things have changed and why we need better roads and better highways, and why the branchlines, by their closing, have created more transportation problems. Do not forget that, back in the early '70s there, our trucks were made to haul 74,000 pounds. Today they haul in excess of 140,000 pounds. Therefore, we need increased strength in our bridges, in our roads, and everything.

* (1120)

So just talking about the extra weights that these trucks haul today, back in the 1970s, as I have said, they were hauling 74,000. Now they haul 140-some thousand pounds. This has created a cost to our transportation system. The bridges that we have to build today to be able to carry these weights have to be improved a lot. The roads, the concrete and the blacktop have to be improved to be able to carry these kinds of weights, so they do not get the dipping that we have had in the past.

Another thing in my area that has created extra stress or extra wear-and-tear on our road system has been the quarry operations just north of Stonewall there that produce quite a number of jobs in the area. There are quite a number of companies there that have limestone

crushing plants, and a lot of that limestone is hauled into Winnipeg, used in the building and construction trade. That, again, creates more transportation problems, more stress, and more traffic on our highways, the truck traffic, so we do have to continue to improve our highways in the Interlake.

So, with that, Mr. Deputy Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to put a few words on the record.

Mr. Gerard Jennissen (Flin Flon): Mr. Deputy Speaker, although I am sympathetic to the argument that the member for Emerson (Mr. Penner) makes, I do have some concerns about the direction that that resolution seems to be taking.

I do not like railway abandonment any more than any other member in this House does, I am sure, and I was struck by the member for Dauphin (Mr. Struthers) talking about Rorketon and how that little community was affected, you know, by railway abandonment and how at one time it was a bustling community and it is perhaps not quite the same way today.

I can only think of my own home town in Saskatchewan, Eavesham, that used to have four elevators along the railroad and today there is not a single elevator there at all. I think we have lost something. Perhaps I am being awfully nostalgic and not market oriented enough, I am sure, but I think we have lost something. That silhouette of the elevator against the skyline was one of my first impressions of Canada when I came to this country. It will always be with me, and I really miss that. Those huge concrete piles that make things much more efficient just do not have that same emotional impact.

I was also struck by the fact that the member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux) said that the New Democrats have a strongly negative attitude towards trucking—

An Honourable Member: Did he say that?

Mr. Jennissen: He actually said that, and I want to put on the record that that is not true, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We are certainly in favour of trucking and a strong trucking industry in Manitoba, and we note with satisfaction that some of the major truckers have their headquarters in Winnipeg.

I am concerned, however, that when we talk about having the feds give us money to fix roads that need to be fixed because rail lines are abandoned that we are into a process that we have not really examined that carefully. As the member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk) said, we have not always thought about the implications of what the feds do or what we do either for that matter. What I mean by that is, when we deregulate or privatize a national railway system, as the federal government is doing, along with ports and along with some airports, we decry the negative impact of that as it hits our province.

At the same time, we are on the same kind of a bandwagon, at least the government is, saying, well, there is nothing wrong with privatization. Take a look at home care, for example. There are negative effects of that, for sure. So you cannot have it both ways. You know, if privatization is so bad for the feds, how come it is so good provincially for the government? I do not think they are being consistent. I note that irony. They scream a lot at the federal government when their privatization and deregulation affects us negatively, but they seem to turn a blind eye when privatization hurts ordinary workers in the home care field and, of course, the clients, as well. That concerns me.

I would like to talk a little bit about the railroad to Churchill, because that is a line that I think is absolutely critical to this country, to this province for sure. It is essential for the health and the safety of the bayline communities. It is essential for the Akjuit space centre to survive. It is essential for tourism. It is essential for a whole lot of reasons. Again I notice some kind of ambivalence in the federal government when on one hand they say the Port of Churchill is important and the bayline is extremely important. We will put money into it, \$27 million possibly. We are willing to ship a million tonnes of grain through Churchill. But nothing ever really seems to materialize in that direction, at least not to the extent promised. So again there is a real difference between what the federal government promises on the one hand and actually delivers in reality.

I do ask the honourable members in this House, however, to support the Gateway North project, because I think it might be the only hope for salvaging the line and not just salvaging, making it grow and also making sure that the Port of Churchill remains a viable port. So the Gateway North project is an extremely, extremely good project.

The members opposite seem to assume that it is inevitable that we must go from rail to road, and certainly that seems to be the trend. I think the Minister of Highways (Mr. Findlay) at one time quoted me the fact that whereas railroads at one time carried 80 percent of the goods, now that is down to 20 percent, and big trucks have taken up the slack. But I do not think that we can assume that is inevitable. It is only inevitable if you say that the marketplace runs everything, if that is the arena in which you operate. There need not be inevitability there. We have just allowed it to happen. If that is what we allow to happen, then we better be prepared to pay for the extra costs, the road building cost, the infrastructure cost, the bridge costs and so on.

This does not come cheap, and I will not even mention the fact or talk much about the fact that the member for Swan River (Ms. Wowchuk) talked about, the safety factor, because the more I travel roads in the North, which by the way are not nearly as good as the former Minister of Highways says they are—I would, in fact, invite him to travel with me on 391 or the road to Norway House in the early spring and see if we can even get through.

They are not nearly that good nor are they nearly that safe because, as more traffic operates on those roads, particularly logging trucks and ore trucks, the potential for accidents increases. So I do have some concerns globally in the sense that we are using scarce fossil fuels for more trucks, for more on-the-road vehicles rather than what I believed to be a cheaper system which is a railroad system. It is also a system that has united this country and tied this country together, and I would hate to see that system fall into disrepute.

The kind of vision that the members opposite have and that also the federal government seems to share, that the marketplace will sort everything out, I have grave reservations about that. Yes, there are some positives, but there are also a lot of negatives, and the very fact that in this resolution the member for Emerson (Mr. Penner) is asking the federal government to compensate us shows that there are some real negative impacts of rail line abandonment, of being a part and parcel of that vision which leaves it all up to the marketplace, because a lot of us get hurt if we leave it up to the marketplace, as many home care workers are going to start discovering and are discovering right now and are trying to fight right now.

The former minister of Highways talked about the federal government at one point being involved with the SHIP program, that is the Strategic Highway Initiative Program, I believe it is called. Yes, that was a good program, and that is the kind of vision I guess that we once had when we talked about railroads knitting various parts of this country together. That was the purpose, to do nation building, and I do not see that in this private enterprise vision. There is no nation building, there is a lot of buck building, a lot of making a dollar.

At one time we had a vision of connecting the north and the south and the east and the west. Rural communities and remote communities and northern communities had value, the same way as Toronto had value or Vancouver, the highly industrialized with the highly populated areas.

* (1130)

If you go to the user-pay philosophy, the privatization direction, then remote areas and rural areas are not going to have the same kind of value, and that is very unfortunate. I think we do not want to go down that road too far.

I am going to keep my comments very short to give some of my other colleagues a chance to speak, and before I close I just overheard the Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism (Mr. Downey) say something about roads in this province which I thought was rather interesting. I hope you do not mind me quoting him. He said, you know we need stronger roads, we need better roads in this province; it is good for jobs; it is good for the economy, and besides, it has the added benefit of allowing Liberals to leave the province.

Hon. Darren Praznik (Minister of Northern Affairs): I just would like to take a few minutes to add some comments to this particular resolution, as well. I understand there are some other members on the other side of the House who wish to add some comments to this.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, as a rural MLA who represents a constituency with a fair number of roads that connect to main roads and to an interprovincial road system and ultimately an international road system, and as a member who has seen rail service in his constituency decline

significantly over the last number of years—we lost the line to Lac du Bonnet and the grain elevator that went with that. We lost a line that we had that went through—actually the original Canadian Pacific line running east to west, the one that was built by William Cornelius Van Horne that goes through the town of Beausejour, in fact that original main line going through the town of Beausejour was heading to Selkirk, and the roadbed was actually built to Selkirk. Before the rail was laid to the town of Selkirk, the civic leaders of Winnipeg offered the Canadian Pacific Railroad a much better and more lucrative tax arrangement, if I remember correctly, or financial package, and it was far better than the financial arrangements that existed in the town of Selkirk.

One of my colleagues points to the speculation that was taking on at the time, and the result was the main line turned near East Selkirk and went south to Winnipeg and crossed the Red River in Winnipeg. That line—and interestingly that line eventually became a branch line; it was abandoned as a main line—some years ago was abandoned even as a branch line leaving only a spur siding into Beausejour which is a major grain delivery point.

So we have seen over the last number of years in our own area the loss of the ability to move grain and other products by rail and an increased demand on our road system, and, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as you see this develop, the types of vehicles being used in my own constituency now, heavier and heavier trucks on the road—we have a number of operators in my area who have got into exporting product directly into the United States, other places abroad, moving by trucks, heavier and heavier vehicles. It has put a greater and greater strain on our provincial road system and consequently, as well, onto the municipal road system. I do not think they should be forgotten in this equation, because one of the realities of this time of the year in rural Manitoba is that as road restrictions go onto provincial roads, it often means that the transportation gets moved onto the municipal road system, with the consequence that the municipality bears that additional cost of maintaining roads.

I have a couple of roads in my riding, particularly in the Beausejour area, that are used very heavily in the spring, because of provincial road restrictions, to service a seed plant southeast of the town. The net result of course has been a greater cost in road maintenance.

When I meet with municipal people, when I chat with my colleague the Minister of Highways (Mr. Findlay) just about the cost, the sheer cost of maintaining a road network, it is really phenomenal. I do not think most Manitobans fully appreciate the cost of dollars, the cost to them as taxpayers, that go in to maintaining a road system. It is horrendous. I know this time of the year, many of us as rural members have been out touring drainage areas, dealing with municipalities. We look at the cost of drainage, which is huge to maintain.

So we have a very great expense in maintaining basic economic infrastructure of drainage and roads in our rural communities, and what is so troubling about this is when we look at the federal government and the positions that they have taken, they have used the transportation system as a source of taxation. There are gas taxes, fuel taxes that they levy regularly every day, that are paid in this province of Manitoba. Virtually not one penny returns, except the odd grant, the odd little program that comes around, not one penny returns to that infrastructure to maintain and support it. Yet they derive significant revenue from it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, this particular resolution, I think, is an expression of that frustration that we have seen, from us as a province and our municipalities, in having to support what in essence is now the national transportation system, ground transportation system, our road system, with limited support from the national government, while they continue to derive the lion's share or take the lion's share of taxes which come from that system.

I do not make that as a partisan comment because that has existed through a number of governments, but if the national government wanted to take a major step towards ensuring a strong road infrastructure to support the economy of this nation and the changes that are taking place in it, I would very strongly argue that is an area that they should relinquish, quite frankly, in their taxation policy, or put the money in.

We as a government spend a very significant portion of our transportation taxes on maintaining that infrastructure through one mechanism or another. That is our responsibility. The national government taxes but contributes very little, and I always get a great kick as a politician out of when I hear our federal Liberal M.P.s

and their infrastructure program, talking about all the jobs they have created and all the good they have done. When you look at what they have collected in taxes, as the Minister of Highways and Transportation (Mr. Findlay) has said many, many times, compared to what the put in, it really is very, very small.

In these days when we talk about national unity, in these days when we talk about where the country is going, in these days when we talk about what it takes to have a strong and successful and competitive nation into the next century, maintaining a strong and operational transportation system on the ground in this country—and we know there have been shifts between rail and road. Well, we cannot always deal with those things. Those are going to happen, but maintaining a strong road system throughout our country that provides I do not think an extravagant system but a system that is well maintained and services from point to point is a necessary part of the future economic development of this country.

If a government is deriving taxes from that, then they should be contributing to that particular system, whatever political party is in Ottawa. We have seen again, more specifically to this resolution, the changes in the Transportation Act with respect to rail line abandonment, and the additional pressure that will be put on our road system with a minimal compensation package, quite frankly, to make up the difference is not acceptable. It is not acceptable to us as westerners, who have the largest road infrastructure to maintain with the fewest number of people to maintain it because of the topography and nature of western Canada, a large prairie region with large acreage farms and not the population to support those roads. That is unacceptable.

If I may, Mr. Deputy Speaker, a few final comments about the type of hypocrisy we have seen in the way people are treated on this and other issues. Our current national government has very strongly in its rhetoric always talked about national unity and common national standards and ensuring that Canadians are treated the same from sea to sea and that Canada have one set of laws. We need to be one nation. How many times have we heard that? Over and over again. Yet I remind the member, I remind members of this House on this particular issue, which is a western issue in this particular act, we had very little happening. We had the total removal of the subsidy, very little compensation, and yet

dairy producers who are subsidized by the federal government located primarily in eastern and central Canada had a slow, long phase-out of their subsidy. Is that equal treatment? I say not at all. They were treated very differently in the withdrawal of their subsidy than westerners were. We have lived with ours, but we should at least expect that a national government would treat all agricultural producers, if they are getting out of subsidy, in the same way because it is our tax dollars that support that subsidy, as well.

We have seen it on the GST, as well. Our tax dollars, again, are going down, a billion dollars of tax money—proportionately, western Canadians pay a share of that—going to buy off the Atlantic provinces in a deal that ends up with having a multitude of applications of the same national sales tax. I mean, I grew up believing if you lived in Canada, you should be treated the same way in Canada with taxation whether you live in western Canada, in British Columbia, in Ontario, in Newfoundland or the Territories. Yet today we have a national government that has the same national tax applying differently in different parts of the country.

Thirdly, in the same consistency of argument, look at the tobacco tax issue. Another example. This is a government that argues that they want one health care system across the country and yet have a tobacco tax that they collect at a greater amount in certain provinces than they do in others. So where is the consistency? This is exactly part of the same thing, western Canadians being treated significantly different from other Canadians by the national government. That is not the way to build a country and Minister Dion, as he tries to struggle with these issues as a new cabinet minister, should be looking at some of these real-life, everyday issues in building the country and not just constitutional theory.

* (1140)

So this resolution comes, I think, at a good time from a larger context. I gather from comments of some members of the opposition that I have heard that there is a sense that this represents a view that can be shared by the vast majority of Manitobans, and we have seen a lot of good will in this private members' hour. This is another opportunity, I think, to send a message to the national government about the way fairness should apply right across the board. We will live with tough decisions

as westerners as long as all Canadians have to live on the same basis, and that has not been the case.

Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Clif Evans (Interlake): Mr. Deputy Speaker, I just want to make a few comments with respect to this resolution presented by the honourable member across the way, and, yes, I think on this side of the House we do, and rural members certainly do, support the idea that the federal government has in fact and in deed offloaded much of their responsibilities to us here provincially with rail line abandonment.

A good example, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is right in my own community of Riverton, where some seven years ago the CP Rail totally shut down their line coming from Winnipeg Beach right up to Riverton, and not soon after that, the elevator in the community, of course, shut down.

What that means, too, besides the fact that rail lines and roads and transportation are so important in rural areas, is the fact that it also affects the rural economy. By shutting down rail lines, not maintaining our roads, not having that responsibility, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the rural economy suffers because of it. Since 1989-90, when the rail line was abandoned, it has created an awful hardship on the roads in my constituency, an awful hardship.

Now, of course, the producers, not only the grain producers but the hog-producing productions, turkey-producing productions and fishing have had to travel further with their vehicles, with their trucks, to take their products to another community, have had to increase the loads on the trucks, causing a greater hardship on the provincial roads that we have in place, and I know in other constituencies it is the same way, that it has, indeed, created a tremendous hardship and burden on the roads in our areas.

The resolution says that rural municipalities have continually pressed the government of Manitoba to take responsibility for these roads, and members opposite say, well, it is the federal government's fault. The feds are bad. The feds are not supplying us with the proper resources that are needed to maintain our rural structure and our roads.

Well, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I have to comment on the fact that one member indicated that the federal government's offloading is hypocrisy. Well, I say that the

hypocrisy also lies with this government in this province. He says offloading from the feds has created this un-unity, and, in fact, this government, just a year ago, had indicated to the municipalities that they wanted to offload the municipal roads and the maintenance of the municipal roads onto the municipalities, onto the local jurisdictions.

We need a strong road system, there is no doubt about it. But there is also the fact that one kettle is calling the other kettle black. One is saying, it is not my fault, it is their fault, but, in fact, this provincial government is saying to our municipalities and our local jurisdiction leaders that it is going to be now your responsibility to undertake the maintenance of these very important roads that are needed for grain transportation, that are needed for transportation of other products, and they are saying to the municipalities, we do not want to take responsibility for that. We want to give the responsibility to the municipalities.

But I do agree that we should be working together to go after the federal government in an agreement and do what is necessary to be able to provide the resources, so that we can work together as municipalities, as a province and as a federal government to be able to put a system together where we can have the monies, if you want to say, or the resources, to have the availability to improve our rural roads.

That is not happening, and, yes, we are providing a tax base and tax money to the feds from this province through our fuel taxes and other taxes. Yes, they are not taking the initiative to be able to provide us with the necessary resource to be able to maintain and improve the roads in our system. The municipalities in this province in rural northern areas are saying no to this government. They are saying no. They are saying, we do not want the rural roads to be a part of our major responsibility; that it is going to cost us thousands upon thousands of dollars.

On one hand, the province is saying, well, we have to go after the feds. The feds are bad. They do not want to give us anything for what they are taking away from us, but, on the other hand, they are also saying, we are just as bad because we are offloading responsibility onto our local jurisdictions and our municipalities.

Mr. Deputy Speaker, I mean, I certainly do agree. As I said earlier, I agree that we should certainly be going

after this federal government. We certainly should be making our point that we cannot, in rural Manitoba and in rural areas, survive without proper road maintenance and proper road development. If that is taken away from us, then we are not going to have a system. We are not going to be able to drive anywhere in rural Manitoba. Not only are the roads important for our agricultural industry but also for our tourism industry. Tourism is very important, as important as the agricultural industry is to rural areas in Manitoba.

If it is all taken away, if the infrastructure of highways is depleted and continues to be depleted, then we will not have that either, and what other alternative do we have? There is not another alternative. The only alternative is that we can convince this provincial government to uphold its responsibility to rural Manitobans, uphold its responsibility to provide the proper maintenance and upgrading and development of the roads that are so necessary, not only for our grain transportation, not only for our local transportation, but also our economic development and our tourism. Offloading, offloading, offloading, that is what this government has undertaken, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and then on the other hand is blaming the feds for just about everything that they do to offload their responsibilities.

Rural municipalities do not agree with that, do not want that. They want to be able to have this provincial government take the responsibility that they are so elected to do, and that is provide the proper services, one of them being roads, another being health care and education. This resolution just brings about the fact that, again, even though we have a problem, we are going to have to unload it on somebody, and let us go after the feds and say how bad they are and have us agree with that. We agree. Maybe they are that bad, just as bad as this government, this provincial government, in not accepting their responsibilities to rural Manitobans, to the economic benefit of rural Manitobans and to our agriculture industry, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and, certainly, even though we support the resolution, I would think, on the other side, this government should undertake to maintain its responsibility to people in rural Manitoba. Thank you.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question? Is it the will of the House to adopt the resolution?

Some Honourable Members: Agreed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Agreed? Agreed and so ordered.

Is it the will of the House to call it twelve o'clock? [agreed] The hour being twelve o'clock, this House is now recessed until 1:30 p.m.

The House recessed at 12 p.m.

After Recess

The House resumed at 1:30 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

PRESENTING PETITIONS

Home Care Services

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Madam Speaker, I beg to present the petition of Thanasi Alexiou, Edward Matheson, Ana Jarmoszo and others requesting the Premier (Mr. Filmon) and the Minister of Health (Mr. McCrae) to consider reversing their plan to privatize home care services.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood): Madam Speaker, I beg to present the petition of Henny Salie, Bianca Cucu, Shannon Martin and others requesting the Premier and the Minister of Health to consider reversing their plan to privatize home care services.

Mr. George Hickes (Point Douglas): Madam Speaker, I beg to present the petition of C. Cudmore, J. Burr, D. Bohemier and others requesting the Premier and the Minister of Health to consider reversing their plan to privatize home care services.

READING AND RECEIVING PETITIONS

Home Care Services

Madam Speaker: I have reviewed the petition of the honourable member for Point Douglas (Mr. Hickes). It complies with the rules and practices of the House (by leave). Is it the will of the House to have the petition read?

Some Honourable Members: Yes.

Madam Speaker: Yes? The Clerk will read.

Mr. Clerk (William Remnant): The petition of the undersigned citizens of the province of Manitoba humbly sheweth:

THAT on at least six occasions during the 1995 provincial election, the Premier promised not to cut health services; and

THAT on December 16, 1995, a plan to privatize home care services was presented to Treasury Board; and

THAT this plan calls for the complete divestiture of all service delivery to nongovernment organizations, mainly private for-profit companies as well as the implementation of a user-pay system of home care; and

THAT previous cuts to the Home Care program have resulted in services being cut and people's health being compromised; and

THAT thousands of caring front-line service providers will lose their jobs as a result of this change; and

THAT profit has no place in the provision of vital health services.

WHEREFORE your petitioners humbly pray that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba may be pleased to request the Premier (Mr. Filmon) and the Minister of Health (Mr. McCrae) to consider reversing their plan to privatize home care services.

Madam Speaker: I have reviewed petition of the honourable member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux). 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.

Madam Speaker: Yes? The Clerk will read.

* (1335)

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

THAT on at least six occasions during the 1995 provincial election, the Premier promised not to cut health services; and

THAT on December 16, 1995, a plan to privatize home care services was presented to Treasury Board; and

THAT this plan calls for the complete divestiture of all service delivery to nongovernment organizations, mainly private for-profit companies as well as the implementation of a user-pay system of home care; and

THAT previous cuts to the Home Care program have resulted in services being cut and people's health being compromised; and

THAT thousands of caring front-line service providers will lose their jobs as a result of this change; and

THAT profit has no place in the provision of vital health services.

WHEREFORE your petitioners humbly pray that the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba may be pleased to request the Premier (Mr. Filmon) and the Minister of Health (Mr. McCrae) to consider reversing their plan to privatize home care services.

PRESENTING REPORTS BY STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES

Committee of Supply

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

I move, seconded by the honourable member for Sturgeon Creek (Mr. McAlpine), that the report of the committee be received.

Motion agreed to.

* (1340)

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Manitoba Telephone System Privatization

Hon. Glen Findlay (Minister responsible for the administration of The Manitoba Telephone Act): Madam Speaker, I have a statement for the House.

For nearly 90 years, the people of Manitoba watched their telephone company, MTS, develop and grow. In return, MTS has continuously provided affordable, reliable service to many generations of Manitobans in every corner of the province. MTS, by and large, has been a stable company run by Manitobans for Manitobans.

Today, as we begin a new chapter at MTS, we must and we will maintain this sense of stability and continuity. That is why, in converting MTS from government ownership to a publicly traded company, we are offering Manitobans an exclusive opportunity to purchase the majority of shares in the company, thereby ensuring that the voice of Manitoba will be as strong today as it always has been in protecting the services that the province has come to depend on.

But, while Manitobans will be given the opportunity to continue controlling the company, not everything will stay the same. Change is coming, some of it forced on us by circumstances in the telecommunications industry but mostly change that is forced on us by the future itself. You see, the Manitoba Telephone System is in danger of being overcome by the future. Responding to these challenges means selling MTS in an effort to allow us to build upon the foundation Manitobans have worked so hard to create.

Not long ago, equipment and services we take for granted today were unheard of, undreamed of, things like fax machines, modems, voice and data transmissions, the World Wide Web. As we look forward just five or 10 years, it is apparent the technology will continue to change and at an even faster pace than it has in the past.

But with change comes opportunity to open new doors, to introduce a sharper management focus, to alleviate the debt load and the opportunity to help MTS meet the future on its feet and ready to grow.

MTS can have a strong future, but Manitobans have to reach out and grab it because there are a number of formidable obstacles in the way.

Firstly, we must overcome the huge debt load, the largest debt load of any telephone company in Canada. It is an anchor that is bogging down MTS and threatening its very survival. At the same time MTS

faces an increasingly urgent need to finance an extensive modernization program, a full system upgrade worth half a billion dollars aimed at ensuring MTS is capable of providing a full range of future voice, video and data transmissions.

In this day and age of rapid change and increasing competition, government ownership also creates obstacles, obstacles that slow MTS down, that hold the corporation back from pursuing new growth areas like wireless technology, that prevent the corporation from seizing important and valuable market opportunities before its competitors snatch them away first. The Manitoba Telephone System has done well under the government's wing, but the days when it can afford to be just a simple telephone company are long gone. MTS must be able to keep pace, must be able to continue to provide reliable universal service at affordable rates, must be able to create new opportunities for future generations, but this will only happen if MTS stands alone, free from the ties of government.

Converting MTS to a publicly owned company will allow all of this to become a reality, because the best guarantee of affordable rates, reliable province-wide service and jobs is a prosperous, growing MTS.

Further, by offering Manitobans exclusive opportunity to purchase the majority of shares in MTS, we will ensure the decisions continue to be made in Manitoba, by Manitobans, for Manitobans.

To accomplish this goal, we will grant Manitoba, MTS employees and MTS retirees special treatment by offering them the opportunity to purchase shares during exclusive Manitobans-only sales period. Furthermore, we will introduce legislation this session to ensure that Manitobans have the majority of the seats on the board of directors and that shareholder restrictions are imposed to prevent any individual, company or group from gaining voting control of MTS. As well, we plan to offer current MTS employees special incentives to encourage maximum participation.

Today, the old MTS is about to pass into the history books, taking a place of honour for a job well done. It will be replaced by the new MTS, fresh and full of life. MTS has a strong future, a future that builds on the strengths of the past. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

In the interest of helping the members opposite understand, we are giving them technical briefing materials that the advisers gave us.

* (1345)

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): Madam Speaker, the only thing that we believe is moving into the history books of this province is the word and honour of this Premier (Mr. Filmon) and this government who promised not to privatize the Manitoba Telephone System. I think this is a shameful chapter of a party and a group of 31 individuals across the way saying one thing to the constituents before an election, during an election, and shortly thereafter breaking their words to their constituents and to the people of this province.

What democratic mandate do you have? You promised not to privatize. You are now breaking your word to the people of this province. We were extremely disappointed that a Premier of this province would say one thing in an election campaign and I believe in an unprecedented way break his word.

Members opposite would have you believe that this is a need for change.

What we need in this province on the Manitoba Telephone System is a belief in a vision of modern telecommunications owned by the people of Manitoba for the people of Manitoba. We have seen the ideology of the Conservative Party be the only factor that determines where the decisions are going in this province. Instead of looking at the new technology that would allow us to merge data, cable and voice, a new vision that would be similar to some of the European countries that have taken tremendous advantage of the new technology to have advantages for the consumers and the retail decisions that can be made, this government has sold off pieces of the Telephone System by stealth and now brings us to this cynical decision today.

They mention some of the changes and some of the financial situations. Yes, there is a debt in the Telephone System and, yes, there is an asset. There is an asset owned and operated by Manitobans of over \$1.2 billion and there is a debt of about \$800 million. The debt has been dramatically reduced in the last 10 years, and the minister knows this because we have started a plan to

fund the unfunded liabilities of pension plans which was started in the mid-'80s. The minister will acknowledge this because he has in committee. We have paid off almost \$200 million on top of the reduction in debt that has been made because the unfunded liability that was established by the Roblin government was begun by the Pawley government to have that asset and unfunded liability stabilized which has strengthened the corporation, a fact not mentioned in this document today.

The government talks about the need for capital. Manitobans found the capital to build the Telephone System. Manitobans found the capital to do rural telephone services. Nobody else did it. I would ask them to compare the private companies of what they did for farmers in rural communities, the private companies Manitobans found the capital to build the fibre optics line. We were one of the first ones again to build the new fibre optics line across our province. We found the capital again in this province. We found the capital on cellular telephones.

In fact, I was the minister responsible for the Order-in-Council on cellular phones. I am pleased to note that it is one of the so-called strengths of the Telephone System, because we had a vision. We would have cellular telephones competitive at the retail end, but they would come onto the Manitoba information highway so all of us could take advantage of those retail decisions. That is the vision we had to build up this system, and that is why we have the market share that is contained within this document.

The Manitoba Telephone System is owned by us. It is one of our strengths. We have rural telephone systems. We have fibre optics. We have low rates. We have jobs. We have control of the information highway. What is to stop a government that broke its word in the last election—I know Great-West Life is in favour of this, but the Minister of Labour (Mr. Toews) should stop heckling from his seat, Madam Speaker.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable Leader of the official opposition, to complete his remarks.

* (1350)

Mr. Doer: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, and I will continue my remarks on a very long statement on a very important subject.

The member for Rossmere (Mr. Toews) is part of a company that in 1989 wanted to move into rapid deregulation of the Telephone System. In 1990, the Premier (Mr. Filmon) promised he would not do that for the six companies, he would not make the poor people pay more for their telephone rates so that six companies can make more profits. He broke his promise on that in 1992 and he broke his promise again in 1996 in terms of selling the phone system. We know where the member for Rossmere is coming from.

The challenge of \$500 million in capital for new technology is a real challenge, but we have met it before in rural telephone services. We have spent hundreds of millions of dollars to bring capital, investment and equity of the new information highway to rural farms. We started the plan, and the government is to be credited for continuing the plan. I have said that to the minister before, but it did require capital and we did have availability of capital here. We spend \$195 million in capital every year in the Telephone System, raised by Manitobans for Manitobans, and the government need not pretend the capital has not been a requirement of the Telephone System for the last 90 years.

The Tory strategy on the Telephone System is to reduce the revenues. They got telephones out of selling fax machines when that new technology was in place. They sold cablevision for \$11 million when it was worth \$65 million. They sold off telemarketing. They went into long-distance competition five years before Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan has made \$500 million by not proceeding as quickly as this Premier (Mr. Filmon), and we would be \$400 million ahead if we did not have the ideology of members opposite.

We have to have the flexibility to act and if we need to change The Manitoba Telephone System Act to make it more flexible in a changing world, we are absolutely open to that, but we do not believe in throwing the flexible baby out with the technological bathwater and get rid of the public corporation as do the Tories. We believe it should be owned by Manitobans for Manitobans. We should not follow the Alberta model in this province, and the minister knows that and the Premier knows that.

We finally believe and we also know that if you can break your word now on selling the phone system, you can break your word down the road about who will own the system and you can break your word about foreigners owning the system. We know that the people in New Jersey, AT&T, want to control the telecommunication system in this country and in this province, and we know the kinds of interests that come to play. If you like the privatized phone system that will allegedly give us competition, look at the privatized monopoly on cablevision which we see in this country, something that is not in the best interest of consumers in this province.

This Premier broke his word and that is what has gone into the history books today, the word of the Premier. I am very, very disappointed. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

TABLING OF REPORTS

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister charged with the administration of The Public Servants Insurance Act): Madam Speaker, I have the honour of presenting the Public Service Group Insurance Fund Auditor's Report and Financial Statements for the year ended April 30, 1995, and the Public Service Group Insurance Fund Actuarial Report as of December 31, 1994.

Hon. Glen Cummings (Minister of Environment): Madam Speaker, I wish to present the Supplementary Information for the Department of Environment for 1996-97, and the Supplementary Information for the Sustainable Development Innovations Fund for '96-97.

Introduction of Guests

Madam Speaker: Prior to Oral Questions, I would like to draw the attention of all honourable members, firstly, to the Speaker's Gallery where we have with us today five parliamentarians from France: Monsieur Dominique Bussereau, Mr. Didier Bariani, Monsieur Alain Moyne-Bressand, Monsieur Jean-Claude Lenoir and Madame Monique Papon.

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

Also, seated in the public gallery on the east side, we have members of the search and rescue crew from the 435

Transport and Rescue Squadron. This rescue crew was responsible for providing shelter, medical care, food and ultimately the rescue of five people from a plane crash near Ram Falls, Alberta on January 27, 1996. They were awarded the Mynarsky Trophy for their contribution to search and rescue. The trophy is awarded annually to Canadian aviators and is one of the highest honours in the aviation community. Members of the rescue troops present today are Captain Greg Illichuk, navigator; Master Corporal Mario Pelletier, loadmaster Corporal Mark Holoshka, search and rescue technician.

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

Additionally, we have 16 teachers from China and Kildonan East School, under the direction of Mr. Michael Witts. This school is located in the constituency of the honourable Leader of the official opposition (Mr. Doer).

We have eighty Grades 4, 5, and 6 students from Black Duck Elementary School, which is located in Black Duck, Minnesota, U.S.A., under the direction of Mrs. Abeeda Asfoor, Mrs. Donna Dremmel, and Mr. Joe Shepherd.

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

* (1355)

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Manitoba Telephone System Privatization

Mr. Gary Doer (Leader of the Opposition): Before the election and during the election the Premier promised that he would not privatize Manitoba Telephone System. Why did the Premier break his promise to the people of Manitoba, and will he do the right thing and apologize to the people of Manitoba, resign, and get a public mandate which he needs to sell a Crown corporation with these assets and values?

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. I would like to remind all honourable members in this Chamber this afternoon

that you are the 56 leaders of this province and we have a number of young students and teachers, both from in-province and from outside our Canadian borders, and I would firmly believe that you should show each other more respect and behave in a more responsible manner. I would sincerely ask for your co-operation.

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Madam Speaker, as I said this morning when asked the question by the news media, I consistently said, as did my colleagues, when asked the question about privatization of the Manitoba Telephone System, that we had no plans to privatize the Manitoba Telephone System. That was accurate, that was honest, and that was straightforward.

Madam Speaker, I even recounted the fact that when I was campaigning, on numerous occasions, I had some people who were employees of the Manitoba Telephone System who attempted to persuade me that we ought to be looking at privatization of the Telephone System. I said at the time to them that I felt that there continued to be advantages of having a monopoly system of delivery of telephone services in Manitoba.

Madam Speaker, some time last summer when we received the annual report of the Crown Corporations Council, and they did their analysis of risk of the various Crown corporations which we as a provincial government and the people of this province own, they pointed out some very startling figures, one of which was that more than 70 percent of the revenues in the Manitoba Telephone System are now in a competitive environment, a field in which they must compete with private sector opponents for the market and the opportunity. They were in a very vulnerable position to do that competition in a variety of ways, one being that they had the highest debt-equity ratio of any telephone company in Canada, second, being that they were in a situation of rapidly evolving technology, in fact, the most rapidly changing technology of any sector of our economy, and in those circumstances their ability to make good decisions on a timely basis to be able to protect the future of the telephone company was impaired.

Under those circumstances, Madam Speaker, we—and the members opposite know it was several months ago—asked for a review to be done by a consortium of brokerage firms to take a look at the alternatives for capitalization of the Manitoba Telephone System so that

we could make a rational decision about its future. We have chosen the way in which we can best assure Manitobans in the future that they will get quality services in telecommunications at reasonable cost and that they will not be at risk, as they are today with \$840 million of debt that they have guaranteed, and under those circumstances, we believe that we have made the right decision for the present circumstances as well as for the future of this province.

Mr. Doer: Madam Speaker, I cannot believe the Premier, after seven years in office, last year, during the election campaign, did not know that his government decisions on fax machines, on other communication devices at the retail outlet, on cablevision, on deregulation proceeding five years ahead of Saskatchewan, would not produce the competitive environment that he talked about.

Is the Premier telling us today that he did not know what he was doing five years ago when he broke his promise of 1990 not to deregulate the long-distance market here in Manitoba? Is he telling us he did not know what he was doing as Premier of this province after seven years in office and he did not know that his decisions had made our corporation more competitive in the telecommunications environment, given that he had made those decisions?

Mr. Filmon: Of course not, Madam Speaker. The fact is that every telco in Canada will be under CRTC jurisdiction and regulation, and will be subject to all of those competitive forces. Saskatchewan bought a little bit of time. Saskatchewan goes under that, as I understand it, as of January of 1997. The future is the same. They will all be under CRTC regulation. They will all face the same competitive forces. They will all have the same decisions and choices to make, which is why Saskatchewan right today is reviewing their options for privatization of their telephone system.

* (1400)

Mr. Doer: Madam Speaker, the Premier has just confirmed that he did know this fact during the election campaign, that he did know it was a deregulated environment because he made the decision in 1992, which was a different decision and a different vision than Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan did not proceed with the

CRTC decision in '92. They have made \$500 million because of it compared to \$100 million in Manitoba. The Premier knew in 1995 that it was a competitive environment. He had to know. He cannot have it both ways.

Which one of the lines from the Premier should the public believe, that he did not know in 1992 when he deregulated the long-distance that it would have a major impact on the revenues of Manitoba by some \$400 million, or he did not know that the corporation was 70 percent competitive in 1995 when he promised that he would not privatize the Telephone System? Which one of these two lines is the public supposed to believe? Either door leads us to a broken promise, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Filmon: Madam Speaker, I repeat, the commitment that I made was that we had no plans to privatize the Manitoba Telephone System. The issue was that over 70 percent of its revenues—70 percent of its revenues, not the environment, not the areas—70 percent of its revenues were subject to competition. Those are the differences; those are the issues which I dealt with when we got the report from the Crown Corporations Council and those are the circumstances that ought to be reviewed, not some blind ideology that is motivating members opposite. Their ideology does not allow them to look at facts, does not allow them to look at opportunities, does not allow them to look at reality. They are stuck somewhere quoting, as the member for Thompson did, the speeches of 1905 that led to the public ownership of the Manitoba Telephone System. We are talking about today, and we made the best decision for the future of this province, for the people of this province and for the Telephone System of this province.

Manitoba Telephone System Privatization

Mr. Steve Ashton (Thompson): I would like to quote some lines from 1995 from the Premier who said he would not privatize MTS, who in May in this House said he would not privatize MTS, and the minister who in September said they had no plans to privatize MTS.

I would like to ask the minister, since we had the Deputy Prime Minister of Canada yesterday resign because she promised one thing in an election and broke

that promise, would he not consider, given the fact that he clearly did not tell the truth to the people of Manitoba in the last election about MTS, would he either resign, along with the Minister of Telephones, put it to a by-election, or perhaps do what even private companies do and put it to a vote of the shareholders of MTS, the people of Manitoba.

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Thompson for confirming the statements that were made on this side of the House that we had no plans to privatize.

Mr. Ashton: Perhaps, Madam Speaker, I will ask a supplementary about some quotes from the Premier today. In announcing this he said, and I quote: There will be no impact on rates or employment.

I would like to ask the Premier, if he would have looked at the experience of Alberta where they did privatize AGT and where that phone company just recently asked for and received a \$6-a-month increase compared to the \$2-a-month increase for our phone system, does he expect anyone to believe his statement earlier today that this will not impact on rates?

Mr. Filmon: I know that the member opposite will have difficulty understanding this, but the fact is that under CRTC regulation, it would not matter whether they were privately or publicly owned, they would have to make the same case for any rate changes and they would have the same analysis done on them by the CRTC. The CRTC approves some increases and does not approve other increases, and it would not matter whether it was private or public, they would have to face exactly the same scrutiny, same analysis and same decision, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Ashton: Madam Speaker, the Premier does not understand, if you do not ask for the increase as in Manitoba—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable member for Thompson was recognized for a final supplementary question.

Mr. Ashton: I would like to ask the Premier one more time, since he did not give us the opportunity to decide on this matter in an election, will he allow the shareholders

of MTS, the people of Manitoba, to have their say? Will he at least call a referendum on this issue which will allow all Manitobans to have a say over the future of their phone company?

Mr. Filmon: Madam Speaker, the shareholders are shareholders in name only. All they do is support the debt of the company. Shareholders normally get returns on their investment. There has not been a dividend from the Manitoba Telephone System to the people of Manitoba in its history, and that is the fact of the matter. They ought not to play games with the words. The fact of the matter is that people of Manitoba will invest in that corporation, the board will be conducted by a majority of Manitobans and Manitobans really will continue to own and operate a Manitoba Telephone System for the benefit of Manitobans.

Manitoba Telephone System Privatization

Mr. Tim Sale (Crescentwood): Madam Speaker, I fail to see how you can get profits for investors if you do not have higher rates for phone users. I do not see how you can do that. There have to be higher rates.

Madam Speaker, it is an old truth that you cannot suck and blow at the same time. Yesterday, the Finance minister made a strong pitch for HydroBonds; they were a wonderful way to support the economy and to make Hydro a strong company.

Why is a HydroBond such a good idea and an MTS bond a bad idea, Mr. Premier?

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Madam Speaker, I will take that question as notice on behalf of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson).

Mr. Sale: Madam Speaker, I have the report of the MTS financial advisory group, and I want to ask a question about this report.

This massive document for which the people of Manitoba paid a lot of money is seven pages long—

Madam Speaker: Order, please. Does the honourable member for Crescentwood have a supplementary question?

Mr. Sale: Yes, I do, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker: Would the honourable member for Crescentwood please pose his question now.

Mr. Sale: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Will the Premier respond as to whether this is the entire work of three brokerage firms over four months or five months that we paid for, seven pages, or is there some supplementary documentation that you might make available so we could see the basis for this decision to privatize?

Mr. Filmon: Madam Speaker, the member for Springfield (Mr. Findlay) tabled some supplementary documentation earlier.

Mr. Sale: Will the Minister responsible for Manitoba Telephone System confirm that his much-discussed \$500 million, half a billion dollar expansion over a four- or five-year period of MTS is substantially less than the annual capital expansion that has gone on for more than a decade now? It is a straw horse for privatization; it is just a straw man.

Hon. Glen Findlay (Minister responsible for the administration of The Manitoba Telephone Act): That figure was used by the advisers and it came from the Beacon initiative the Stentor companies announced some two years ago, some \$8 million across Canada as new investments that must be made. That is a two-year-old statement. We all know the rate of technology change and since then they have had a PCS licence, so that is a minimum figure at best. It is going to need to be invested. It is money that needs to be raised.

* (1410)

Home Care Program Privatization—Public Hearings

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health. The government's only solution to every problem in Manitoba is privatize. Public schools—we will privatize; MTS—we will privatize; home care, which the minister has finally admitted is one of the best in North America, what are they doing with it? They are privatizing it.

My question for the Minister of Health: Is the minister so convinced that his plan to privatize home care is so

good, will he not at least undertake immediate public hearings so the public of Manitoba can have some input into this bad idea?

Hon. James McCrae (Minister of Health): Madam Speaker, the honourable member for Kildonan is indeed having a difficult time with this issue. We have had a private, nonprofit organization running a large segment of our Home Care program in Manitoba for many years. We think that that organization, as well as the MGEU, are capable of withstanding competition and taking part in it. Indeed, we have invited the Manitoba Government Employees' Union to take part in the future delivery of home care services through a competitive system of service delivery, so the honourable member is indeed having a difficult time with this one.

I learned with some regret earlier today, the president of the Manitoba Society of Seniors has resigned his position saying, we cannot risk being viewed as a lobbying group representing the ideological beliefs of various political parties. Honourable members are daily telling us that the MSOS has taken a certain position, and the president has sort of let us know the way he feels about the position that some of the other members in the MSOS take. I hope the general membership of the MSOS will get involved and make sure that the higher levels of the association truly represent the views of the people.

Mr. Chomiak: Madam Speaker, my supplementary question again is to the Minister of Health. This government cannot produce one organization, one group or one single study that justifies their privatization plan, and the government still has not responded to the MSOS letter condemning the government for its privatization plan. How can the minister insist that his plan has the support of anyone in Manitoba?

Mr. McCrae: Madam Speaker, it does not help make the point for the honourable member when his friends in the union movement condone the kinds of activities that unfortunately I am hearing about today at St. Boniface Hospital. I am very disturbed that patients trying to get in and out of that hospital are being harassed, having their vehicles banged upon and struck by people on the picket line, and it does not help the honourable—

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable Minister of Health, to quickly complete his response.

Mr. McCrae: It does not help the honourable member convince me or anybody else when people that he supports are encouraging the sort of disturbing report that I heard this morning from a home care worker simply trying to do her job to provide services to vulnerable Manitobans and having her tires slashed. I do not think that kind of activity helps the honourable member make his point.

Mr. Chomiak: Madam Speaker, does the minister understand that Manitobans are not only frustrated and angry but concerned that this government has not allowed them any input, any public hearings, any involvement and has not produced one single bit of evidence to support their privatization scheme? Does the minister not believe that his inciting comments, very derogatory comments in this Chamber and in the committee Estimates, may have a factor in Manitobans losing confidence in this government on their privatization plan of home care?

Mr. McCrae: I readily acknowledge my own agitation at times when I hear some of the stories that are sanctioned by members of the MGEU and members of the Manitoba New Democratic Party when it comes to this type of labour dispute.

This is not the type of activity where a labour dispute like this has any place. We are dealing with our fellow Manitobans who are vulnerable and we have the Manitoba Government Employees' Union which will not deliver services to anybody. They will not even deliver services to people who are terminally ill because they have failed to achieve their ideological end in all of this. We are talking about health care and delivering it. We are going to do that. We do hope the honourable member will use his considerable powers of persuasion with members in the union movement and get us—if they will not put a stop to this foolishness, at least give the people of Manitoba an essential services component here so that those vulnerable people who need services can access those services.

Manitoba Telephone System Privatization

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Inkster): Earlier this morning I saw the Premier (Mr. Filmon) of the province practising

the art of deception. What we saw, Madam Speaker, was the government of the day trying to convince Manitobans that the Manitoba Telephone System is going to belong to Manitobans. Well, MTS currently belongs to Manitobans. The public share offering that this government is providing is going to see those who can afford the opportunity to invest in MTS have that opportunity.

My question to the First Minister is: How can the Premier say he is selling MTS to the public when they already own it?

Hon. Glen Findlay (Minister responsible for the administration of The Manitoba Telephone Act): As we have tried to explain to the members opposite—and I would ask them to read the information that we put on the table here a little while ago—things have changed in the Manitoba Telephone System. It is technology driven, an excessive rate of technology change. Technology is now driving competition. Competition is challenging the regulator. It puts the whole operation of the corporation at some level of risk if it cannot operate fast.

Under government ownership, the ability of the corporation to respond to new initiatives is definitely slowed down. The involvement of politics slows it down. We want to free up that corporation so that it can respond to economic opportunities and increase the ability to deliver the highest quality services of telecommunications in Manitoba that are available anywhere in the world.

Madam Speaker, we have made a very specific announcement that Manitobans will be allowed to purchase particular benefits or investment options given to employees and retired members of Manitoba Telephone System. When this was offered in Alberta, 80 percent of the employees bought in and the actual citizens oversubscribed the issue, and I expect the same to happen in Manitoba.

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, will the Minister responsible for MTS not agree that today the government, through MTS, has the ability to have real influence in terms of ensuring that there is a basic standard of telephone service being delivered to all Manitobans in a system which reflects the general will of government in being equitable and providing rural Manitobans in particular the same opportunity?

By privatizing it, that is not going to happen. Would the—

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

* (1420)

Mr. Findlay: Madam Speaker, I want to remind the member that within Canada there are nine telephone companies. Seven of them are privately owned. As of five years ago, six were privately owned. Alberta privatized, and now we are down to Manitoba and Saskatchewan as the only two Crown corporations.

We have gone through an analysis that says that the public of Manitoba would be the better owner. We have guaranteed board membership by Manitobans in the form of a majority. We have said that the shares will be sold, the majority to Manitobans, which allows Manitobans, through ownership and through board membership, to control what they want in the form of telecommunications throughout Manitoba. The regulator controls all of the rates, and certainly there will be no impact on universality of the service available to Manitobans, because Manitobans are there making the decisions and the regulator specifies that that should be the case.

Mr. Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, is the minister responsible trying to tell us today that the level of services is not going to deteriorate in any region in the province of Manitoba? Does he really believe we are that naive to believe that the minister is saying that there is going to be a sense of equity throughout the province in terms of fees, in terms of services, that a private company is going to argue in the best interests of the province of Manitoba compared to MTS as a Crown corporation?

Mr. Findlay: Madam Speaker, I will go further. I will say that the Manitoba Telephone System, owned by Manitobans as shareholders, will improve the quality of service to all Manitobans, improve the ability of Manitobans to be employed at the Manitoba Telephone System and improve the ability of everybody in business in Manitoba to do business all over the world.

Independent Schools Funding Formula

Ms. Jean Friesen (Wolseley): Madam Speaker, earlier this week in Estimates the Minister of Education said that

she understood the French school division, and I quote: “. . . in terms of the constitutional requirement, it is much like the private school issue”

Madam Speaker, since the French school governance derives from a Supreme Court decision of 1990, could the minister tell the House which parts of the federal or provincial Constitution, or which court judgment, makes private school funding a constitutional requirement in Manitoba?

Hon. Linda McIntosh (Minister of Education and Training): Madam Speaker, two parts to the answer I would like to provide, because I did indicate I would table some information about the government of Manitoba's position on independent schools. I say to the member that historically a parallel can be drawn between the nondenominational schools, the denominational schools and the Francophone population and their language rights in Manitoba as compared to other facets of society. I think she knows that as an historian there are very real historical presences as Manitoba came into Confederation that do have historical rights and obligations.

I will table these with the next question.

Ms. Friesen: Madam Speaker, I want to table a formal letter of 1988 signed by the present member for Rossmere (Mr. Toews) when he was acting director of the Department of Attorney-General which makes the argument that it would appear, and I quote, that the Manitoba Act does not provide constitutional support for the requested funding. Is this the constitutional act that the minister is concerned about? Does she have a more recent legal opinion that she is prepared to table for the House?

Mrs. McIntosh: I know that recently the member was tabling newspaper articles from 1985 and today she is quoting 1988. The government of Manitoba's position in 1986: Roland Penner indicates that an out-of-court settlement is the only way to go, much better than letting it go to court. In 1976, under Ed Schreyer, the NDP promised to ensure the moral and religious education of their children in conformity with their own convictions, to have respect for the liberty of parents to choose schools for their children other than those established by the state and signed in writing that primary education

should be available and free to all and that they would enact legislation or other practical measures that are needed to give force and effect to these rights for independent school students.

Then, Madam Speaker, 1987, Minister of Education Jerry Storie, again a third-on paper, in writing—commitment of the NDP government, Jerry Storie writing on April 23, 1987, saying: It is the government's intention to move towards funding independent schools at 50 percent.

Ms. Friesen: Will the minister confirm that the material that she has just read out indeed confirms that in Manitoba the funding of private schools is now, as it always has been, a political remedy, whether it was Laurier speaking, Greenway speaking, whether it was the Norris government speaking, or whether indeed it was the Filmon government speaking? It is a political remedy, and will she tell us—

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Mrs. McIntosh: The member had indicated to me earlier that she wanted the government of Manitoba's position on whether or not this should have gone to court or been an out-of-court settlement. Roland Penner, Minister of Education for the NDP government under Mr. Pawley, says: It is my view and the view of our government, our NDP government, that a political solution of the problem, out-of-court settlement is the best approach to be taken.

That was by the government of Manitoba, May 30, 1986, Madam Speaker.

Some Honourable Members: Oh, oh.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. The honourable Minister of Education, to quickly complete her response.

Mrs. McIntosh: In other words, since the days when Ed Schreyer signed an agreement pledging that they would enact legislation if need be to ensure funding for independent schools, till the 1986 agreement when Roland Penner confirmed that the best way to go was to strike exactly the kind of agreement that this government then followed through with that finding. I will conclude by indicating in the letter that I have received, thanking

the NDP government for initiating the process and the Conservative government for completing it.

Headingley Correctional Institution Commission of Inquiry

Mr. Gord Mackintosh (St. Johns): Madam Speaker, my question is to the Premier. When justice comes into disrepute in this province, the governments in Manitoba are compelled to turn to the commission of inquiry whether that is regarding the Harvey Pollock matter, Aboriginal Justice Inquiry in the Harper matter, the Ticketgate matter, the Lavoie tragedy.

My question to the First Minister, although certainly at the risk of political embarrassment to this government, will he put the public interest first and get the Justice minister out of the way of a commission of inquiry and ensure that one is called immediately?

Hon. Gary Filmon (Premier): Madam Speaker, the public interest is being put first. The public interest is ensuring that we get an investigation of the matter underway as quickly as possible so we can ensure that we have restored the conditions at the prison to good circumstances, so that we can assure the security and safety of those who work in the system and those who are housed in the system, so we can ensure that we investigate to determine what procedures were followed that should have been and that should not have been, and all of the elements of investigation that will allow us to understand what led to and contributed to the riot last week at Headingley, correct anything that needs to be corrected and ensure that in future we have the safest possible circumstances in which people can work and be housed. Those are the circumstances that are in the public interest.

The only thing that is in the interest of the member opposite is to try and create a public forum for him to raise his face, and that is not in the public interest.

Madam Speaker: Order, please.

Point of Order

Mr. Mackintosh: On a point of order, Madam Speaker. It is so unfitting of the First Minister of this province to make such an allegation, to attribute such motives to this

side of the House. I ask that the Premier do the right thing, the honourable thing, and recognize that honourable members are here to do the honourable thing and that is put the public interest first. I ask him to withdraw those comments.

Madam Speaker: Order, please. On the point of order, I will take the matter under advisement and I will report back to the House if necessary.

* * *

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

Mr. Mackintosh: To the First Minister: Given that again today we have seen an exposé of this government's turning a blind eye to what goes on in Headingley jail with the release of the report from Associate Chief Justice Murray Sinclair, an inquest report into a suicide at Headingley, a scathing report, would the First Minister ensure that a commission of inquiry is held on this matter? Will he instruct a representative of his government to meet with the correctional officers—so they do not continue to set them up, like they were lion tamers without even a little chair—to further safety concerns.

Hon. Rosemary Vodrey (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Madam Speaker, we have just received the report of the inquest of the suicide which took place in 1991. The report took approximately five years to prepare, and it is about 165 pages, so we will be having a look at what is included in that report. However, I can tell the people of Manitoba that a number of changes have occurred even since that inquest has begun, things such as a risk assessment tool, a uniform risk assessment tool which is now in place, and also training for correctional officers.

In terms of our overall strategy of working with correctional officers, this government certainly understands the very difficult position and job that they have, and through our number of inquiries we will continue to support them.

* (1430)

Random Urinalysis

Mr. Gord Mackintosh (St. Johns): Madam Speaker, my supplementary then to the Minister of Justice: Would

she now admit that not only is there no court case that prevents a commission of inquiry—and indeed we are aware of one that says that a commission of inquiry can certainly proceed—will she also admit that she did not need any court case to announce that random urinalysis can now commence, because that has been done in Canada's prisons for years?

Hon. Rosemary Vodrey (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Madam Speaker, certainly the information that I have received has said that as a result of a Supreme Court case this can now be done within our institutions, and we intend to proceed to do it. We will be, however, through four mechanisms, looking at making sure that all of the issues which are related to the running of Headingley institute and the issues surrounding the riot will be examined. I have spoken about what those four mechanisms are a number of times: the internal review, the independent review, the Rebuilding Headingley Committee, and, in addition, there is a police investigation which may lead to criminal charges.

Headingley Correctional Institution Independent Review

Mr. Daryl Reid (Transcona): Madam Speaker, the ability of every working Manitoban to perform their job duties and return safely to their families is a fundamental part of our society and is protected by law under The Workplace Safety and Health Act. The Workplace Safety and Health Act clearly identifies the employer responsibility to protect workers' safety and health.

I want to ask the First Minister (Mr. Filmon) to explain to Manitobans how his secret closed-door investigation can determine the true facts regarding the cause of the Headingley riot, when yesterday, once again, we saw the Minister of Justice's senior staff prevent corrections officers from commenting publicly on this issue.

Hon. Rosemary Vodrey (Minister of Justice and Attorney General): Madam Speaker, I understand that there was in some coverage some comment made—and I do not know if it was made by the individual in question—so we will certainly look into that. However, the important point here is that the people of Manitoba will have access to a report made public on the issues which will be dealt with during the independent review.

During the process of the independent review, we will make sure that people who work in Headingley Institution have the opportunity to come forward and speak. However, as I have said in the past, people may decide that there are a number of different places in which they feel the most comfortable speaking. They may wish their anonymity to be completely protected. They may feel more comfortable working in the Rebuilding Headingley. They may feel more comfortable in the independent review. We certainly expect that a great deal of work will also be done within our internal review.

Madam Speaker: Time for Oral Questions has expired.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

The Void Teen Getaway

Mr. Gerry McAlpine (Sturgeon Creek): Madam Speaker, as the MLA for Sturgeon Creek, I am pleased to rise in the House today to pay tribute to another great group and organization in my community. I was pleased to be part of a teen dance at the St. James-Assiniboia teen drop-in centre located in the constituency of Sturgeon Creek. The drop-in centre is appropriately named The Void Teen Getaway as it seeks to fill a void that many young people have in our city today.

For the past eight years, my wife Jeanie and I, along with other dedicated volunteers, have been actively involved in helping to sponsor, organize and participate in these dances and other events on a weekly basis. During the summer months car washes are held to raise money to underwrite the cost of the dances and other more regular functions for the youth. Employment is offered to young, mature students over the summer and weekends during the year by means of fund-raising events and the Green Team.

The Void Teen Getaway is sponsored by the St. James Focus on Youth Incorporated and has been very effective in giving our young people a safe, responsible, enjoyable way to spend their time. Jeanie and I participated in the most recent dance. I was impressed with the orderly manner of the people who turned out for the evening.

Madam Speaker, I want to publicly acknowledge the St. James Focus on Youth Incorporated for having the vision to meet our young people at a level where they feel

welcome. A lot of organizing, planning and roll-up-the-sleeves work is involved for this organization year around and I very much appreciate their tireless effort, especially people like Tina Tully, Jill Andres, Andrew Fennell and others. I am particularly honoured to be invited to participate in all facets of these youth directives and thank those responsible for consistently inviting me to attend. It is my pleasure to attend, and it is my distinct pleasure to recognize activities such as these in this House today.

* (1440)

Portage Correctional Centre for Women Concerns

Ms. Diane McGifford (Osborne): Madam Speaker, earlier this week the Minister of Justice attempted to divert attention from the NDP Justice critic's call for a full-scale public inquiry into the Headingley riot by claiming that the member for Osborne's concern with the provincial penal system was with toys at the Portage Correctional Centre for Women. Her statement completely and quite deliberately misrepresented my written concern, and I think her tactics are contemptible. I believe that the overriding and single most important concern in correctional institutions is, of course, always and forever, the safety of employees and inmates. This is true in Portage as it should have been true in Headingley.

But, as well, Madam Speaker, I am concerned that women in Portage must meet their families and visitors in the public vestibule, a small room of about 10 by 15 feet with no dividers, no privacy, no opportunity for confidential conversation and no toys for the children. On visiting days, Saturdays, this room is crowded, noisy and chaotic. The atmosphere is not conducive to family cohesiveness.

The stated purpose of the Portage Correction Centre's self-development program is, and I quote: To provide for delivery to residents which shall assist and enable their successful return to the community as law-abiding citizens. Creating bonds between women on the inside and families on the outside will assist with this goal and help guard against recidivism.

I ask the minister to eschew misrepresentation and diversionary tactics and promote Portage's goals, and if

she is worried about introducing toys, as she should have worried about potential weapons at Headingley, a daily count of rubber ducks might ease her anxiety.

Let the minister stop pointing fingers and instead, with the dignity that should accompany her office, accept responsibility for the Headingley disaster.

**Canadian Police Association
1995 Yearbook**

Mr. Gary Kowalski (The Maples): Madam Speaker, I would like to make a statement in regard to a publication I received the other day from the Canadian Police Association. It is their 1995 yearbook and because I am a former director of the Winnipeg Police Association—I guess that means in the vernacular of the government that I was a union boss and very proud of it—I do have an opportunity to receive their yearbook every year.

Going through the yearbook, you see the wonderful work of this organization, not only in bargaining for salary and working conditions of its members throughout Canada but the lobbying they do to bring positive legislation in the fields of criminal justice and labour law, working with victims and commemorating the officers who have lain down their lives in the line of duty. By coincidence, when I received it, it was also the same day that I noticed an article indicating that another police officer was killed in Montreal, another officer that was very close to his retirement, just doing a traffic stop on a quiet residential street when three bullets were pumped into his body. On the same day, there was an RCMP officer that risked his life in Emerson to save some people.

So I rise to congratulate the Canadian Police Association for their publication and to remind all honourable members of the significant work and contributions that police officers make to the community in Canada.

**City of Winnipeg
BFI Information**

Mr. Marcel Laurendeau (St. Norbert): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak about a little bit of propaganda that we received within our community and

I believe throughout the entire city. This propaganda was sent about by the City of Winnipeg. On the front it read: Millions of your dollars could be headed straight to the BFI dump.

They are wrong. There is at least \$100,000 going to the Brady landfill because that is where the majority of these so-called propaganda papers are going. We were in the apartment blocks in my constituency, and we saw hundreds of these in the garbage cans. So I know they will not be coming back to me, and I know where the people stood on it.

It is interesting because back when I was on council and back when I first got elected in the Legislature, this issue was before us. We spoke about and we initiated some of those tipping fees, but when I was there I said, if you attempt to make more than a 20 percent return, you will have competition in the future. It is there today because they have put in place a very large fund for themselves. We should call it what it is, and it is a hidden tax. It is a hidden tax because it is a tax on the businesses which is spent on or extended onto us when we purchase products from them. The increase that they imposed on the tipping fees went directly to business. It has caused the businesses to impose a new cost to us as purchasers of their products. So it is not \$7 million that they are going to lose from their so-called fund; it is \$7 million that is going to be redirected back to where it belongs, and that is to the public so we can choose where to spend those dollars.

Madam Speaker, if they are going to start spending hundreds of thousands of dollars for this type of propaganda to make me make a political interference decision against the commission that is making a report—and back in 1990, in closing, they told me that I should accept this commission's reports when they speak to bringing forward a hazardous waste in my constituency. They said it would be good, and that I should accept it wholeheartedly and that everything would be all right. Well, the City of Winnipeg can go back to bed. That is where they have been for 15 years.

**Resignation Request
Reform M.P.**

Mr. George Hickes (Point Douglas): Regrettably, on Tuesday, April 30, Reform M.P. and party Whip Bob

Ringma stood up in Parliament and proceeded to make discriminatory statements regarding members of visible minorities and homosexuals. His comments were clearly racist and discriminatory, and I hope that all members of this House and all citizens of Manitoba will join with me in condemning Mr. Ringma's comments.

Mr. Ringma's words offended many Canadians. According to Mr. Ringma, it is acceptable to fire, or as he put it, move to the back of the shop any member of a visible minority or homosexual if the presence of that individual offended a bigoted customer.

Essentially, these comments represent one man's yearning to move the clock back to the days when open discrimination was rampant in this country. Unfortunately, however, these comments did not shock me. I know that even today racism and prejudice are commonplace in our society. Every day many Manitobans confront these evils in their homes, workplaces and communities. However, I was deeply saddened to hear that these comments were spouted from an elected member of Parliament.

Mr. Ringma, in his role as an M.P., is supposed to be a representative of the people, but in all reality, how could a member of a visible minority or a homosexual look to Mr. Ringma for political leadership? Mr. Ringma has lost the trust and confidence of the Canadian people. Mr. Ringma was forced to acknowledge this to a small degree. This is why he, although first refusing to, finally did apologize to all of the Canadians he offended. In addition, he also resigned as the Reform Whip.

But the question I would like to ask is, is this enough? I do not believe so. Mr. Ringma should do the honourable thing and resign his seat as an M.P.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

House Business

Hon. Darren Praznik (Deputy Government House Leader): Madam Speaker, on House business, firstly I would like to seek leave of the House for the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to sit on the morning of Friday, the 10th of May, 1996, while the Committee of Supply is sitting. I think if you canvass the House, there will be sufficient leave.

Madam Speaker: Is there leave? [agreed]

Mr. Praznik: I also, Madam Speaker, wish to inform the House that Volume 4 of the 1994-95 Public Accounts, and Volume 4 of the 1994-95 Provincial Auditor's Report, tabled in the House this week, will be referred to the May 10 Public Accounts meeting for consideration by that committee.

Madam Speaker, I would also now like to move, seconded by the honourable Minister of Environment (Mr. Cummings), that Madam Speaker do now leave the Chair and that the House resolve itself into a committee to consider of the Supply to be granted to Her Majesty.

Motion agreed to, and the House resolved itself into a committee to consider of the Supply to be granted to Her Majesty, with the honourable member for La Verendrye (Mr. Sveinson) in the Chair for the Department of Education and Training; and the honourable member for River Heights (Mr. Radcliffe) in the Chair for the Department of Health.

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY (Concurrent Sections)

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Mr. Deputy Chairperson (Ben Sveinson): Order, please. Will the Committee of Supply please come to order. This afternoon this section of the Committee of Supply, meeting in Room 255, will resume consideration of the Estimates of the Department of Education and Training. When the committee last sat it was considering 2.(b)(1) on page 35 of the Estimates book. I believe the minister still had some time remaining if she wishes to continue her answer.

Hon. Linda McIntosh (Minister of Education and Training): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to begin by tabling the Children and Youth Secretariat committee members, the ones from Education and Training. The members had asked if I could indicate who was working on the committee and how much time they had put in so far. This lists the committee members and the approximate time spent per month on the Child and Youth Secretariat. I have three copies to table as requested, and I believe we were just concluding some

conversation on the Alexander Ross School and its renovation into the School for the Deaf.

The residence, as I indicated yesterday, is in the Alexander Ross facility, not in a separate building or in separate houses. The deaf community at first was uncertain as to whether they wanted a residence inside the school, outside the school, and in the end however, the parents of the children who are actually attending the school indicated a preference to have the residence in the school, and that, we felt, was the best group to listen to, the parent group. Therefore at this time they are renovating the school, and I have the blueprints of the floor plan for tabling if the committee members are interested. They might like to take a look at how it is being done. It also has a main floor plan there.

* (1500)

The one thing the students particularly are excited about there, of course, is the science room. As well, of course, they have a lot of rooms there that were former music rooms or theatres, so they have stages at various levels where desks can be put, which is ideal for deaf students who use vision to read sign language and to compensate in a lot of ways for the lack of ability to hear. Those things do not show on the blueprint, I do not believe, but they are additional features of the school that make it particularly appealing for these particular students. I will leave it there if the member has any other questions.

Ms. Jean Friesen (Wolseley): I remember when I was talking to some of the parents about proposed renovations and the differences between the old school and the new school that one of the things that they had been very excited about—I believe some of them had seen the school in Newfoundland, a recently either constructed or recently renovated school. I wondered if the minister had had similar kinds of conversations with parents and whether we have some sense of how this new school, or newly renovated school compares with others across Canada.

Mrs. McIntosh: Mr. Chairman, I am really pleased about the way this particular project has gone. We got together a committee of the people directly affected, parents, et cetera, to talk about the implementation of the move from the current site to the new site. That

committee has had approximately 21 meetings. I believe the last meeting—according to my staff—was just last night, so they have been regular and ongoing.

The parents are delighted with the layout. Staff have been to visit other schools of this nature in British Columbia, and all the indications that we receive from those who are knowledgeable in this area is that Alexander Ross will, when it is completed, be the top state-of-the-art technologically advanced school in Canada, probably the one that will be looked at as standing out as the best of its kind, so we are really pleased. The British Columbia one is newer, but when the renovations are completed at Alexander Ross, it is believed that it will be more advanced and better even than the B.C. one, which is known to be a very good facility.

The implementation committee working on that relocation included not just Education and Training staff and staff from the School for the Deaf, but it also included students from the school, as well as members of the Winnipeg Community Centre of the Deaf, and the parent council at the School for the Deaf, as well as from the advisory board—the deaf advisory board, not just for schools, but for other facets of life for deaf people. So that, I feel, has been very good. I believe that answers your question.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chair, I have a number of questions about the prospective future of the school. At the moment, the minister said it houses about 85 students, and I am wondering if the capacity is larger than that, and if it is, is the minister intending on looking at some interprovincial agreements? Is there any possibility for that? Is that sort of considered in the general plans?

What kind of role is the school going to play in the deaf community, generally? Does the minister and the committees that she has been working with envisage a particular role for that school in that context?

Thirdly, the renovation, is that being done in stages so that, for example, when the students move in—I assume it is this coming fall—will there be continued renovations after that or do you think you will be able to get it ready, that all the renovations will be complete for September?

Mrs. McIntosh: Mr. Chairman, the school has the capacity for about 120, so it has room for slightly less

than half again what it currently has. We do not have a formal agreement with other provinces, although at the current time we do have some students from Saskatchewan and from native bands and so on who are not provincial Manitoba students who nonetheless attend this particular school. So there is nothing formal. It does not preclude the ability to have formality, and I have been in communication with the Minister of Education in Saskatchewan. I will be seeing the minister again soon, and while we have not talked about this specifically, we have talked about how we would like to start working together where we can where it makes sense. This could be one area. There have not been any discussions on it though.

You had also asked about the place and what did the deputy have with the school or what other function did the school fill. The School for the Deaf community plays much the same kind of role that a neighbourhood school might for a catchment area. It is a focal point of attention. I do not think there is—sort of like rules, I do not think there are rules for how the deaf community interacts at the school, but I think it is fair and accurate to say that they are there a lot. They have a great interest in the school. They see it as very important to the deaf culture, and they support it by their presence, by activities.

I know at the current site they will have teas and so on, fundraisers for various activities, and they are very much run and have involvement from the wider deaf community even though they may not have students in the school. In fact, that was something that took me initially a few weeks to really grasp when we started dealing with the transfer. Initially, a lot of the alumni really did not want to see the school moved, and they felt very concerned about it, whereas I had been focusing in on the parents who wanted the move. The alumni were very upset, and as I came to know the deaf community and the deaf culture, I understood that interrelation and that connection. The school is very important to them.

* (1510)

I think they are all happy now. I just got a poster here that you can sort of see. It has got the deaf Children's Festival '96, and it is the Advisory Council on School Leadership, it is the parent council. But if you look at the bottom it says, many thanks to the donors of the

Canadian Cultural Society of The Deaf for making this festival possible. So while it is the parent council and it is a school activity, they have got support from a lot of organizations but also from the Canadian Cultural Society of The Deaf. We have also got support from some government organizations here, but it is a great poster and a great festival. In case you are keen on it, we should hang it up someplace.

An Honourable Member: Put it on Hansard.

Mrs. McIntosh: It does not get printed till

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chair, I had another question. They were not all related, it is true, those three, but the other one was the staging of renovations, and is that going to be completed by September or will there be renovations continuing over the next couple of years?

I also wanted to follow up on my previous question, which was I was looking for how the renovations really are relating to the deaf community as a whole. For example, the multipurpose room, there are gymnasiums, things which may not have been available at the same level of technology, I suppose, and space in the past. I wondered how those kinds of plans had been meshed, and what role the general community had in putting those together.

Mrs. McIntosh: Sorry, I thought I had left something out before. Now I forgot what it was—Oh, yes, in stages. Our plans are to have the entire school done before the students move in, to the point that if the renovations are not complete by September 1, we will not move them in until they are. We do not want them in there with construction still going on because of the nature of the deaf students' needs, getting adjusted to a new place, and we want to make sure that all the technologies that are going to be built in there are in before the students are. Our expectation, as I said, is this fall; our hope is the beginning of September, and, barring any tremendously unforeseen circumstances, we should be able to be in there in the fall.

The multimedia area is going to have two huge televisions, the great big ones—I am not sure of the measurements there—but for Internet access for students and other members of the deaf community as well. That room will also be used for meetings of various sorts. The

deaf community will sometimes book rooms for meetings in the current school. We expect that they will continue to do that in the new one, and we are planning, as we plan the school, that there will be those places in the school available. The deaf community will also be having access to the conference room and the gymnasium and the playground and the shop area. So those are some of the opportunities for the students and those with whom they spend a lot of time and those other people who are deaf who are no longer students.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chair, in the Estimates themselves there is a small—there is a \$3,000 drop in Other Expenditures, but other than that it is more or less the same in staff years and Other Expenditures as it was last year. So I am assuming, and this is just for the record, that the renovations and all the technical expansion is in Government Services rather than under Education.

Mrs. McIntosh: That is correct, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chair, I wanted to ask about New Directions and the deaf school. Could the minister give us some overall perspective on how the New Directions curriculum, and in particular the examinations are being applied at the deaf school?

Mrs. McIntosh: Mr. Chairman, I am informed that adaptations for deaf students can be made, as can adaptations for the visually impaired or blind. They would obviously have to have, in certain subjects, some adaptations made.

Ms. Friesen: I assume that applies to similarly abled children in the broader public school system as well. Could the minister indicate what kinds of adaptations are available in the New Directions examinations that we have had so far?

Mrs. McIntosh: The adaptations for the deaf or hard of hearing, the deaf students, are minimal really. They would require, maybe in some instances, sign language interpreters for some of the discussions, depending upon with whom it is they are having discussions.

The blind students would require a larger adaptation in that there would be Braille or large-print material. We know that already in some of the schools there are students who are blind who use the—looks like a video

screen—I forget what you call it, but it is a giant magnifying glass and the text is just rolled through it. They can take ordinary books. I do not know if the member has seen wonderful pieces of equipment that are now available. The one I am referring to looks like a small television screen and an ordinary book can be placed under it. It acts as a giant magnifying glass and throws up huge print on the television screen, and the student then is able to read normal books that do not have large print, and they are really quite interesting—so Braille or large-print, or that type of machine that I talked about. Sometimes they will need someone to actually read material to them and sometimes they might need more time.

* (1520)

Deaf students might be some who, in certain instances, might require more time if it takes longer to communicate a message than it might through normal channels. So we have those kinds of accommodations.

Currently we have a curriculum development committee that is looking at these issues of adaptations for people whose bodies do not work the way most of ours do, and they are looking at all manner of disabilities or adaptations that might be required. A lot of the things that might need to be done might not require any special equipment, or even any expert who might know sign language, but rather just some common-sense applications, or some common-sense flexibility in bending some of the guidelines to fit.

In terms of the deaf students, the underlying principles of deaf education that are used in conjunction with New Directions is that there are about four or five of them. One is that all students from kindergarten to high school be exposed to both ASL and English, so that is one underlying principle. The most appropriate language at the School for the Deaf is deemed to be ASL, and that is used as the mode of communication in all classes and school activities. They use ASL for communication, and then it becomes a comprehensive visual language within a social context. We also have augmentative communication and technology systems, and those can be used by people who are having difficulty using ASL. ASL itself is used to facilitate the learning of English, so ASL is the first language, so to speak.

Students are given the option to develop speech—and many can speak—or speech reading or listening skills

through individual sessions or in group sessions in order to develop a maximum communication competency and those last three words are, I think, very important for deaf students. Again, we have computers and multimedia technology. Those components will, in some cases, allow for the adoption of new curriculum development and the incorporation of the American Sign Language into the Manitoba curriculum, which is currently taught.

I will maybe stop there in case I am off target.

Ms. Friesen: I would like to pursue some other questions on the adaptations of exams and outcomes to differently abled children elsewhere when we get to assessment, or maybe I can just ask some other questions on this line.

One of the keys is outcomes. One of the keys to that is parents understanding the outcomes. How are those communicated to parents of deaf children? I guess the first thing is have there in, in fact, been children from this school or deaf children in the system generally who have taken the exams so far? I got the sense from when the minister was speaking that this is how it would happen. I am just wondering if it has happened.

Mrs. McIntosh: The deaf students are writing the exam this year, but they will be writing it in June because they did not have a January exam. So it is still this year, but it is still a will-be, because they will be writing it in June, along with some of the other schools that have semester systems and write in June.

This year, in Grade 12, there is only one Grade 12 student eligible, only one in Grade 12 who will be writing the exam, but that individual will indeed be writing the exam. From Grade 7 to Senior 4, Grades 7 to 12, there are six reporting periods to students. It is a little higher than in the other schools in Manitoba, but because of the nature of the students, the reporting periods are more in number.

The parents are actively involved, not just because they receive more reports, but they have a very active and involved parent advisory council at the School for the Deaf. They are very active in the school and they have a lot of input. They have a lot of ongoing communication with the people who run the school, the principal, the teachers. It is unusually close, and I think, again, it is

perhaps because of the nature of the students and the bonding that takes place with people of like circumstances.

Ms. Friesen: I was also asking about outcomes and how they are communicated to parents. The minister says they meet frequently, but I wondered if there had been translation of those. If that was required for some deaf parents. How is that communicated?

Mrs. McIntosh: The written reports, the six reporting periods that are there for Grades 7 to 12, are written, but there are also verbal parent-teacher interviews, and many times that people get together during the course of the year. There are always interpreter services there whenever they are requested. There is an interpreter service that is available for the deaf community. At the School for the Deaf, the interpreter is considered a natural part of the schooling. It is part of the milieu of the school that interpreters are there to liaise between those who speak ASL and those who do not. That little piece of information that the member may be interested in is that 85 percent of the parents at that school, 85 percent of the deaf children are hearing parents, and many of them proficient in ASL, of course, because they learn with their children and they are bilingual, but still the referral service is there.

I know, any time I have been there there has always been an interpreter always there. Even though the principal himself is bilingual, speaks ASL, even still, when I would go to the school there would be an interpreter there just in case we needed them.

* (1530)

I have just been handed a note and I am really pleased to indicate this. It is a little note from the current principal who says, because our current principal obviously is a hearing principal and we have been wanting to have a deaf principal and we have gone one more than that—he has here in his little writing—and we are proud to announce the hiring of Norma Jean Taylor, who starts August 1, first female deaf principal in Canada.

So I thank you for the note, and I thank you for all the work that you have done in being principal at the school. Mr. Miller has had a wonderful, wonderful way at the

school and has filled in for us all these years and I know that he has won the hearts and minds of the people there, and I know that they are going to miss him, but I know at the same time they might be thrilled to have a principal who is also deaf. That was important to them. So that is news for me, too. So thank you.

Ms. Friesen: It does sound good news, and I think we wish both parties well in the future. What I was trying to get at with the outcomes and interpretation question was not so much reporting to parents but outcomes in the formal sense that it is used in New Directions, that is, the establishing of expectations, that the communication of that to parents would seem to be crucial to the whole purpose of New Directions. So I am wondering how it is done in this particular case.

Mrs. McIntosh: Staff is busy doing an inward dialogue here, but while they are doing that I would just like to indicate, having thanked Mr. Miller for his work as principal of the deaf school, that is not his main role. Howard Miller is the provincial Co-ordinator for Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and when I say he has filled in as principal, in terms of other duties as assigned, that was quite a big one that he took on for the last three years. So of course he is still with us as co-ordinator, but we are very grateful for the work he did in those years.

Mr. Chairman, informing the parents as to outcomes will be done essentially the same way as it is for any other school or any other group of students. The only difference would be in the adaptations that are made, for example, when you maybe, as many schools do, have the parents in to explain the Grade 3 maths outcomes. In this setting you would have available an interpreter for those parents who are also deaf, although most of the parents do hear. The corollary, of course, of 85 percent being hearing parents is that 15 percent are not. Some of the teachers are also proficient in sign and so on, but you would have interpreters there for those kinds of meetings to explain them, and the written material would be sent home as it would normally, because that does not require any particular kind of adaptation. So that would be about the only modification that would need to be made.

Ms. Friesen: The unusual situation in this school is that it is the government in a sense who are the trustees; there is no separate set of trustees. When we were talking about outcomes before, we talked about one of the things

that actually concerns me, that there may be some disparities in the way in which school boards have dealt with the issue of outcomes. The minister mentioned St. James has sent it home. We do not know whether every school board did, whether there was the same kind of interpretation, so I am wondering what the government itself did as trustees in this case. Was it dealt with? I mean the minister essentially said things went home in writing, there were discussions with parents at regular meetings. Was there a general policy on that? Is that how we should be expecting in fact people across the province to deal with it?

* (1540)

Mrs. McIntosh: Mr. Chairman, in our dealings as a board of trustees, and I had not really thought of that—I am still a trustee, hey, I had not even thought of it that way—but it is a good analogy, because that is really what we are. In our dealings we, with the Manitoba School for the Deaf, send things to parents constantly. We sort of do a paper blizzard in terms of the amount of material that is sent home, and that very close working relationship, I indicated before, between the staff and the parents is wonderful. I wish we could have it in all our schools. We do have it in some; unfortunately, not in all.

The member raised an interesting point, and it is something I would like to respond to, when she asked about how things go in all schools. With our advisory committee on the implementation of educational change, for which I wish we had a different name, they indicated this concern and problem about communications, that some people were getting some information, others were not and so on. So we have come up with a protocol for communications that at least from the department will emanate. If we had a concern, we would send things to a parent council; the superintendent would say, I did not get it. I would get people phoning asking me questions. I do not know what they are talking about. Or we would send it to the superintendent, and the parent council would say: the superintendent never sent us the stuff; he always leaves us out, or she always leaves us out.

So we came up with a protocol then where everything goes out, if we can do it, simultaneously. So, if something is of interest to parents, boards and schools or of use to them all, we send it out, hoping, by the time of

our mailing, that it will be received simultaneously by all. But I understand there are some places where something, if it goes to the superintendent, is still not getting through to the parent councils.

The letter that the member for Radisson (Ms. Cerilli) was reading the other day about phys ed, we had sent out the material on that, and apparently there are some schools in one division that have not had it forwarded to them. So we still have some work to do on our protocols, but that one there was because the division itself has not forwarded it. I think these protocols have to be understood by all.

One of the first schools to set up an Advisory Council for School Leadership was the Manitoba School for the Deaf, and that I found interesting. The nature of their involvement and the impact of their decision making on the school, I believe, have really made that school a better place and more suited to what the students actually want and what the parents want for them. All the information is sent out to parents. All the information from that school is sent to parents, and any information that is circulating is included on the agenda for the ACSL. Frequently, the director or the assistant deputy minister is available to present information when it is necessary. They have staff meetings regularly, and the staff regularly attend the parent council meetings to become knowledgeable about new requirements in New Directions. That kind of model would be wonderful to have in every school, from my perspective.

The deputy has just pointed out that, just to give you an example of the impact of the involvement with the Advisory Council for School Leadership that was set up at the Manitoba School for the Deaf, five representatives from that are on the committee that is overseeing the renovations for Alexander Ross. So they have major input on the renovation plans, and nobody feels threatened by that. Everybody gets along well in that setting, so I think it is a model for how the province should behave.

We can give guidelines to schools, and we are encouraging the establishment of that kind of parent council, but at the same time it has to be a decision of the parents, the community, if they want it. Some do not. We cannot force them and would not force them. We might wish it would be different, but we lay out the

opportunity and make the opportunity known, and then it is up to them.

Ms. Friesen: The simultaneous protocol, I do not know what term to use for it, but obviously is something that I think would serve many areas of education well, because there are clearly different divisional practices and people feeling rightly or wrongly that they have been cut out of the loop.

There is also the final link. I do not know if you might call it the missing link, but it is getting it from the child to the parent. I used to liken my own son's school bags at the end of the week—it was like an archaeological investigation, you know, you go down through the layers, but that is the final link.

Mrs. McIntosh: I think that is a really good point. I swear I am still finding notes from my son's jeans and he is 28, so it has been a long time. I think the older they get, they either a) get distracted, b) do not care, or c) figure this is something they really do not want to take home to mom and dad, but I think a lot of it is that it is not of high priority to them, they forget, they tuck it in their pockets and forget about it. The younger children are wonderful about carefully carrying the message home and not getting it dirty and making sure mommy sees it, or daddy, but I do not know if staff has any advice for me on this one. If every home eventually has a home computer, and the costs of e-mail and all those things come down, we can just sit in the office and punch it into every household, and it would be there. Maybe that will come someday.

Mr. Deputy Chairperson: 2.(b)(1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$2,633,700—pass; 2.(b)(2) Other Expenditures \$331,900—pass.

2.(c)(1) Assessment and Evaluation, (1)Salaries and Employee Benefits \$1,700, 900. The honourable member for Wolseley.

Ms. Friesen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To begin on the first section of that, the Salaries and Employee Benefits, there is an increase from Estimates of last year, an increase in staff years and an increase also in dollars. Could the minister give us an explanation of those increases?

* (1550)

Mrs. McIntosh: Mr. Chairman, that line is an increase of 6.26. It is 4.26 professionals and two administrative positions. These positions were there for the piloting of the standards testing.

Ms. Friesen: I wanted to ask if these are term positions or are these regular positions or contract. How do they show up on this line?

Mrs. McIntosh: They are permanent staff years and they could be filled by people on secondment or by people full time permanently in the position.

Ms. Friesen: Could the minister tell us how many of these are filled at the moment and is there an organizational chart or something that would be easily tabled which would show us how this section works?

Mrs. McIntosh: Mr. Chairman, I do have something I could table and the ADM has been kind enough to put little pink checkmarks where the vacant positions are. Those positions are being prepared for bulletining now and they should be bulletined for hiring in about six to eight weeks. We hope to be able to fill those new positions, and the secondments for this particular one are also—competition is used even for the filling of secondments unless it is a very unique or outstanding individual. So I will table this. I just have the one copy but it probably will do.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chair, could I also ask about money in the second part? I know we pass them separately, but eventually we will pass them all together, but just while we are on the money and the positions.

Under Other Expenditures, there is a considerable increase again here from \$606,000 to \$971,000, and there is a footnote saying, "Provision for Piloting of Standard Tests under the Education Renewal Initiatives." Could the minister explain or could she give us a breakdown of that \$971,000? Some is presumably—it looks here as though there is \$43,000 for Capital; \$104,000 for Other Operating. Are there other professional fees and contracts that relate to this No.1 footnote, the Education Renewal Initiatives?

Mrs. McIntosh: Mr. Chairman, under Transportation, this includes travel for consultants. Approximately two-

thirds of it covers the travel of technical and advisory committee members. There is an increase of \$71,100. It covers additional travel costs for the standards testing committees and the examination markers for the Senior 4 examinations and the standards tests.

Communications includes telephone, courier and postage costs for the Assessment and Evaluation office. A large portion of dollars are utilized for the postage of examinations and reports to school divisions. There is a decrease there of \$300 due to telephone and long-distance savings.

Rental/Maintenance, there is a decrease of \$25,100 there. That is for space-lease cost, that decrease. Space-lease costs account for about \$51,000 there. It also includes costs for rental and maintenance of equipment used within the Assessment and Evaluation branch.

Professional Fees includes the payment for contract writers, for assessment designers, report writers and fee-for-service costs for technical and advisory committee members. There is an increase there of \$167,000 or \$167,200 and that is for additional committee members, markers and contract writers.

It also, under Other, includes the purchase of office supplies, photocopying costs, printing costs of exams and assessment reports, and an increase of \$80,200 for the provision of standards tests and the Senior 4 examinations.

The Other Operating includes accommodations and meals for consultants in a travel status, with a large portion for the many committee members who come in from the more distant parts of the province. There is an increase there of \$43,500 due to the increased number of committee members for the standards testing and the addition of markers for the Senior 4 examinations and the standards tests.

* (1600)

The Capital includes costs associated with the purchase of new hardware and software for staff within the Assessment and Evaluation office. There is an increase of \$28,000 in technology requirements for new administrative and professional staff who will be developing and administering standards tests, and those

are basically the details surrounding those particular items.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chair, I have a couple of requests coming out of that. They do not necessarily all require comment at this point, but I would like to know something about the hardware, software that is being purchased for the Assessment branch.

Secondly, I would like to know what portion of that—I believe it was, I am not sure, either a \$40,000 or a \$60,000 increase—was for the markers of the English language exam? Maybe I should just put it more simply, what amount did the minister allocate to the markers of that English language exam, I guess by semester really? Well, maybe I would look for some advice from the minister, that is actually going to be doubled or are there fewer people writing in June than there were in January?

Mrs. McIntosh: Mr. Chairman, about two-thirds wrote in January and the remaining one-third will be writing in June, so the costs will be different proportionately.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chair, I am looking for the cost in January, and then I will be able to extrapolate, more or less, approximately what the cost in June would be.

I am also interested in obtaining a list of the contract writers with the particular subject areas.

Mrs. McIntosh: Mr. Chairman, staff are just searching for the names, but while they are doing that I will indicate that the total cost for the English language arts exam including stipends, development, everything, was \$740,000.

The questions she asked about the hardware and software, they are—one PC for the new staff members, like, one each—WordPerfect, communication software, spreadsheets and databases. If she can wait just a moment, we will have the rest of the information.

Just an indication. Most of the work is done by committee so there would be, sort of like joint ventures, but all we have here today—we will get the rest tomorrow, but I will give you what we have today. An individual who did some contracting for us, a Mr. John Ilavsky, spelled I-l-a-v-s-k-y, who prepared a document for teachers and administrators regarding reporting policies

and practices on student progress and achievement from kindergarten through to Senior 4, was paid \$4,900 for that. He is a retired school superintendent.

I do not have the names, but I do know from staff that there were two other people who did graph work and translation and then others who did computer programming to input data. As I say, we do not have those names here today but we can provide them tomorrow.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chair, what I had assumed when the minister said contract writers, were the people who were writing curriculum. So I get the sense from the examples given that that is not exactly what these people are doing. These are essentially technical reports in the area of assessment requested by the government.

(Mr. Peter Dyck, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair)

Mrs. McIntosh: Mr. Chairman, the testing development is done by a committee of teachers, so there is not a contract person there. When we get to 16.2 (b), there will be more detail about how the curriculum is designed, but, basically, there is a committee of educators who will design a curriculum and set down the parameters. The curriculum then will be written by a writer and that is sometimes contracted out, about half of the time contracted out.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chair, the minister suggested earlier—I cannot remember if it was in her opening remarks or not—that she had a new method of selecting teachers for committees of the department.

Could the minister tell us how the teachers were selected for the testing development committee?

* (1610)

Mrs. McIntosh: Mr. Chairman, I indicated that test development is generally done by a committee of teachers and that our secondments are now open to competition, so to speak, for want of a better way to explain it. The way it works is this: We will send a letter of invitation to all school superintendents. The school superintendents will nominate the teacher who they think is the right teacher, or they may send in a couple of names. It does not have to be just one. But we will write to all

superintendents and say we are going to be doing some development in this and this area; could you nominate a person or some people from your division that you think would be best. So they will then send in the names and, if they send in a couple from every division, you have about 100 names to choose from. They are then selected against certain criteria.

One, of course, that will be fundamentally important would be the background in the subject, the years of teaching and the expertise in the subject. The question being asked is, maybe not on paper but in our minds, is this a master teacher in this discipline? Then they will also check against urban/rural/north in terms of area, male/female or cultural background that might be deemed to be applicable for whatever it is they are doing, and they need to have an aboriginal representative for each committee. So then they have the committee. The committee then guides the design, the technical preparation, the test items for development and participates in the piloting process. That is it in a nutshell.

Ms. Friesen: When the minister says, participates in the piloting process, is part of that piloting process a formal evaluation at the end of the pilot, and is that a written evaluation that is available publicly?

Mrs. McIntosh: There is a report—"report" is not maybe the right word, but there is an evaluation that will come from the school to the team. It is an internal evaluation because the material coming from the school is sent back under confidential conditions, basically surrounding the security of the exam because, if they make specific recommendations such as change the theme from this to this, then it sort of breaks the integrity of the security. The evaluation that comes back does not come back sort of like to this arena, where you and I might be, or into the House. It comes back for internal use by the team that is working on the development and the evaluation.

Ms. Friesen: How many test development committees are there at the moment?

Mrs. McIntosh: Mr. Chairman, there are six in total right now.

Ms. Friesen: There is, obviously, one for the English exams. What are the other ones in process?

Mrs. McIntosh: They are Senior 4 math, both the 40-G and the 40-S, Senior 4 ELA, Grade 3 math and the two subcommittees to do the French, the same exam but in the other language.

Ms. Friesen: The minister and I have differences, I think, about probably the level of examination and the nature of exams. But putting that aside, one of the things that I think is really important—whether in fact you have examinations in this matter or not—is the outcomes. It is one of the things that I have been stressing as I go along, because I think that clear expectations for parents, clear communication of a range of expectations within certain years and grade levels and that kind of thing are very helpful whatever the final issue is. So the communication—particularly for the kind of program that New Directions is, obviously, outcomes clearly establish well translated, well understood by parents, teachers and students, certainly at many levels—is very important. So it is this communication of outcomes that concerns me.

(Mr. Deputy Chairperson in the Chair)

How were the outcomes—in the sense of expectations—communicated for the Grade 12 exams and does the minister see any changes for this coming June?

* (1620)

Mrs. McIntosh: Mr. Chairman, the curriculum contains statements of outcomes, and those are sent out one year in advance. The outcomes, as I indicate, are contained in the curriculum, and they are available in the guides that we send to divisions for the divisions' use.

There was an interesting comment made by the deputy as I was being given this information, and that is that the Manitoba Textbook Bureau indicated a rush super-large request for the curriculum guidelines that have been in place since 1987 the minute this was announced. I think that is interesting because it indicates when people say, well, the teachers will teach to the test, it indicates that they ran out and decided they had better start teaching to the curriculum, if they had not been already, or at least refresh their knowledge of the curriculum. To me, that indicates how important it is to know that they are going to be assessed, that it does, I think, encourage the curriculum being taught.

Can we take a break?

Mr. Deputy Chairperson: Is it the will of the committee to take a 10-minute break? We will resume at 25 minutes to.

The committee recessed at 4:22 p.m.

After Recess

The committee resumed at 4:34 p.m.

Mr. Deputy Chairperson: Order, please

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chair, the minister had been talking about the rush on curriculum at the Textbook branch, and the assumption is, and that is what I wanted to follow up on, that this was all from teachers. Is it possible that parents and parent councils or other groups were part of that rush to purchase curriculum? What I am after overall is the communication of the outcomes and the standards.

Mrs. McIntosh: Mr. Chairman, the rush on the Textbook Bureau was from teachers and schools. Now the curriculum does have in it the guide that the department has provided on outcomes and so on. We encourage, and without monitoring, hope that schools did inform parents of these outcomes in a variety of ways.

I have indicated, as the member referenced in her earlier comments, one division where I know for sure it was sent out, and we understand that the message was put out to parents, if not in that exact same fashion, in very similar fashions in many of the divisions. I cannot say all because I do not think it was all and I do not know. We have not surveyed all, but the message did go out in written form to the public in areas of the province, and our encouragement and expectation would be that it has gone out through other vehicles in local catchment areas.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chair, I think the member for Crescentwood (Mr. Sale) walked off with my math curriculum, which is unfortunate because I was going to read from it.

One of my concerns in that curriculum is, and the outcomes are there, but they are not user friendly to put it mildly. Now presumably St. James School Division, I

think the minister said, they did it in a newsletter so they would have translated. They would have put this into plain English and into language that new parents, and obviously at the Grade 3 level many are new parents, can understand. That is what I am looking for is some consistency in that overall. Some school divisions have done that; some have not. Some have done it in parent meetings where some parents have been and others have not, so even within divisions there may not have been that consistency.

Again, whatever we think about the place of exams, it seems to me that this is an important element of education and I would be looking for some sense in the evaluation of the exams that that could be looked at, that could be part of the evaluation, and that perhaps over the next few years in all the areas of curriculum those can be.

The ones I am thinking of—I have looked at some from the Protestant school board in Quebec, or I think what used to be the Protestant school but I think they have changed it now—where they have done a number of popular versions. I guess, of the new curriculum. There are in some of the European countries, and the United Kingdom is the one I am familiar with, there are popular books essentially which have been written on the new national curriculum aimed at parents, at parent councils, which provide the opportunity for discussion around certain areas and sort of lead people through those kinds of discussions so that they can look at them both individually and collectively and share ideas with other parents. It seems to me that that would be really important. Again, leaving aside the question of exams, that would be really important for parents in Manitoba to have access to. So I would be looking for the department in the future to be making that kind of popular consumption, popular understanding more widely known.

* (1640)

I think even beyond parents, too, it has an importance because the whole standing of the public schools, I think, depends upon all of the community understanding, the standards that are there, the different grade levels in particular subjects, the wide variety of the curriculum, the kind of things that the minister refers to as—I have forgotten the term that is used informally—the skill building across the curriculum, for example, in technology. One of the things I think we have to

communicate to people generally in Manitoba is how that is being done, what students can accomplish at certain levels. As I say, the minister is also adding on to that exams. I think there are many other ways of communicating it, but I think we would probably agree that that is an area of important communication, so I will be looking for plans as we look at these Estimates for that broader communication of those goals and outcomes.

Mrs. McIntosh: Mr. Chairman, the parent reports, I think, come in here as significant in terms of these kinds of communications, and the parent report for math will be user friendly. It is being designed and developed for parents, to be put in language that would be meaningful for them. That is due out in September '96, so it is just a matter of some months away, and, as each new curriculum is developed, we will be providing parents with information about curriculum outcomes.

We do believe that all partners can play a part, and I can raise this issue with the advisory committee to see if they have any additional thoughts or input on it because, again, it is part of that whole communication agenda that we talked about earlier, how do we make sure that those who require information receive it? That has a couple of components. We talked earlier about the communication protocol and how important it was, once information was developed, to have it get to the right people in a timely fashion. The other part of that, of course, is to determine what is the information that needs to go out, and I think the member has raised a very legitimate point that I think we are aware of and have addressed in some ways but could probably do more to ensure that there are not groups of people out there wondering what is going on.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chair, another possibility might be also to look at the public libraries as depositories for examinations as well as for the curriculums, curriculum guides, outcomes, those kinds of things. I was in the new Vancouver library recently, which is unbelievable. I mean, it is fantastic. If you get a chance to go, this is what they have done as their centennial or 125th, I think, project for the city of Vancouver. One of the areas that they have is devoted to the curriculum in schools. You can actually go to the shelves. You can pick off any curriculum guide. They have their version of skills and outcomes. You can pick out the exams. I actually sat down and read all the Grade 12 exams for last year in British Columbia, and I was not the only person in that

section of the library either reading them. So it seems to me that that was a very popular, easily accomplished depository that would get material around the province and puts it into the hands of, not only parents but the general community as well.

Mrs. McIntosh: We have not been doing that, and it sounds like a good idea. It is something that I think we will take a look at. Right now we are still developing curriculum and so on, but the merit I think and the concept the member raises in her observations of how it is working I think has a lot of potential to help students prepare themselves for exams by reviewing old or recent ones that are written. Plus I think it would also help to make the process as transparent as could be, that people would be able to sit down and explore on their own without any kind of intervention and come to conclusions about what they are reading.

It is open. I like the openness of it. We are looking at the electronic medium so that access to some of these things could be electronic, but not quite the way the member has expressed it. As I say, it has not been something that we have looked at, but staff too is indicating it sounds like an intriguing idea. So it is maybe something we will put on our to-explore list for future consideration. Thank you.

Ms. Friesen: Two of the other ways that I have seen of communicating educational programs that struck me as very useful; one is the Saskatchewan indicators program, the Saskatchewan indicators reporting, which I would like to come to, actually when we get to Schools Information System. It is perhaps more appropriate there. British Columbia as well, when they began to move to the discussion of outcomes, one of the things they did was to publish a wall chart, I think it was, something that could simply be put up in the entry of every school or again indeed in the public library.

So there are relatively simple and cheap ways of exposing the general public to what is happening in the public schools. That is the context in which I am looking at it, building up that confidence in the public schools.

Quebec I know—and the reason that I saw the Quebec ones was in fact they were published in the newspaper and formed the basis of some letters to the editor back and forth for a few weeks. So there was that sense of

public debate, but everybody was actually reading from the same book essentially. That seemed to me quite helpful.

I wanted to look at the English language exam that we have just had. There were some concerns about it, and I wonder what the minister's response has been to those concerns or what the thoughts of the department have been.

Speaking as the MLA that represents Gordon Bell School, one of the concerns there has been the applicability of the English language examinations to students whose English is relatively recent. One of the arguments that I heard was that it really takes six to eight years after a student has mastered the basics of English, enough to carry on a conversation and to be integrated into a regular classroom, that really you have to allow almost a decade, a six to eight year period until the colloquialisms were there, the fluency, the ease of expression could approach those of students whose first language is English or French.

Gordon Bell, like a number of other schools in the inner city, has a high proportion of students who are relatively recent newcomers. They expressed I think their concerns about this exam. The concerns are at a number of levels. One of course is the amount of weighting that will come onto the exam in the future. These are often students who are very able. I have been to their graduations every year and the marks that they have in the math exams and the science fairs and those kinds of things are just utterly amazing. Both they and some of their teachers are very concerned about the impact that the 50 percent English mark will have on them in their ability to be competitive in university entrance exams and college scholarships and those kinds of things. So that is one level of concern. Maybe I should stop there. The others dealt with the actual process of this particular exam.

* (1650)

Mrs. McIntosh: Just to indicate two things, one, just straight, factual type stuff, and the other, a little philosophical commentary. I should indicate, in terms of fairness and equity, the test was designed to be written by all Senior 4 English language arts students in the province, and all students have an opportunity then to

demonstrate their knowledge and skill on a common measure. The exam was structured so that all students, whether English as a Second Language, native, multicultural or from single-parent families, whatever their disadvantage in terms of the language might be, could read and respond. The readings were selected so that weaker students could participate. Strong students were able to demonstrate strengths in their responses to writing tasks and to reading questions. There are students who are in English as a Second Language; they were not compelled to write the exam. Only students who had maybe completed their English as a Second Language, if that was a problem, and were in the regular classroom wrote the exam.

Now, I know what the member is saying. She indicated it takes about eight years to really get up to the comfort level but, nonetheless, the students who had gone through their English as a Second Language were put in the regular classroom and were working with those students. The passages were selected with a wide range of difficulty so that all students could write and students did have access to dictionaries and grammar guides throughout the process writing.

Having said that, those being points that indicate that people who really are not English speaking yet really could not write the exam and that we anticipated a wide range of abilities and therefore had a wide range of accommodations, we nonetheless know that there would be people who would be bright, who would be proficient in many areas, except at this point not yet that proficient in their English, although they might be someday further down the road as they stayed longer in an English-speaking society.

There are two things that you could do now to the little philosophy bit, two things that one could do as a decision maker. One would be to measure accurately; one would be just to close your eyes and not take into account any of those external factors and just say, how well is this student doing, just measure it in the same way that you measure how tall this student is or how fast this student can run? Just do the measurement, put it down as a fact of measurement.

The other route to go would be to, I am not saying, distort the measure, but, to—[interjection]—weight it in some way—thank you, that was the word I was looking

for—would be to weight it in some way so that you would not disadvantage that student for circumstances that may not be in that student's control.

The government has taken the position that they want the accurate snapshot unweighted, in its pure form, so to speak. In that way, then, they will know the true level of proficiency as opposed to a weighted one, and they will have a better photograph of the picture of the province at any point in history.

Now, having said that, that is one of the reasons that the exams at Senior 4 are not going to be counting for more than 50 percent, but the theory is that we would rather move the students up to the standard than adjust the standard for the student. Sometimes that might mean it would take a little longer to reach the standard, but when the student then says to someone, I have my Grade 12 English language arts, those who become familiar with our system once it is up and running will know exactly what that standard is and it will be constant and measurable.

There has been debate back and forth about those two philosophies, which are different from each other, and both have points about them that are meritorious. We have chosen the one that I have described as being the better of the two, and I think the Blueprint and the Foundation for Excellence, and all of those things, New Directions probably spell out some of the rationale for that decision. We do, though, try to accommodate those who are really struggling with the language by not insisting they write the exams. If they are proficient verbally and they can read and write, yes, they would be expected to write it. They would have access to dictionaries, access to research material, those kinds of aids and guidances but other than that, they would be writing the same exam, marked the same way.

Ms. Friesen: There is a difference of philosophy here and I do not think we need to get into that argument. What I would flag for the minister is, it really is a serious concern in schools like Gordon Bell, and there are other ones obviously in the rest of the city that are in that same position with a substantial number of students in that situation who, over the years, we know will reach that kind of proficiency but in the meantime may be denied access to the scholarships, and really these are

scholarship students and to whom post-secondary education may not be available without a scholarship.

* (1700)

What I wanted to ask the minister was, is this something that can be included in the evaluation? Is it possible in the way the results are coming to you and the consultations that you are doing with schools, perhaps, afterwards that this can be an issue that can be raised? How has this affected these kinds of students? Is there some material that we should be gathering over a longer period that would give us some indication two or three years down the line whether, in fact, this exam has proved a barrier or has not proved a barrier to those kinds of students?

Mrs. McIntosh: Undoubtedly those types of questions being raised here, for example, by the member, or she indicates some people at Gordon Bell or wherever the people would have that kind of question raised, we too then would be asking that question of ourselves in an evaluative process. There would be any number of things we would be looking to see as the examinations continue.

One thing that I know we want to check is if the universities are noticing any difference in the students coming in after—this would not be a question we could ask right away, of course, because it will take a few years to be able to get a picture. The universities have made quite a point of complaining about the inconsistency in the ability of students coming in to university to use the English language. I think I indicated before in earlier conversations some of the suggestions that they have explored, I do not know if they have explored them formally but certainly informally, and I believe formally as well, about entrance exams or common first year which is one I believe they are looking at pretty seriously.

When they start saying, well, maybe we need entrance exams to the university, by and large, they are trying to address the fact that someone from school A sends in their record, and it says they have 86 in English language arts; someone from school B sends in and says they have 72 in English language arts. Yet the 72 percent person is actually better skilled in English language arts than the one in the 80s, and it is because, to date, in Grade 12, there has not been an English language arts exam for 25 years; their school has had exams.

Some places have division-wide exams, but they are testing them on slightly different things. They mark against slightly different criteria; they do not have a set standard that anybody understands. If they have written the same exam, sent to a central marker, marked the same way, then the university, being just one of many places that might need to make comparisons, can compare apples with apples.

We feel, as well, that it will be an encouragement for the curriculum to be more influential in the classroom and that, therefore, the skills coming out at the end—more consistent. I believe that this will be an asset for students, and, again, we do a lot of dialogue on that. Certainly, all of the criticisms and critiques that are being put forward to government as we go through the process are ones that will be looked at if for no other reason than we will be wanting to answer the critics and say we did take a look at the concern that was expressed, and we find that our expectations were correct. That would be what we were hoping to see, and, if we are wrong, then the examination will have proven to be very important to have done.

I really do not think, regarding scholarships and ability to get a scholarship to go to university, that our examinations will allow the rewarding of true scholarships for those superior students who have reached an achievement level and a high standard. Right now, sometimes the high school marks that one gets are used by post-secondary institutions to award scholarships, and the standard of the marks may not be always comparable or give a true comparison.

Just by way of interest, the Aboriginal Advisory Committee which has been giving advice to government indicated to the government that they did not want different standards for aboriginal students, and the reason they gave for that is that they were concerned that their children would become increasingly marginalized because they feel that is what has marginalized their children over the years to now. They feel that their children have become marginalized and that the sort of patronizing treatment that they have received with all good intentions over time has not been to the advantage of the children.

This sort of attitude we have taken, which I hope as a people we are overcoming, where we had this noblesse

oblige kind of attitude towards our aboriginal people where we were sort of the great white father sent to look after the helpless native people. I recall reading—and the member may have seen it, being a historian, she has probably got a familiarity with it. I read this little document, which I have got in my desk drawer, and it was written at the time Manitoba came into Confederation. It is done in the old script and the old language, and it refers to the aboriginal people as uncivilized and ignorant. I forget the other words, but it was definitely not complimentary. It was inherent in the way they described the native people as this paternal, we have to be here to look after these people.

Anyhow that is what the Aboriginal Advisory Committee said they do not want to happen anymore. Please do not marginalize us. If you are setting a standard, we can meet the standard. Raise us up to it. Let us work up to it, even if it takes us more time. Do not lower the standard for us because then you make us lesser in the long run.

I like that thinking, and it presents a huge challenge, though. That kind of thinking is a challenge to the student; it is a challenge to the teacher, to the school system, to the ministry, because it is not easily done. Just today apparently a parent called the department wanting a letter from us here in the department stating that her son's marks on the Senior 4 exams would not—the school would not supply the letter because there was no provincial requirement to report separately and he needed the marks for his application to an eastern university, a U.S. university, hrm. I think that demonstrates the value of the provincial program of testing, that he needed that mark to show, and I think that kind of thing will be useful for students to have, particularly if it is a known standard and a measurable outcome that has meaning in comparisons of the apple-to-apple variety.

Are you signalling me my time is up? Okay, I will stop there then.

* (1710)

Ms. Friesen: The parents, I think, that I was trying to represent are ones who are new immigrants, of course, for whom so much hope is vested in their children. So the exam, the weighting, the future weighting of this exam is causing considerable concern and a feeling that these are

children who will make it, who are bright and hardworking, and yet there is a stumbling block been placed in their way at a particular age which has made it more difficult for them. So it was not—there are obviously many aboriginal students at Gordon Bell as well, but I think, more widely speaking across Winnipeg No. 1, that that is the expression of concern I have heard.

The minister's reference to the 19th Century perspectives of an aboriginal people is actually not so far off the mark for the present day in the context of the Indian Act. The Indian Act actually makes all Indians wards of the state. They are all in theory, in principle, in law essentially—

An Honourable Member: Children.

Ms. Friesen: Yes, children in legal terms, and that Indian Act is still with us, a very current legacy of those kinds of attitudes.

I wanted to ask about the English language process. The minister made reference to having an aboriginal person on every committee of teachers who develop the tests. I am not sure if I understood that correctly but that was what I understood. One of the comments that I had—I think it was also raised in the Free Press—was the nature of the selection of materials for that exam. There was in particular a very surprising—it surprised me when I read it—article by David Suzuki which had some references to aboriginal people which were very much of a 19th Century context. I was surprised Suzuki had written that. Others were I think surprised that that had been selected.

So I wondered—I am sure it was raised with the minister; I think it was raised publicly as well—if there had been any response or any reflection from the department on this. Again, in the same context, there were some people who were concerned about gender balance in the selections. There were very few women writers who were used and had that been something that the department had looked at and again the minister said when she selected teachers for these committees, gender balance or gender was certainly an issue that was considered.

So has this really made its way through to the committee or was the committee aware of what it was

doing? Does it believe that there can be improvements? Has the government reflected upon those kinds of comments?

Mrs. McIntosh: Mr. Chairman, two points. I just asked staff and to my pleasure in their preparedness they have the exam here and they will bring forward the Suzuki article. I do not know if you have read it yourself or if you were referencing what the Free Press had indicated or not, but we will table it as soon as he pulls it out.

Just regarding the immigrant parents, because I do understand what the member is saying of the pride they have and the hope they have when they come to this country. I really think that the immigrant children of today will succeed just as the immigrant children of yesterday did because (a) they work hard, (b) they have hope, and (c) they have enormous will and drive for a better future than the one they might have faced in the place from which they came. I really think that the curricula and assessment and testing gives extra incentive and drive. If you hear people talk about the things they experienced when they came into the country, how hard they had to work and the hurdles they had to overcome to be proficient and at the top, you will see some of the strongest, the most capable people who have learned not only how to reach for something but to have to reach harder and higher and farther than most. The net result of it is when they reach their goal, they reach it with far more sense of purpose, intensity and pride than those of us who are able to drift through and have things come easily. I think they become stronger for it, but that is just a comment. I do not disagree with her about people coming with hope and wanting and seeking success.

The articles in the test package—the main question she was asking—were screened for bias. The Suzuki article was combatting, not supporting stereotyping, but because it is written at a higher skill level, I guess, than just the straightforward, some people may have misunderstood the point of the article. I am just going to read: The materials selected have to be free of bias, inclusive of native and minority groups, avoid stereotyping and reflect a wide range of reading difficulty. Materials for the examinations were carefully selected to reflect a balance between literary and transactional text, familiar and sight text, and male and female voice.

We will keep trying to be vigilant about bias, as well as other factors in the testing materials and in the

construction, the design and the content of the test. The article to which we were referring is an article that is called *The Right Stuff*. It is by David Suzuki. The member is correct in her understanding of David Suzuki; he is very much not a person who would write this.

What he is saying in his article is that as the writer visited a northern town to judge a science fair—and he describes the town, a tough town with a transient population, et cetera—and he drops into a bar. A man in the bar comes over and starts to talk to him about the students in the high school. David Suzuki was going to speak at the high school. The man says to him, I hear you are going to talk to the students in the high school tomorrow. Now I am quoting from the article: When I affirmed it, he shocked me by adding, they will kill you. I am the science teacher there and I can tell you that all they think about is sex, drugs and cars. They will tear you apart.

I am still quoting from the article: Well, he really scared me. I immediately formed images of a blackboard jungle filled with switchblades and drug-crazed hoods. The next day when I walked into that auditorium, it was with great trepidation. There were 400 teenagers in the gym, about a third of them Indians. They looked pretty normal to me, but I had been warned and I knew that they were just biding their time by turning into raving animals.

* (1720)

He goes on in that vein, and at the end of the article he ends up indicating that students will remember the things they learn in school. The implication there is those hidden messages are going to be remembered as well.

He does say that he knew they were just biding their time by turning into raving animals, but what he was really doing in his writing was referring back to the message that had been given to him, and implying and telling how you, by accepting messages without doing your own research, can often be conned or tricked into believing those things. He has his tongue in his cheek very obviously. But that type of thing—and it is an interesting article to have in a test—because satirical writing often does require a higher level of interpretation in the reading, and that is one thing that can be noted in the marking. Who picks that out quickly and easily? Who notices that it is satire? Who interprets it literally?

I think that is one of the reasons teachers kind of had fun with the marking of it. It was looking for those kinds of subtleties throughout it, but we are conscious, we do not want anybody to feel reading it, interpreting it the wrong way and feeling badly about it. That is not an intended outcome. So we will be very diligent in going through these things to ensure that nobody goes home feeling that they have been made a lesser person in some way, if even just for a little bit of time.

Ms. Friesen: Mr. Chair, continuing on a number of process issues. I do not know how our time will go, but if I could draw them to the minister's attention and then maybe we will perhaps conclude it next time. I wanted to make sure that there was indeed an aboriginal teacher on this test development committee. That was No. 1.

Number two was the process of collecting information on the results of the test. I was looking for some commitment to the fact that ESL—not ESL, but the students with that middling capability in English, that that can be addressed. I am not sure I got the answer that information is being collected in such a way that that can be addressed over a three- or four-year period. So it is the nature of the evaluation, how you are talking to schools, how the overall evaluation of the exam is considered. That is No. 2.

Number three deals with process during the exam. It took a long time. It took a number of days. That was the purpose of the exam. It was to develop, to examine, those kinds of issues of editing, self-editing, correction, development of themes. The amount of time it took was of concern to some schools so, again, I am looking for some reflection from the minister on how that is going to be evaluated. Is there any possibility that the time might be shortened, it might be compressed in different ways over perhaps the next two years of examinations? Is that being taken into consideration in evaluation?

Am I up to No. 4 now? I am not sure. My fourth one dealt with the time in between that students had for group discussion, I think was of a concern. The groups were often groups which had not met before—not often, in some cases, the groups were groups which had not met before. They were given a relatively short space of time to develop a leader, a group dynamic, as well as reach some general discussion and conclusion. I think there were concerns expressed about that. Has that been evaluated?

What kind of changes are possible as a result of that? Has that particular portion of the exam been examined to see what it contributes to the overall generalizations, and are there possibilities of adjustments in that?

I think people were concerned that you put students together who have never really talked to each other and within a very short space of time, they have to come to conclusions, they have to choose a leader. You know, at the age of 17 or 18 those are not things that come quickly. Often in some cases, there will be; some cases, there will not be. It might in fact be an issue of the homogeneity, homogeneous population in the school. It might be an issue of how small or large the school is. A small school they might know each other better. They may be more prepared to trust quickly than in a larger school where they do not have that.

A further question was, again, the gaps between the exams where students were supposed to consult their work, possibly even get together in groups—I think this was over a weekend—my sense of listening to both parents and teachers and some students on this is that there were considerable differences in the way different schools and different communities approach this. In some schools and communities, children essentially worked on their own, possibly with a parent, possibly without. In some schools I think students sort of put in long hours. Some schools, I heard, were on the Internet and dealing with distant relatives in other parts of the country who were doing doctorates in English and that kind, drawing on a wide variety of sources.

In itself there is nothing wrong with that, and one would want to encourage students to develop all kinds of means of improving their work. But, when it becomes an examination, when students are marked and they may not have equal access to the Internet, they may not have equal access to a group of parents or to a group of parents with similar expertise, it seems to me that inequities are being introduced into the process. So I am looking, in this case, for evaluation of that. Has the minister been made aware of those kinds of things, and is there a process for evaluation?

Finally—I do not know what I am up to, five or six—the minister in the House and in a number of conversations has said that the marking of the exam was regarded with great enthusiasm by the teachers who did it. I am sure that is true. Any collective professional endeavour like—

Mrs. McIntosh: Could you back up and say that last sentence again? I missed it, sorry.

Ms. Friesen: All right. The minister in the House and in various conversations has spoken of the enthusiasm that teachers have expressed in marking these exams, and my sense is that any collective endeavour like that where they are discussing work is professional development. Again, our differences, I think, would come over the weighting of this and over the location of it and all those sorts of things, but the actual professional development involved in the collective marking of students' work, the discussion of student work, I think, is important. The minister did at one point, I think, offer to facilitate my meeting with some of these teachers in a response in the House, and I would like to take her up on that. I would like to talk to some of the teachers who had marked that exam.

Mr. Deputy Chairperson: The time is 5:30 p.m. Do you have a very short comment or do you want to finish it tomorrow?

Mrs. McIntosh: Mr. Chairman, what I will indicate is that we have been noting down the questions and I notice we are out of time. We will come back tomorrow, I guess, and we will bring in the answers and we will start off by giving them to her.

Mr. Deputy Chairperson: The hour being 5:30 p.m., the committee will recess until 9 a.m. tomorrow (Friday).

* (1450)

HEALTH

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Mike Radcliffe): Would the Committee of Supply please come to order. This section of the Committee of Supply has been dealing with the Estimates of the Department of Health. Would the minister's staff please enter the Chamber.

We are on Resolution 21.2, item 2.(c) subparagraph (1).

Mr. Dave Chomiak (Kildonan): Perhaps on a bit of an administrative—we had indicated we are going to move out of this item and move into some other areas,

specifically, home care today. Between now and that particular item, there is a question of the Youth Secretariat. Last year, the minister brought in a Mr. Toews from the Youth Secretariat to answer questions.

I wonder if the minister is prepared to bring in Mr. Toews at some point during the course of these Estimates. But I realize, if we were to deal with it on line items, we are going to be passing that item, I think, today. But I am wondering if we can make some arrangements to deal with the Youth Secretariat, as we did last year, during some other portion or some other discussion in this Estimates process.

Hon. James McCrae (Minister of Health): Mr. Chairman, I do not know if I heard the customary invitation on your part to invite staff to join us. It might be helpful if that were to happen. I could do some orchestrating with the help of my staff.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Radcliffe): I could advise the Minister of Health I did, but I would be more than pleased to invite the minister's staff to please enter the Chamber. If the minister's staff were in the anteroom, this would an appropriate time for them to enter the Chamber. The minister's staff.

Mr. McCrae: While we await the arrival of my staff whom we welcome with glee this afternoon—[interjection] Sometimes you are reminded just how insignificant you are.

Mr. Chairman, the question the honourable member for Kildonan asks is whether at some point we could have Mr. Reg Toews with us to discuss the Youth Secretariat, and it is a question simply of agreeing on the appropriate time for that to happen and we can make that happen.

Mr. Chomiak: I thank the minister for his assistance in this area.

To continue along this line, Mr. Chairperson, last year, during the course of Estimates debate, I asked the minister about the ISM agreements, and I am not entirely certain whether or not we were going to undertake to table them or not, and I do not believe they were tabled. I wonder if the minister could outline for me in abbreviated form what each of the ISM agreements entail.

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairman, I suggest this area is something that might be explored with my colleague the Minister of Finance (Mr. Stefanson) during the Estimates of the Department of Finance.

(Mr. Chairperson in the Chair)

Mr. Chomiak: I appreciate the minister's comments, and I recognize he is not trying to be evasive, that he is just trying to direct me towards the appropriate source. Yet the issue of the ISM agreements and the issue of data and information on health is relatively significant to this area and the subject of this discussion.

What I am trying to come to grips with is the kind of material dealt with by ISM and the line of questioning I was going to go down as the kind of protections in place vis-a-vis that material and whether or not some of the other discussions we have had concerning confidentiality of data and proprietary nature of data are also covered by the confidentiality provisions that the minister has alluded to during other aspects of information management we discussed during the course of these Estimates. So while the Minister of Finance may be able to give me details of the agreements, what I am looking at is the type of data that ISM has management over and the kind of protections that are in place concerning that data.

* (1500)

Mr. McCrae: Manitoba Health used to have its own contract with ISM with respect to hardware and mainframe services. There is now a new contract that is on a government-wide basis. We will get back to the honourable member to let him know which minister he can direct his questions to about that new contract, but in terms of all data processed through this system that contract provides for enhanced protection of confidentiality and security of those records.

Mr. Chomiak: Would it be possible for the minister to table with me the confidentiality provisions of that particular contract?

Mr. McCrae: We will take that request under advisement and discuss it with my colleague responsible for that particular contract.

Mr. Chomiak: I just want to assure myself that the information contained within the data utilized in

conjunction with that agreement or other agreements with ISM remains the property of and under the control of Manitoba Health and that ISM or no subsidiary or other company in relation to ISM has access to that material now or in the future. Can the minister give me that assurance?

Mr. McCrae: Yes. Whatever access ISM would have to any public records that they are contracted to assist the government with, whatever access they have, would be governed by the contractual arrangements. Those contractual arrangements would protect the interests of Manitobans in regard to any issues relating to confidentiality of records.

Mr. Chomiak: I may have not posed my question correctly, but I will pose a supplementary to that. The minister indicated confidentiality of records would be maintained. I recognize that. What about the question of use of those records for other than Manitoba Health usage? Is that covered?

Mr. McCrae: ISM is not authorized to make any use of any of the data.

Mr. Chomiak: In the data concerning SmartHealth, it is specifically pointed out by the government that SmartHealth will not have access to personal medical data carried on the network. It seems clear to me that SmartHealth per se, if this description falls through, has only access to software programs and the hardware and does not have access to the actual data, the material. Is that similar to the ISM arrangement?

Mr. McCrae: It is the clear intention and understanding between the parties that SmartHealth is not to have access to people's health records. In fact, with the development of the appropriate passwords and methods of getting into this data, only authorized people will have that type of access. By authorized, I mean people who have to administer our health system.

Mr. Chomiak: I thank the minister for that response. Does a similar understanding and agreement exist concerning the data and the government's relationship with ISM? For clarification, the minister has indicated that SmartHealth per se does not have access to the data, and only authorized Department of Health officials and personnel and other individuals and groups we discussed

previous have access. Is this a similar arrangement with ISM? If not, what is the arrangement with ISM?

Mr. McCrae: With ISM, they provide the hardware; the software is the property of Manitoba Health.

Mr. Chomiak: So I take it from the minister's response that it is, in fact, identical to the relationship with SmartHealth, that ISM does not have access to the material.

Mr. McCrae: Yes.

Mr. Chomiak: The department supports 600 existing and a number of new personal computers and the like. The capital budget for Supplies and Services is not given the cost of technology is not overly generous, \$687,000, half-a-million dollars. How is that capital and that new capital equipment funded?

* (1510)

Mr. McCrae: This is not the only place the honourable member will find appropriations for capital in relation to the purchase of computers and computer supplies and upgrades. We will undertake to put together a listing of other areas in these Estimates where the honourable member will find appropriations for capital.

Mr. Chomiak: I appreciate that response. I just want to clarify this for my own understanding again. If X hospital or institution in wherever Manitoba wishes to purchase a new computer system, presumably they go through their hospital or their institutional budget, and it goes through the process and it goes to Manitoba Health ultimately for approval. The minister can correct me if I am wrong in my understanding. It goes to the Department of Health, and the Department of Health goes through its normal auditing and other functions in order to approve or not approve. At what point do the Information Systems people, Mr. Alexander and company, intercede to determine, not only the advisability of buying that kind of equipment, but whether it is compatible with future directions of the government. How does that process work?

Mr. McCrae: If there are relatively minor expenditures required throughout the course of the year, or as part of a hospital's annual budget, that is taken care of in the

hospital's annual budget. If they are contemplating changing systems or making a major overhaul, again, they would work with our systems department here in Manitoba Health, to find out whether what they are proposing works with the health system that we are developing here in Manitoba. So Manitoba Health does indeed have a role in arrangements with hospital X, or Y, or Z, with regard to their information systems requirements.

Mr. Chomiak: Is there a protocol that Manitoba Health has, and if it does, could it be tabled?

Mr. McCrae: We will review that and probably have some information for the honourable member subsequently.

Mr. Chomiak: I do not need a copy of it, but is there an inventory? Is there inventory of all of the systems equipment presently functioning in the system?

Mr. McCrae: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Chomiak: I have changed my mind. I do not know how else to put it, Mr. Chairperson. I would be interested, if possible, to see that, if it is not too large an undertaking, or even a summary of where the system is at in Manitoba. If it is too large an undertaking, then fine; but, if it is available and it is relatively easy to access, I would appreciate a copy.

Mr. McCrae: I believe we can accommodate the honourable member.

Mr. Chomiak: I thank the minister. Just, finally, on this general area, we have talked extensively about the contractual arrangements between the Crown corporation and SmartHealth, Government of Manitoba and SmartHealth, and we have determined that there are no outstanding contracts other than were signified in the contract between Manitoba Health and SmartHealth, and that is those three firms.

Can I get a listing of contracts this year or last year, consulting or otherwise, that have been entered into between Health and various firms in this area?

Mr. McCrae: I am not really sure I understand here. Are we talking about the Information Systems part of the department? That is one question I have, but in addition,

information about contracts entered into by the government is public information, and people who receive money or companies that receive money are listed in the Public Accounts on an annual basis, so it is all there for the honourable member.

* (1520)

Mr. Chomiak: No, to clarify, I am asking about Information Systems here as opposed to the SmartHealth-HIN arrangement, because I think I concluded that there are no contracts other than that between the government and SmartHealth and the three subsidiary contracts of SmartHealth we have entered into, because we have concluded that is the only contract in that area, so what I am trying to establish is just a listing if possible. I recognize they are in Public Accounts, but they are usually two years behind, and I am wondering if it is possible to get a listing of contracts that have been entered into in this area.

Mr. McCrae: Again we will take the question under advisement. As I say, this kind of information is public information and is available to people. We will review the question in the context that it has been put.

Mr. Chomiak: The minister will be aware that there is a concern with the issue of pharmaceutical and patient data being sold and utilized outside of the health care system. Can the minister outline what Manitoba government policy is in this regard?

Mr. McCrae: We are aware of proprietary organizations seeking information from our health system, and we and our associates in the regulatory agencies have resisted.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, that does not get me quite all the way. I recognize that we have resisted, but can the minister just outline what policy is in this regard from the Department of Health and how the minister will continue to resist, how he is going to go about continuing to resist?

Mr. McCrae: Our policy is to resist, and The Drugs Cost Assistance Act makes the divulgence of the information set out in that statute illegal.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, and how is medical information protected?

Mr. McCrae: I am not clear what the honourable member is asking. A pharmacist is in possession of the following information in the case of a given transaction: the patient's name and health number, in possession of a prescription from a practitioner which includes the name of the practitioner. That is the information that the pharmacist has.

I am not sure what it is the honourable member is asking about in terms of some proprietary agency looking for information, because if it has to do with the patient's name or health number, that is not available. If it has to do with the doctor's name, that is the policy of resistance that we have, and we are working with the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the Pharmaceutical Association on that. The other piece of information is the name of the pharmacist and the prescription, so that is the information. There are laws, The Prescription Drugs Cost Assistance Act, The Medical Act, The Pharmaceutical, or whatever it is called, Act, that contains provisions and regulations which protect the privacy of health information. I am not just sure what it is the honourable member is asking.

Mr. Chomiak: What is it that the minister is resisting? I could put a note.

Mr. McCrae: Knowing what information is available, and speculating that certain interests might be wanting some of that information, it is that information that we are resisting sharing.

Mr. Chomiak: Can a physician in Manitoba provide information to outside third-party interests concerning even information of a confidential nature banded, as the term we have used through the course of these Estimates, banded information dealing with either medical practices or pharmaceutical prescription practice? Can a physician in Manitoba utilize that information in a banded form to pass on to a third—

An Honourable Member: Blinded.

* (1530)

Mr. Chomiak: Blinded, oh, I am sorry, it is blinded form. It is true, blinded is the—in a blinded form to pass on to a third party?

Mr. McCrae: I think I know what the member is getting at here. If the information is not patient specific, then I

do not know if there is any professional block to a physician, for example, discussing his or her way of practising their profession as long as the physician observes and respects the principle that patient-specific information is not to be shared so that I can see a pharmaceutical company, for example, paying a call to a doctor to encourage the prescribing of a certain kind of drug and engaging in a dialogue with a physician about what that physician's practice pattern is. I do not think there is anything illegal about that, and, as long as the doctor does not identify any of his or her patients, then I think there is not any bar to that.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, I thank the minister for that response. Does the province have a policy position in that regard?

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairman, the policy of the government is laid out in the legislation and regulation dealing with these matters. Some of that legislation and regulation applies to professional organizations which, pursuant to that legislation and regulation, adopt certain policies that relate to their procedures.

Mr. Chomiak: So we have established that it is possible for physicians to provide blinded nonidentifiable information to, say, pharmaceutical companies on prescribing practices or otherwise. Can pharmacists do likewise?

Mr. McCrae: To my knowledge, Mr. Chairman, there is no legislated bar to that happening. I do not know the practice of the physicians and pharmacists in our province, whether they engage in that sort of thing or not. I think we can endeavour to find out a little bit more about that, but certainly they and the government are bound by the law that we have laid out. As I have stated, we are very concerned about issues related to confidentiality and privacy of individual people's medical information and are prepared and have stated, announced that we will be coming forward with legislation to accompany the new automated system that we are going to have in Manitoba so that the issues being raised by the honourable member today will no doubt be part of those discussions as to what, if anything, needs to be done in that area.

Mr. Chomiak: I think the minister has answered my question, and I will try to sum up that in fact these issues

will be considered as part of a new legislative package of information that is coming in in the spring to deal with matters of privacy and confidentiality. Is that correct?

Mr. McCrae: Yes, Sir. While I am on my feet, on April 30, the honourable member for Kildonan asked about the Affirmative Action program of Manitoba Health. I am pleased to share with the honourable member a copy of Manitoba Health's Affirmative Action program key activities for 1995-96, to 1996-97, together with a document entitled Affirmative Action Guidelines for Recruitment and Selection.

Mr. Chomiak: I believe, in the most recent Pharmaceutical Association newsletter, there was discussion and reference made to the issue that we have been discussing. That is the sale and the use of proprietary information. So I think it is quite timely, and it is an area that will require scrutiny and probably legislation, but I take it, from the minister's response, that the government will be considering that as part of the legislative proposals that are coming forward next spring.

Mr. McCrae: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Chomiak: As part of the information that was given out in February concerning SmartHealth, a listing was made of each of the positions of the SmartHealth team, including project director, senior project manager, project manager, senior facilitator, team leader, training, technical writer and documentation system architect, quality assurance and testing and network architect. I wonder if the minister is prepared to table a list of who fills those positions.

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairman, SmartHealth is an independent private organization. The honourable member might approach SmartHealth, and they may provide that information, but I am not going to do that.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, in the unlikely event that SmartHealth is not prepared to provide me with that information, would the minister be prepared to make inquiries on our behalf and obtain that information for us?

Mr. McCrae: Well, it is an unusual request. It is unusual for me to be asked who works for such and such

a company, so all I can do is do some thinking about that, take it under advisement or whatever.

* (1540)

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, last year, I received information about the three major areas of development under the SmartHealth agreement, those being the administrative initiatives, the tactical initiatives and the strategic initiatives. Now I appreciate the minister has outlined for me previously that there is movement in five areas, but I would like to ascertain under these categories what is presently being developed.

I recognize the drug utilization review is going. I presume the specialized formula is going. I do not know if the electronic storage and transmission of lab results is on, whether remote lab testing is on, whether new clinical guidelines based on past treatment effectiveness are on, whether the electronic storage and transmission of patient information is on and whether or not proactive clinical guidelines are on. Can the minister sort of update us as to which of those areas are presently being developed?

Mr. McCrae: As we build the contemplated system here, the benefits to which the honourable member has referred will become known and will become something we can report on. So, as I recall the comments the honourable member was just making, as the different systems that are part of this wheel are developed, the benefits will become measurable. There will, however, before those spokes get built, be projections that will come as a result of work done by our stakeholder group and everyone else involved; and, as we build those spokes, then we will be able to measure the performance against the projections that will have been made previous thereto.

Mr. Chomiak: The minister could have done justice to any lawyer in any courtroom across the nation with that response.

I recognize that these are the benefits, but there is a category here, for example, electronics storage and transmission of lab results, which is a fairly specific development that figures quite prominently in the changes that are imminent in the lab industry in Manitoba and in Winnipeg. I just wonder at what stage we are in developments in that particular area.

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairman, in keeping with the extremely open approach that we have taken with regard to health issues, I should refer to an information request yesterday, yesterday being May 1, by the honourable member for Kildonan regarding the Drug Use Management Centre. I am pleased to provide the honourable member with a copy of a report by the Manitoba Pharmaceutical Association entitled Manitoba Drug Use Management Centre Feasibility Study. This study was funded by the Health Services Development Fund. It is already out there, as I understand it, so I cannot really take too much credit for my openness today.

But I do not know how the honourable member—I know I put in a lot of hours, but he must do it too because there is an awful lot of stuff to be read. I am just sending this over to the honourable member.

An Honourable Member: You are sending it over to him. You are not tabling it.

Mr. McCrae: No, I do not think I need to. I do not have a whole bunch of copies unless the member for St. Boniface (Mr. Gaudry) is anxious to get into that heavily this afternoon. We could find another copy for him or his colleague the member for Inkster (Mr. Lamoureux), should they so desire.

One of the first things that happens after the DPIN is that the lab, the DSIN, the Diagnostic Services Information Network—the lab network will capture many of the savings which have the word “lab” attached to them. Within a few weeks we are going to be scoping the size and costs of the province-wide network. We are now working with the lab managers and donors to identify those savings specific to it. That is one of the deliverables for DSIN and Stage 0. This costing will be done at a higher—[inaudible]

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, I did not capture the minister's last sentence.

Mr. McCrae: Simply that this costing will be done at a high level.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, can the minister indicate what stage we are at in terms of the development of DUMC?

Mr. McCrae: With respect to the Drug Use Management Centre, the development of that centre has not, to this point, moved beyond discussions at the conceptual level, and those discussions continue.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, in the feasibility study, there is an estimated year one operational cost for the centre of \$1,035,000. Has that been included at all in the Supplementary Estimates of the Department of Health for this year?

* (1550)

Mr. McCrae: No, Sir.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, can the minister indicate how it is proposed that the centre will be funded? Will it be totally government funded, or will it be funded through a mix of funding from other agencies? If it is going to be funded from other agencies, what are the other agencies that are going to fund the centre?

Mr. McCrae: There have been no decisions about that, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, I briefly had a chance to review the report, and it appears that there is discussion about the centre being funded through research grants, contracts, and by outside third parties like drug manufacturers. Can the minister give us any indication as to whether or not the province would deem it appropriate that the drug manufacturers would in fact fund activities at the centre?

(Mr. Mike Radcliffe, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair)

Mr. McCrae: The government of Manitoba welcomes the interest of the pharmaceutical industry in research pursuits, development pursuits, manufacturing; any of those things are welcome in our province. Indeed, we as a government see the province of Manitoba as an international centre of excellence in health research and other health related-industries. So it is in that context that I approach the issue being raised by the honourable member, or the question being raised. We are always interested in exploring appropriate partnerships.

Mr. Chomiak: Can the minister give me an indication as to how DUMC would be structured, i.e., would it be

reporting directly to the minister, would it be a model similar to the Centre for Health Policy and Evaluation? How is it envisioned that DUMC will be established and report to the Minister of Health?

Mr. McCrae: The concept we have been talking about has not gone to that extent that we are able to make that—we cannot answer that question at this stage. The discussions have not gone forward far enough.

Mr. Chomiak: In general and, strangely enough, within the rough time frames we let out yesterday, I have completed most of my questioning in this area. I will have some questions when we get to the Pharmacare line on some of the specifics, but I cannot pose them at this point, so we may just have to function as best we can. I do not want to inconvenience Mr. Alexander, but I think things functioned fairly well. The questions will not be such, I think, that will be of that technical nature.

Mr. McCrae: We value very highly the services of Mr. Alexander, but somehow we think we are going to be able to stumble through. Once we get through Information Systems, once we get to things like Home Care and Pharmacare and those other questions, we think we are going to be able to find our way through even without Mr. Alexander at that point. The only thing we do ask is, once this line is passed and we are about to move to other areas, we would at that point ask for a very brief break.

Mr. Chomiak: If it is agreeable, what I was contemplating is, between now and 4:30, going through the other lines, taking us up to Home Care, then having a break at 4:30 and then proceeding from Home Care. If that is agreeable to the minister, or if the minister wants to take a break now, I am agreeable to that as well.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Radcliffe): On the advice of the committee, we are considering item 21.2(c)(1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$4,328,200—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$3,057,400—pass.

21.2(d) Facilities Development (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$660,900.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Acting Chairperson, we have the blend as usual in the Estimates book of Facilities

Development dealing with capital, as well as the Appropriation 7, dealing with capital. I am proposing today that perhaps we will pass this item but deal with all of the capital questions under item 7.

Mr. McCrae: Agreed.

* (1600)

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Radcliffe): As a result of that ensuing discussion, the next item for consideration was 21.2(d) Facilities Development (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$660,900—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$313,100—pass.

Resolution 21.2: RESOLVED that there be granted to Her Majesty a sum not exceeding \$19,088,000 for Health, Management and Program Support Services for the fiscal year ending the 31st of March, 1997.

The next item for consideration is paragraph 21.3 Community and Mental Health Services. The amount involved is \$219,783,400 and under (a)(1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$1,146,300.

Mr. Chomiak: This branch, last year, had been effectively reorganized into a different configuration this year. I am trying to ascertain how this new configuration is actually working, and I feel silly asking the question, but I still feel compelled to get a description from the minister as to how this new configuration is working out.

Mr. McCrae: I am sorry for the delay, Mr. Chairman. As we address a reformed health system throughout the province, we need to have a Department of Health that is properly geared to serve the interests of the reformed system. We cannot have a Department of Health organized in the way that it was organized to look after the old system. When we move to a new system we need a reformed Health department itself, and indeed there is more change coming, and more change will have to happen in the department itself to accommodate that change. In addition to that, we have to set an example for all of the rest of the health system with which we work.

A couple of years ago, for example, we asked hospitals to take 20 percent out of the administrative part of their budgets. That might sound like a pretty good thing to do, especially when there is pressure on the front-line service

end of service delivery in our hospital and community sectors, but I think we have to be an example too. So in addition to the need to change the organization of the department in order to deal with a reformed system, we also need to show our partners that we are prepared to do to ourselves what we are asking them to do as well. I think therein, in those brief comments, lay a general kind of response to the honourable member, but if he has anything specific to ask about it, we would be happy to do that.

The branch is led by Assistant Deputy Minister Sue Hicks, who has joined us this afternoon, and it is somewhat of a streamlined Department of Health at the senior levels, where at one point there were a number of assistant deputy ministers, more than we have today. Ms. Hicks and her colleagues at that particular level have very, very significantly widened responsibilities in terms of taking on many more branches and directorates and so on that exist in the department than they at one time had. So we would like to think that we are imposing on ourselves the same sort of discipline that we are imposing on everybody else.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Radcliffe): The item for consideration has been item 21.3(a)(1) Salaries and Employee Benefits \$1,146,300.

Mr. Neil Gaudry (St. Boniface): My colleague is not there this afternoon, and I do not have the Supplementary book, but I have just a few questions to the minister here. In regard to a letter that was written December 1995, I can send the copies over to him so that he might refresh his memory. It was in regard to the closure of the eating disorder program at the Health Sciences Centre. My understanding is that you responded to some of the concerns that were raised in the letter; however, in your response you indicated that the Health Sciences Centre had experienced some difficulties in recruiting suitable psychiatrists to provide the eating disorder program services. Could the minister tell us what is the situation at this time?

Mr. McCrae: I believe further progress has been made in solving the problem referred to in the correspondence the honourable member has reminded me about today, and we will inform ourselves and bring that information back for the honourable member.

Mr. Gaudry: I thank the minister for the answer.

What dollar figure is allocated for the mental health in this province for such a program as the eating disorder program?

Mr. McCrae: It is very hard for us to answer that one specifically. The Health Sciences Centre has some kind of a program going there, and there are different aspects. I know, for example, Brandon Mental Health Centre looks after some patients who have eating disorders, and I know of cases in other parts of Manitoba where eating disorders have been dealt with in the community. So it is really hard to put a dollar figure on it. Where those sorts of cases present to the system through their medical practitioners, their medical practitioners then advocate to get the appropriate services for the clients or for the patients that are required. So it is spread throughout the system.

Mr. Gaudry: Mr. Chairperson, the minister mentioned that there was the program available in Brandon. Is there any other institution in the province that this program is available to?

Mr. McCrae: I think it goes perhaps without saying that the numbers of patients throughout the province requiring this sort of treatment do not warrant setting up an eating disorder program in all of our hospital locations, for example, but we know that there are services available at the Health Sciences Centre and perhaps one or two other places on a kind of irregular, on a day-to-day or year in, year out basis. It is felt though that there might be some indication here that a focussed approach to the development of a dedicated program in this area may indeed be the appropriate thing to do. That may be built around what they are doing at the Health Sciences Centre or at some other location in Manitoba.

* (1610)

The question the member raises, I believe, reflects the views of some people in Manitoba who are interested in this particular matter, but again, throughout the province the distribution of patients who might require these services is not spread evenly, so it calls for some specialization, I suggest.

The Acting Chairperson (Mr. Radcliffe): The item under discussion has been 21.3 3.(a)(1) Salaries and

Employee Benefits \$1,146,300—pass; (2) Other Expenditures \$536,400—pass.

Item 3.(b) Program Development (1) Salaries and Employee Benefits.

Mr. Chomiak: I note that under Program Development there are specific listings of some 10 or so programs, and I assume this is not an exclusive list, but only a highlight list. Is that correct? I guess I am trying to ascertain why those particular 10 programs are the ones that are listed in the Estimates book.

Mr. McCrae: The programs listed are the ones that our Program Development staff are steering. They also participate in other things besides these programs, for example, the Child Health secretariat or the aboriginal unit that we have set up under the leadership of John Ross. Those sorts of things they are also involved in.

Mr. Chomiak: I appreciate that response. What I am trying to establish is, for example, if you look at Expected Results, "Facilitate development of Cardiovascular Health Strategy," presumably that is under the auspices of Wade-Bell, and I wonder how all that fits in this regard, or is that in fact not under the auspices of Wade-Bell and is something different?

Mr. McCrae: The Wade-Bell effort dealt with the tertiary function of the tertiary hospitals, with respect to surgery. The cardiovascular issues go well beyond that to community programming to deal with heart health and circulatory issues, which includes the whole area, the whole continuum of services, which includes prevention and healthy living. We have the ACE program in Brandon, for example, which promotes healthy living and promotes the proper exercise and that sort of thing.

So, when we talk about, in this context with respect to Program Development, cardio-vascular issues, we are talking about the whole continuum from start to finish, the finish line being, I suppose, the tertiary end of it, which is the high-tech cardiac surgery and cardiovascular surgery cases.

Mr. Chomiak: Would the provincial registry that has been talked about by the department be under this particular area? This surgery registry, the cardiac registry list.

Mr. McCrae: The waiting list issue?

Mr. Chomiak: The waiting list issue, in fact, yes.

Mr. McCrae: That would not be part of this. The prioritization of waiting lists, and so on, is not part of this program function.

Mr. Chomiak: Notwithstanding that, can the minister give me an update as to what is happening on the waiting list program?

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairman, in March 1995, interim funds were approved for the period of March 15 to June 15, 1995, as a short-term strategy for reducing waiting lists. These dollars were redirected institutional funds and were shared with seven hospitals to reduce the waiting lists for joint replacement surgery, open-heart surgery, MRI scans and radiation oncology. The final statistics for 1995-96 will not be available until later this year, but we do know that 58 additional joint replacement surgeries were funded in '95-96. We have also been advised that St. Boniface General Hospital and Health Sciences Centre expect to have performed approximately 1,000 open-heart surgical cases in '95-96, compared with 749 in the previous year.

We also provided funding for an additional 450 MRI procedures, and have continued to work with Manitoba Cancer Treatment and Research Foundation to address their waiting list for radiation therapy. Manitoba Health will continue to work with the physicians and hospitals in 1996-97 to improve the system to ensure that Manitobans receive surgery within appropriate time frames. Specific issues will be addressed in this consultative process.

With the new leadership at our cardiac program and the money that we have made available, we appear to be making some significant inroads into this very, very—what shall I call it—thorny issue of waiting lists for these types of surgeries.

It has been a difficult problem to solve, and it defies easy resolution and that is why it takes a while. As the honourable member knows, doctors keep their own waiting lists, and if you, Mr. Chairman, were a doctor and you were in charge of, you know, you were a specialist in knee surgery or something like that, no

doubt, if you were anything as a doctor like you are as an MLA, you would be a very popular knee surgeon and people would have great, big, long lineups to your door for surgery.

That is one of the problems. It is a nice problem, I suppose, in some ways to have for the doctor, because that doctor gets all these patients, but that doctor also gets better and better at it. The more you do these things the better you get at it, but it does create a wait list. So if you do not share your wait list with your colleagues in the same profession, some people wait longer, some people do not wait for very long. But that is one problem. I think it is just a proper allocation of the resources we have. If it was done better there would not be such an unevenness in the lists. Maybe they would not be so long for some physicians too, because the more they collaborate and develop practice protocols and work together to prioritize patients, the more that is spread out and the better things get.

* (1620)

On the other hand, dollars are made available to make operating room space available as well—has been—and that has made a difference. So when you talk to your constituents, which I know you do, Mr. Chairman, I do too, about the relief that is afforded through these surgeries. You know, that is why it is such an important and thorny item in the past, and I hope that it stays in the past and only continues to get better as we make funds available for it and as we continue to work with the wait list reduction committee—I think it is called appropriate access committee—to address this issue.

Mr. Chomiak: One of the reasons that I return to this question frequently in the Estimates is, several years ago the former Minister of Health made an announcement about the establishment of a central registry. I believe last year, during the Estimates, we talked about advancements in that area, so I wonder if the minister just might—and I appreciate the difficulties involved—update us as to where we are at in terms of the establishment of a central registry, be it in the cardiovascular or in other areas.

Mr. McCrae: I do not know exact dates, but I expect in the relatively near future to be able to move forward with the government's response to the work of the Urban

Planning Partnership and the design teams. When that becomes known and implementation begins, we will be able to make good use of the work that has been done to this date in addressing the whole issue of this registry for the use of the various operating rooms in Manitoba.

Mr. Chomiak: Would those recommendations fall under the surgery design team? Is that who would be dealing with this issue?

Mr. McCrae: This will be part of the work of the surgery design team.

Mr. Chomiak: Would KPMG also be looking at this issue?

Mr. McCrae: KPMG's work is a broader look at the primary and secondary part of the health system, and this question of the honourable member's relates more to the specialists that are involved in the delivery of surgical services in the system in the city.

Mr. Chomiak: Returning to page 48 of the Supplementary Estimates and the specific prioritized programs, one of the tasks is to address recommendations of the Child Health Strategy. I do not think there is any need to discuss it at this point since we are going to have Mr. Toews in at some future point, so perhaps I will jump over that area. I am quite concerned and would like some specific information with regard to the provincial Cancer Control Committee report and to the status of that report, and I have related questions to that.

(Mr. Chairperson in the Chair)

Mr. McCrae: I have another complicated answer. I hope that I can hold the honourable member's attention. The Cancer Control Committee's work is not done, but some of its preliminary-type recommendations or observations are being taken into account by the cancer design team, the geriatrics design team and the chaplaincy design team, or have been and continue to be taken into account through the Urban Planning Partnership arrangement. So, while the Cancer Control Committee's work has not been totally completed, its work has not been left out of the loop in the sense of the work being done as we design this integrated system in the city. Dr. Schacter shares both of those design teams. Dr. Schacter is involved with both the Cancer Control Committee and the cancer design team.

Mr. Chomiak: Just by way of administration again, we had talked about taking a break at 4:30, which will shortly be upon us, and in addition I had thought we would be moving into Home Care right after that, I am going to have a fair amount of questions in this area as it turns out, probably for about the balance of the afternoon, so does that change the planning of the minister's staff?

Mr. McCrae: We can work with that.

Mr. Chomiak: Well, maybe it is an appropriate time to take our break and return.

Mr. Chairperson: Committee will recess for five minutes.

The committee recessed at 16:28 p.m.

After Recess

The committee resumed at 16:38 p.m.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, inasmuch as a lot of this information and data is being analyzed and dealt with by the design teams, and insofar as I do not have a complete listing of the recommendations of all design teams, can the minister provide us with a listing of all the recommendations of the design team? I appreciate he cannot do it today but perhaps at the next sitting.

Mr. McCrae: Yes.

Mr. Chomiak: I thank the minister for that response. The palliative care aspect, I believe and I stand to be corrected, but I thought there was a palliative care report that fell under the auspices of the Cancer Control Report, and I am wondering if the minister can give me an update as to what the status is of that report because I believe it is in and finalized. I wonder if the minister might outline what developments have taken place with regard to those recommendations.

* (1640)

Mr. McCrae: We will have a city-wide palliative care program. There is a palliative care committee whose work has been involved in design efforts amongst

Riverview Hospital and St. Boniface Hospital and Deer Lodge Hospital and the department in designing a city-wide palliative care program.

Mr. Chomiak: Could the minister be more specific as to what form this program will take and how it will be operated? How will the program be operated and what form will it be taking?

Mr. McCrae: There will be a greater emphasis on the community part of palliative care in the future. The general program will also have a component dealing with education of people who deliver palliative care services, again with emphasis on the community. The findings have been that the consumer really does prefer, to the extent that it is feasible, services delivered at home. So that is why we need to develop a new mindset around palliative care services which places a greater emphasis on the community. Of course, we are going to require people with the experience in palliative care, notably institutional based, in designing programming for palliative care services in the community, but any palliative care program of the future will have to have an educational component attached to it because of that different or greater emphasis or shift in emphasis from institution to community.

Mr. Chomiak: At present, if an individual is in the position of requiring palliative care, can the minister indicate how they access that care and where the care is delivered from and, secondly, how that will differ under the new program in the future.

Mr. McCrae: The way it presently works is that access to palliative services is something that starts with consultation between the physician and the family, and palliative care services are available at home now. I think that we want to do more of that because we think that that is what the people want to see more of, and of course in some cases a time does come when it is not feasible anymore, and that is when the institutional side is part of the equation. I think the reason for the work is to have a smoother relationship between the various players in palliative care so that this can be arranged with as little disruption as possible. At that particular time of a person's life, I think that the least we can do is make the transition from one type of care to another as smooth as we can, and that is what the efforts are pointed at.

Mr. Chomiak: What I am trying to get at is how it is going to work. At present, for example, if the individual is at St. Boniface Hospital, the very elaborate program that is in place, if the individuals was, for example, say, at another institution, they do not have the same types of programs, how is the department envisioning—what I am trying to get at is, are we at the point where the department is going to suggest, for example, that St. Boniface Hospital, for example, will become the palliative care centre in the city of Winnipeg and, outside of Winnipeg, other institutions? How is it going to be structured and set up?

Mr. McCrae: It is not decided how many institutional sites would be decided on. Again, I think the point is for practitioners and families to have access to palliative care consultants who have good expertise in this area. There will be a decision, at some point, about how many hospital sites need to be available, but I think that this new approach will allow for people to be in their homes for much longer than they were in the past, which would probably result in fewer palliative acute care beds being required because people will not be in them as long. They will be in their homes for longer.

I think that the key to this is the expertise that the program is attempting to make available to those who need it, that expertise being the palliative care consultants, if they are going to have a title. Those people's expertise would be relied on more so that there would be a better co-ordination of the resources that are available for palliative care services.

Mr. Chomiak: I do not quite understand how that will occur in the structure unless there is the establishment of some overall body or committee or structure that deals with it, so I wonder if the minister can just indicate to me how that is intended to be operated.

* (1650)

Mr. McCrae: We expect that there will be some program leadership function which can be accessed to allow for this co-ordination. We will try to put it in the appropriate language and maybe enlarge on that a little bit for the honourable member tomorrow.

Mr. Chomiak: I thank the minister for that response. Is it envisioned that it will be co-ordinated with home care?

Mr. McCrae: It is not decided, I do not think, what entity would employ the co-ordinating authority here, but it is envisaged that there would be such a function and, again, I think that we can flesh that out for the honourable member tomorrow. By the way, Mr. Chairman, I understand that Mr. Toews would be available first thing tomorrow, nine o'clock. If that is satisfactory, we can arrange to have Mr. Toews here and deal with the honourable member's questions on that point, and then maybe when he is finished we could return to issues that Mr. Toews does not need to be involved in.

Mr. Chomiak: I think that is appropriate. I should double check, but I think that would be appropriate. Let us just go ahead and do it.

Can the minister also outline for me what will happen in this regard outside of Winnipeg?

Mr. McCrae: We are in the process of setting up our regional health authorities, and we expect this year to apply or discuss with the regional health authorities some of the things we are learning in the city of Winnipeg, with respect to palliative care, with those boards, and to see developed across the province similar capabilities.

I think the key, again, especially in rural Manitoba, is the expertise that needs to be relied on for education of people in the system now. We would expect to see that facilitated some with that discourse between the program in Winnipeg and the regional health authorities. So we have the capability now throughout the province to allow for people to die at home, to the extent that that is appropriate, and we want to make that more co-ordinated than it is now, and to ensure that regional service deliverers have access to the expertise that they need in designing programs for individual Manitobans requiring those services.

Mr. Chomiak: So presumably palliative care would be one of the core services being assigned to the regions that would be then discussed in terms of core budgets and in terms of how the program is to be operated.

Mr. McCrae: It will be a service available throughout the province. Whether the experts agree that it needs to be identified as a core service is not clear at this point, but what is clear is that it is a service that is required

everywhere. The regional authorities are going to be aware of that, and so will we in our dealings with them in this coming year.

Mr. Chomiak: I just want to follow up on that for a second. It is a requirement everywhere, but it is not a core service. Can the minister elaborate on that distinction?

* (1700)

Mr. McCrae: We do not place palliative care services in a category all by itself. If you look at the Urban Planning Partnership model for example, we have identified cancer, geriatrics, chaplaincy as being areas that are all concerned with palliative issues. So in that sense you do not want to describe it as a core service, although it is a service that we want to be available to everybody who needs it. I think it is a contextual type of matter here, so that the plan is that palliative services be available everywhere. But to refer to it as a core service somehow to me sets it apart from these other core type services that are described in that way, and I would worry if we used that kind of nomenclature that it might get lost in the shuffle somehow. We cannot have that.

So we need people involved in various other parts of care, critical care of people, to have access to people who have expertise in palliative care. So in that sense, I suggest every region and the city of Winnipeg all ought to be concerned about the development of an improved palliative care service throughout Manitoba. I hope that explains a little bit what I might not have put very well last time.

Mr. Chomiak: I thank the minister for that response. That is a very good explanation. The only reason that I would actually question the minister's analysis, and I would not argue with him, is the one advantage I suppose, thinking out loud of calling it a core service, is that it does denote a certain priority attached to it in terms of the Department of Health, in terms of a future direction. But I think the minister's explanation is quite good and appropriate.

Returning to the Provincial Cancer Control Committee report, so as I understand it, it is still being reviewed and it is forming part of the design team recommendations. The minister is nodding in the affirmative. Can the

minister outline what the status is of the Community Nurse Resource Centre outside of Winnipeg?

Mr. McCrae: As the honourable member knows, the Youville Clinic site in St. Vital is open and I believe working very successfully in the community. The next one, and we are making good progress there—that is in Thompson, where there is good effort going on with respect to the development of the community.

We expect the Thompson project to work in three phases. First would be a mobile outreach service delivery which would travel through the different neighbourhoods within the city of Thompson. The next phase would be a stationary site located in an appropriate area of the city to offer expanded services and services that would not be well suited to the mobile approach, and the third phase is to outreach services to communities in the region which, based on further needs assessments, could benefit from the expertise and services the centre would have to offer. That is moving along quite nicely.

We are working with one of the communities in Norman that was referred to earlier on, and that will be identified in due course, but that is with respect to the assessment. The same kind of assessment carried out in St. Vital before they set up the Youville satellite, and they are trying to identify a location for the Parkland resource centre. So the work is continuing with respect to those resource centres.

Mr. Chomiak: Does the minister have time frames on the establishment of those three centres?

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairman, as I said, the Youville one is up and running. We expect to see two additional ones, one in Thompson and one in Norman, up by the end of the fiscal year. And the Parkland location would come after that at some point.

Mr. Chomiak: Can the minister indicate what funds have been appropriated for each of the Thompson and Norman operations?

Mr. McCrae: There is no specific line item that would identify these centres. However, the overall budget of the Healthy Communities Development office is the budget that would provide for whatever funds would be required to start these operations up.

Mr. Chomiak: Is the minister in a position to identify either the Norman or the Parklands location?

Mr. McCrae: The potential is really quite significant when you think it through, Mr. Chairman. We have committed to the four locations. However, there is very significant interest throughout the province. Dr. Helen Glass, head of the committee that is working on this, has done quite a bit of travel around, and within the dollars that some communities are already spending, they are invited to put forward proposals for this type of model within the funding they already receive for health.

(Mr. Frank Pitura, Acting Chairperson, in the Chair)

So it is not to add on, but to reallocate, or use the dollars that are already being spent in some other way to finance this type of operation which can be more integrated. It can be, if it is designed properly. It can bring about a greater team approach to health delivery and health promotion, prevention, as well as other health services in a given community, so that, other than the four, strictly speaking, no. But we have talked through Dr. Glass with a number of, many would be more accurate, communities that have shown an interest in this concept.

Mr. Chomiak: Is there a distinction between the funding for the four proposed initial centres and those to be otherwise proposed, or are the funds for the four initial centres to come out of the budgetary allocations for those areas as well?

* (1710)

Mr. McCrae: We have identified the four to be funded through the Healthy Communities Development office. Beyond that, should there be proposals for other ones, they would be funded from existing dollars that ultimately will be made available to the regional authorities.

Mr. Chomiak: Can the minister give me an update of the Breast Cancer Screening Program?

Mr. McCrae: We will check and report tomorrow on the progress in Thompson, but we have the Brandon breast screening centre up and running. We have the centre at the Misericordia Hospital up and running. There are issues being worked on in Thompson, and we

will bring an update for the honourable member tomorrow.

Mr. Chomiak: It comes up regularly concerning the breast screening, but has any consideration been given to a mobile unit to serve certain regions of the province?

Mr. McCrae: No, but we have not ruled out mobile breast screening. We have reports from other jurisdictions of limited success with mobile programming in other jurisdictions. We want to have our fixed locations running, and we would like to be able to evaluate the rate of access from the various regions so that we can measure whether mobile service is the way to go or whether we ought to find other ways to get people to the fixed locations. So we will learn a lot from the establishment of these centres.

I know that some communities have asked for mobile service. Those people who are trained to do that kind of work spend more of their time on driving than they do carrying out the function that they are trained to carry out, and that is not really the most positive use of the expertise that there might be. So like I say, while we have not ruled it out, we want to know how underserved we are in some areas, if that is the right word, or how much compliance we are getting from the population with the fixed programs we are setting up.

(Mr. Chairperson in the Chair)

We will, depending on the circumstances, look at the utility of finding alternate ways to get the consumer to the service. In other words, there are problems associated with mobile service delivery, and we want to learn more about that before we commit ourselves to it.

Mr. Chomiak: Will the minister be in a position perhaps tomorrow when he provides data to provide some actual statistical data of the breakdown of volumes in the operations in the various centres?

Mr. McCrae: We may not have been running the units long enough to have gathered the useful statistics that would provide any useful information for the honourable member. We will check, and if there is something we can share with the honourable member, we will do that too.

Mr. Chomiak: Given the issue of an open debate, or the evidence still outstanding on the value of mobile units,

has there been any consideration given to the question of mobile breast screening vis-à-vis the aboriginal community?

* (1720)

Mr. McCrae: Not specifically, Mr. Chairman. We again want to get the Thompson unit in operation. We do need to measure compliance. There is an understanding, and the honourable member was right to raise this question because, of whatever reasons, there is a belief that there might be less of a compliance level amongst aboriginal women to this type of programming. So if we can show that through the performance of the program, for example, in Thompson, then we can start to work on programming that might find ways to get at that problem.

With regard to northern, for example, remote, reserve communities, even if all the issues jurisdictional were laid aside, access for this type of equipment and personnel is a difficult problem to solve until we have four-lane paved highways between all those communities. It does present us with pretty significant geographical problems to overcome, but I think an important first step is indeed to get the Thompson unit up and running so that we can get a sense of the compliance level of aboriginal women.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, last year one of the programs identified was the development of the prostate centre. I wonder if the minister might give an update on that development.

Mr. McCrae: There is not presently a lot of discussion with respect to a prostate centre. Men experiencing problems in this regard are accessing services nonetheless through the channels they were before, their family physicians.

Mr. Chomiak: Does the minister by that response mean that the move towards the development of an actual prostate centre is no longer a government initiative or policy?

Mr. McCrae: In the overall scheme of things, Mr. Chairman, we have accelerated efforts with respect to surgery and women's health and emergency and critical care in medicine and cancer and pediatrics and psychiatry and geriatrics, chaplaincy, diagnostic imaging lab and support services. I think that there has been a shift to those issues to try to get them resolved, and all of the resources out there have been kind of working very much on all of those issues related to the Urban Planning Partnership model, and the prostate issue has not been the subject of as much discussion of late.

Mr. Chomiak: Does that mean in the scheme of things, in terms of where the government's plans are going vis-à-vis surgery and other aspects of the Urban Planning Policy, that the government is no longer going to develop a prostate centre?

Mr. McCrae: Mr. Chairman, I would say that with regard to prostate issues, because service is available in numerous locations, the other issues simply have more or less moved ahead in the sense of the planning for integrated services in Winnipeg, and discussions about any possible prostate centre of excellence for the future has been left, for the moment, while we discuss these other matters, so that it could, indeed, arise at a future time. I think those proponents of a centre of excellence for this have been patiently awaiting the outcome of some of the other things that are going on at the present time.

Mr. Chomiak: Mr. Chairperson, last year under the expected results of this branch of the department, it was indicated that they were working on the development of the aboriginal health and wellness centre. I wonder if we might have an update of the status of that.

Mr. McCrae: We are making progress in this regard, and I expect that we will have some announcements to make about that in the very near future.

Mr. Chairperson: Order, please. The hour being 5:30 p.m., this committee is now recessed until tomorrow at 9 a.m. (Friday).

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF MANITOBA

Thursday, May 2, 1996

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